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KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION

Doctoral dissertation submitted to obtain the degree of
Doctor of Business Economics, to be defended by

Lieve Lembrechts

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Supervisor support for work-life issues: Investigating antecedents and effects on employees

Promoter: Prof. Dr Patrizia Zanoni | UHasselt
Co-promoter: Prof. Dr Marijke Verbruggen | KU Leuven

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Dedicated to Alex, Olivia and Luc.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ik heb het voorrecht gehad om te mogen doctoreren en daarbij omringd te worden door enthousiaste supporters, die me doorheen mijn doctoraatstraject bijgestaan hebben met raad en daad. Ik ben mijn achterban heel dankbaar.

Kort door de bocht gesteld heeft mijn doctoraatsonderzoek me geleerd dat de leidinggevende er mee voor zorgt dat een werknemer zich goed voelt. Patrizia, jij bent daarin geslaagd. Ik heb het geluk gehad om jou als promotor te hebben. Je was een bron van steun voor mij op allerlei vlakken. Je was steeds bereikbaar voor advies en bood de nodige flexibiliteit. Je gaf me voldoende vrijheid om mijn ding te doen en hielp me tezelfdertijd om de juiste richting te vinden. Ook al was ik een minder klassieke doctoraatsstudente, ik voelde me alleen maar gesteund door jou.

Marijke, als co-promotor was je een rots in de branding. Je zette me op de juiste weg in de soms verwarrende wereld van de *work-life* literatuur. Je geduld was eindeloos: geen vraag was je te veel en je wist altijd een antwoord. Net als Patrizia was je niet alleen een onmisbare schakel om mijn doctoraat tot een goed einde te brengen, maar ook een fijn persoon om mee samen te werken.

De leden van de doctoraatscommissie wens ik eveneens uitdrukkelijk te bedanken. Jullie namen de tijd om mijn werk grondig te bekijken en dankzij jullie opmerkingen ben ik duidelijk tot een beter eindresultaat kunnen komen.

Dank ook aan de werknemers die mijn enquête invulden en die ik mocht interviewen: zonder jullie zou mijn doctoraat er simpelweg niet geweest zijn. Ik hoop dat ik jullie via mijn onderzoek op de één of andere manier iets kan teruggeven.

De UHasselt ben ik bijzonder dankbaar om me financieel te ondersteunen, maar ook om een fijne werkgever en universiteit te zijn. Ik ben fier dat ik aan de UHasselt heb mogen werken en studeren! Ik heb mijn tijd aan de UHasselt, bij SEIN, als een bijzonder fijne tijd ervaren. En dit is ook te danken aan mijn toenmalige collega's. Ik kan in alle eerlijkheid zeggen dat jullie de beste collega's waren die een doctoraatsstudente zich kan wensen. Jullie waren altijd te vinden voor een babbel of gezamenlijke lunch, zorgden voor onvergetelijke teambuildingmomenten, nieuwjaarsetentjes en zoveel meer. Dankzij jullie was doctoreren niet altijd en alleen maar werken. André, Annelies, Bie, Christina,

Eline, Elisa, Elke, Hannah, Hannelore, Jelle, Koen, Kris, Maarten, Marjan, Nico, Özlem, Sabine, Sarah, Stefan, Steven en vele anderen: bedankt! Mijn bijzondere dank gaat uit naar mijn collega's van de KU Leuven destijds: Tess, bedankt dat je altijd geëngageerd en enthousiast samen met mij enquêtes wilde voorbereiden en afnemen! Vickie en Valeria, bedankt om me de kans te geven om samen met jullie onderzoek te doen!

Ik wil ook mijn ouders bedanken. Ma(ma), pa(pa), merci om me de kans te geven om te studeren en om mijn eigen weg te zoeken. Jullie leerden me wat het betekent om graag te werken. Mijn broers Jan en Peter, mijn schoonzus Célina, mijn nichtjes Anna-Laura, Kaat en Sien en neefje Lars: bedankt voor de leuke feestjes en andere ontspannende momenten. Dank ook aan mijn schoonouders, voor het babysitten en de andere hulp.

Luc, jij weet als geen ander hoe het (soms hobbelige) parcours van een doctoraatsstudent en onderzoeker eruit ziet. De combinatie van werken, doctoreren en kinderen grootbrengen was niet steeds eenvoudig, maar ik heb het nooit als een onmogelijke opdracht ervaren. En dat is allemaal dankzij jou. Je was mijn bron van emotionele, instrumentele en alle andere mogelijke vormen van steun. Het is voor mij heel bijzonder dat we in hetzelfde jaar, 2018, ons doctoraat hebben mogen verdedigen.

Liefste Alex en Olivia, jullie zijn zonder meer de grootste verwezenlijkingen in mijn leven. Jullie oprechte verwondering, jullie (soms iets minder) lachende gezichtjes en jullie gekke verhalen zorgden ervoor dat ik elke dag even weg kon zijn van alle doctoraats- en ander werk. Ik draag dit doctoraat op aan jullie (en aan jullie papa) en - al zijn jullie nu nog te klein om het heel bewust mee te maken - ik hoop dat jullie later fier zullen zijn op mij.

Ik heb zoveel supporters gehad tijdens mijn doctoraatstraject dat ik niet iedereen bij naam kan noemen. Alleszins, aan iedereen die op de één of andere manier geholpen heeft: bedankt!

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In contemporary societies characterized by dual-earner and single parent households, many employees have to combine work with other life roles (Chung, 2011; Mullen et al., 2008). As an increasing number of employees also has high demanding jobs, this combination is often challenging (Drobnič, 2011; Goh et al., 2015) and may result in work-to-life conflict, which refers to the hindering impact of an individual's role in the work domain on his or her roles in the life domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Hill et al., 2016; Siegel et al., 2005). In this context, the work domain refers to paid employment, while the life domain includes non-work settings, such as family, leisure and community tasks (Frone, 2003). The topic of work-to-life conflict has also become popular in the societal debate under the related term of work-life balance. According to the 2016 European Quality of Life Survey (Eurofound, 2017a)[1], 24% of the Belgian workers considers the fit between work and non-work commitments as (very) poor. The same survey reveals that at least several times a month, 58% of the Belgian workers is too tired after work to carry out household jobs and 41% finds it difficult to fulfil family responsibilities because of the time spent on the job. Moreover, the 2016 European Quality of Life Survey (Eurofound, 2017a) points at a deterioration in the combination of work and non-work commitments, despite the legislative and organizational initiatives taken to counter this conflict. Statistics about the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (Flanders) confirm this finding, pointing at an increase in the proportion of employees experiencing a (very) problematic work-life balance (Bourdeaud'hui et al., 2017).

Work-to-life conflict has been linked with several individual and organizational outcomes. For instance, work-to-life conflict was found to be associated with ill-being indicators such as burnout, stress, anxiety, depression and cardiometabolic risk and with family-related outcomes such as parental overload and family distress. It has also been found to relate to work outcomes such as turnover (intentions), lower job satisfaction, lower job performance and less organizational commitment (Allen et al., 2000; Allen, 2001; Amstad et al.,

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[1] See also the European Quality of Life Survey 2016 online:
https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eqls2016#3 (last consulted on 27 January 2018).

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2011; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Berkman et al., 2015; Brauchli et al., 2011; Butts et al., 2103; Frone et al., 1992; Frone et al., 1997; Huffman et al., 2008; Lee & Hui, 1999; Simon et al., 2004; Thompson & Prottas, 2005).

Because of its prevalence, persistence and potential impact, it is in the interest of organizations to tackle work-to-life conflict. An increasing number of organizations makes an effort to reduce work-to-life conflict, for instance by offering work-life policies, such as teleworking, flexible hours, part-time jobs and childcare provisions, assuming that individuals using such arrangements will experience less work-to-life conflict (Anderson et al.; 2002; Byron, 2005; Hill et al., 2001; Russell et al., 2009; van Rijswijk et al., 2004; Russell et al., 2009). Nonetheless, the results remain largely inconsistent. Some studies even found that the use of work-life policies reinforced rather than lowered employees' work-to-life conflict (Schieman & Glavin 2009; White et al., 2003).

Other research focuses on the role of social support, and more specifically, of the social support provided by the supervisor for the employee's work-to-life conflict. Numerous studies demonstrate that employees who feel supported by their supervisor experience less work-to-life conflict than employees who do not perceive this support (e.g. Allen, 2001; Behson, 2002; Byron, 2005; Frone et al., 1997; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Hammer et al., 2007; Kelly et al., 2008; Michel et al., 2011; Muse & Pichler, 2011). Supervisors can demonstrate several types of family supportive behaviors, such as offering emotional support, instrumental support or informal flexibility or demonstrating role modeling behavior (Hammer et al., 2007, 2009). Employees' perceptions of each of these behaviors appear to be related with lower work-to-life conflict (Hammer et al., 2009; 2011; 2013).

Despite this increasing scientific attention, the role of the supervisor in the employees' work-to-life conflict remains still unclear in several aspects. First, the role of supervisor support in the employees' work-to-life conflict compared with those of other factors is uncertain. Especially insights on the impact of supervisor support relative to work-life policy use and demanding work characteristics are lacking, since many studies look at the impact of only one or two (sets) of these variables for work-to-life conflict (Cortese et al., 2010; Pal & Saksvik, 2006). Second, most studies only focus on the emotional component of supervisor support (for work-life issues or in general) and its relationship with work-to-life

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conflict (e.g. Byron, 2005; Frone et al., 1997; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Kelly et al., 2008; Michel et al., 2011; Muse & Pichler, 2011), while research also identified dimensions of supervisor support that consist of instrumental support, role modeling behavior and creative work-family management (Hammer et al., 2007; 2009), which may also be related to work-to-life conflict. Third, research is mainly based on the employees' perceptions of supervisor support and their relationship with work-to-life conflict, without looking at the supervisor's behavior presented in the literature as being family supportive, thus leaving uncertainty about what supervisors should actually do in order to be family supportive (Hammer et al., 2007; 2009). Fourth, not much is known about the antecedents of family supportive supervisor behaviors, as is demonstrated by the recent calls to pay more attention to the context characteristics in which attitudes and behavior towards work–life policies emerge (Kossek et al., 2010; Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Straub, 2012).

This dissertation aims at contributing to the literature on supervisor support in the field of work-to-life conflict. We do so by studying the effectiveness of supervisor support in lowering work-to-life conflict and the antecedents of this supervisor support.

In the remainder of this introduction, we first clarify the employees' struggle with work-life issues and introduce the concept of work-to-life conflict (1). We then discuss the organization's (2) and especially the supervisor's role (3) in the employees' work-to-life conflict. Next, we shift our attention to the antecedents of supervisor supportive behaviors (4). In the following sections, we describe the goals of this dissertation (5) and the empirical data on which the studies are based (6). We conclude by presenting the structure of this dissertation (7).

1. One individual, competing roles: the employee's struggle with work-to-life conflict

Work-to-life conflict originates from the broader notion of work-life conflict. Work-life conflict refers to the competition between the role in the work and the life domains, as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus &

Beutell, 1985:77).[2] To explain the competition between work and life roles, many work-life researchers put forward a scarcity or strain hypothesis (Goode, 1960), which is grounded in role theory (see for instance Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978). According to this hypothesis, individuals dispose of scarce resources they have to divide between their role in the work and the life domain, which may cause strain or a conflict between these roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The scarcity or strain hypothesis has inspired the role conflict theory, which puts central the notion of work-life conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Other concepts are also the result of this scarcity or strain hypothesis, such as work-life interference and negative work-life spillover. Role theory has also led to an expansion hypothesis (Marks, 1977). This hypothesis states that roles in different domains interact positively and that their accumulation leads to synergy, as the concepts of work-life enrichment (Carlson et al., 2006; Chen & Powell, 2012; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), work-life enhancement (see for instance Wadsworth & Owens, 2007) and positive spillover (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000) refer to. This dissertation will focus on the difficulties individuals experience in combining the work and the life domain, as advanced by the scarcity or strain hypothesis, because of the prevalence of this conflict, its persistence despite efforts from policy makers and organizations, and its detrimental consequences for employees and employers.

Three types of work-life conflict have been identified: timed-based conflict (i.e., the time invested in the one domain hinders the role in the other domain), strain-based conflict (i.e., the strain experienced in the one domain hinders the role in the other domain) and behavior-based conflict (i.e., the behavior demonstrated in the one domain hinders the role in the other domain) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Moreover, researchers identify two directions of work-life conflict: work-to-life conflict (the work domain having a negative impact on the life domain) and life-to-work conflict (the life domain having a negative impact on the work domain) (Byron, 2005). It is important to distinguish between both directions in conflict, because they appear to have different sources.

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[2] In the literature, the non-work sphere is referred to through both the terms 'life' and 'family' (Michel et al., 2011). In this introduction, we use work-to-life conflict, as 'life' is more encompassing, except in chapter one, where we retain work-to-family conflict, in line with the specific literature we build on.

Within the literature, most researchers identify two groups of sources of conflict: work-related sources and life-related sources (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). Meta-analyses demonstrate that work-to-life conflict is more often determined by work-related sources, such as work role involvement and work social support, whereas life-to-work conflict is mainly determined by life sources, such as parental demands and family social support (Byron, 2005; Major et al., 2008; Michel et al., 2011). These sources may increase or decrease the conflict individuals experience between the work and the life domains in terms of time, strain and behavior. The former represent 'stressors' and the latter 'resources'. Thus, stressors experienced in the work domain will sharpen the conflict with the life domain, while resources will have the opposite effect by lowering the conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985). Because this dissertation focuses on the role of the work environment, work-to-life conflict will be put central. The European Quality of Life Survey and the European Working Conditions Survey also demonstrate that work-to-life conflict is clearly a more pressing issue than life-to-work conflict (Eurofound, 2013; Eurofound, 2017b).

2. What can the organization do? Work-related antecedents of work-to-life conflict

Resources and stressors in the work domain are deemed to influence work-to-life conflict (Byron, 2005; Major et al., 2008; Michel et al. 2011). Organizations that want to assist employees with tackling their work-to-life conflict can try to adapt these resources and stressors (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). The literature clarifies that the work domain comprehends several resources and stressors in which organizations can intervene.

First, several of these resources and stressors are situated at the level of the organization of work (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2010). Some jobs are very demanding because of the irregular working schedules, night shifts, weekend work, variation in tasks, high work time demands and work overload, resulting in work-to-life conflict (Byron, 2005; Eurofound, 2017b; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; McRea et al., 2001; Michel et al., 2011). Other job dimensions function as resources, decreasing work-to-life conflict, such as job autonomy (Behson, 2002; Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Greenhaus et al., 1989; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Michel et

al., 2011). Work-life policies – HR initiatives in the organization aimed at helping employees with combining work and other roles (Ryan & Kossek, 2008), also referred to as (for instance) work-family policies, family-friendly working arrangements, work-life arrangements and work-family programs – can be considered as resources too. Examples of work-life policies are teleworking, flexible hours and onsite childcare. By altering the way in which the work is organized, organizations are expected to be able to intervene in the employees' work-to-life conflict (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011).

Second, organizations can affect the non-formal or social support an employee receives (Behson, 2002). For instance, following the finding that the mere use of family friendly arrangements does not necessarily lead to less work-to-life conflict, researchers turned their attention to how these arrangements are embedded in the organizational context, for instance in terms of accessibility, but also in terms of supervisor and co-worker support for and negative reactions towards these arrangements, which were found to be important for the employees' experience of work-to-life conflict (Allen, 2001; Behson, 2002; Hammer et al., 2007).

Not only the support employees experience in the field of family friendly arrangements, but also the support (for work-life issues) at the workplace more in general was found to reduce work-to-life conflict (Byron, 2005; Frone et al., 1997; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Kelly et al., 2008; Michel et al., 2011; Muse & Pichler, 2011). The non-formal support employees receive at the workplace is often referred to as *workplace social support* (Behson, 2002), which is considered as a subtype of social support more in general. Drawing on the many different definitions of social support, Kossek and colleagues state that employees experience social support when they are "feeling cared for and appreciated" and are "having access to direct or indirect help" (2011: 291). Social support occurs in the professional as well as in the non-professional domain. In the non-professional domain, examples of sources are the partner, family and friends, while in the professional domain, workplace support includes co-worker support, supervisor support and organizational support (Li et al., 2017).

Social support theory can help to explain why workplace social support is related to work-to-life conflict (Barrera, 1986). This theory states that

"psychological and instrumental support from significant people in an individual's role space is critical to providing resources" (Hammer et al., 2013: 287), resources necessary to compete with the conflict between the work and the life domains. Thus, workplace social support has the power to reduce the stress and difficulties employees experience when combining roles in different domains of life (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Kossek et al., 2011). The impact of workplace social support on work-to-life conflict can also be explained through organizational support theory. This theory states that employees develop a general perception of the supportiveness of the organization, based on "the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing" (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002:698). Employees feeling supported would be more inclined to reciprocate their organization, by performing well and being committed to their organization, with a decreased work-to-life conflict as one of the possible outcomes (Foley et al., 2006; Kahya & Kesen, 2014).

A substantial part of the scientific literature on workplace social support and its relationship with work-to-life conflict focuses on the role of supervisor support. Of 57 studies on the relationship between workplace social support and work-to-family conflict identified in the meta-analysis conducted by Michel and colleagues (2011), 31 studies focused on supervisor support, 15 studies on co-worker support and 11 studies on organizational support. Nonetheless, the relative impact of supervisor support on employees' work-to-life conflict, compared to other types of workplace social support, but also compared to the organization of work, is unclear.

3. Supervisor support and the employee's work-to-life conflict

The supervisor is an important source of workplace social support, able to mitigate the work-to-life conflict employees experience (Hammer et al., 2013; Kossek et al., 2011). This supervisor support can be specific for work-life issues, or more general. One part of the research in that field focuses on *supervisor support for work-life issues*, e.g. caring and talking about personal and family issues, which was found to be negatively related to work-to-life conflict (Anderson et al., 2002; Behson, 2002; Hill et al., 2016). The supervisor's supportive role for work-life issues is also attributed to his or her ability to influence the individual employees'

tasks and adapt them to their work-life related needs (Valcour et al., 2011). Supervisors - through their work-life supportive attitude - are also able to create the perception of an organization that is work-life supportive, which in turn relates to a decreased work-to-life conflict according to some studies (Kossek et al., 2011; Valcour et al., 2011). Due to the devolution of HR roles, many supervisors today are responsible for HR tasks relevant for the employees' work-to-life conflict (Bond & Wise, 2003; McCarthy et al., 2010; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Indeed, the literature identifies supervisors as 'gatekeepers', able to determine the access employees have (or not) to the family friendly arrangements provided by the organization, as they are often involved in allowance decisions (Bond & Wise, 2003; Powell & Mainiero, 1999). Supervisors can also influence employees' experiences of family friendly arrangements by giving them autonomy in using arrangements such as telework (Kossek et al., 2006), protecting them against or avoiding negative effects of the use (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004; Thompson et al., 1999), creating perceptions of accessibility of these arrangements (Allen, 2001; Anderson et al., 2002; Behson, 2002; Michel et al., 2011; Valcour et al., 2011) or even by creating 'informal' flexible arrangements when the organization does not offer formal options (Anderson et al., 2002), which all appear to be related to a decreased work-to-life conflict among the employees. Another part of the research includes support that consists of respect and concern for employees in the broad sense, *transcending work-life issues*. Supervisor support in this broad sense also appears to be related to work-to-life conflict (Frone et al., 1997), but to a lesser extent than support specific for the work-life domain (Behson, 2002; Hammer et al., 2009; Hill et al., 2016; Kossek et al., 2011).

Next to identifying *why* the supervisor is important for the employees' work-to-life conflict, the literature also specifies *how* supervisor support operates. Hammer and colleagues (2007; 2009) identified four types of supervisor support: instrumental support, role modeling behavior, creative work-family management and emotional support. The vast majority of empirical studies on supervisor support – and particularly those on supervisor support for work-life issues specifically – focuses on the emotional component of this support (e.g. talking about and being understanding about family and personal business) in relationship to work-to-life conflict. Perceived emotional supervisor support repeatedly appeared to be negatively related to work-to-family conflict (Anderson et al.,

2002; Behson, 2002; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004; Thompson et al., 1999). Next to this emotional support, supervisors may offer instrumental support, which includes for instance the supervisor's effort in switching schedules and juggling tasks or duties (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). They can also display role modeling behavior, for instance by showing how they successfully manage the boundaries between the work and the life domains (Koch & Binnewies, 2015; Nielson et al., 2001). Finally, supervisors may support employees through their creative work-family management, for instance by offering informal flexibility (Anderson et al., 2002). Research on the relationship between instrumental support, role modeling behavior and creative work-family management on the one hand and work-to-life conflict on the other hand is very rare, but there are some indications that these types of support are related to a decreased work-to-life conflict (Koch & Binnewies, 2015; Thomas & Ganster, 1995), which should be further investigated. Moreover, several authors (e.g. Baran et al., 2012; Hammer et al., 2007; Hill et al., 2016; Kossek et al., 2011; Li et al., 2017) plead for the study of supervisor support at the level of the supervisor, while most of the studies thus far focused on the perception of supervisor support by the employees.

4. The antecedents of supervisor support

Research on the antecedents of perceived supervisor support is rather limited (Epstein et al., 2015) and even scarce for the supervisor's self-reported supportiveness for work-life issues (Allen, 2001; Foley et al., 2006; McCarthy et al., 2010; Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Straub, 2012; Thompson et al., 1999). It is important to gain insight in the antecedents of supervisor's self-reported supportiveness for work-life issues, so that organizations can promote this behavior which is related to employees' wellbeing outcomes (Straub, 2012). The scarce research on the antecedents of this supervisor support for work-life issues mostly addresses support for and allowance of work-life arrangements, mainly focusing on personal supervisor factors, personal employee factors, organizational factors and factors related to the team members (Epstein et al., 2015; McCarthy et al., 2010; Poelmans & Beham, 2008).

First, studies demonstrated that *personal supervisor characteristics* influence supervisor support for work-life issues. More precisely, it is assumed that

demographic characteristics that can be considered as indicative of the supervisor's own struggle with work-life issues and/or his or her sensitivity for employees' work-life issues were related to supervisor support for work-life issues. For instance, it appeared that female supervisors and supervisors with parental responsibilities are more supportive for family friendly arrangements than male supervisors and supervisors without children (Parker & Allen, 2001). Also, supervisors that perceive work-life policies as useful, appeared to be more supportive for these policies (Casper et al., 2002), possibly because of the perceived potential positive impact of work-life arrangements on the work that has to be done.

This brings us to the *individual employees' characteristics*, as antecedents of supervisor support for work-life issues. Indeed, studies demonstrate that supervisors take into account the individual employees' characteristics that are deemed important for achieving productivity goals, which again implies a difficult balance between short term work continuity and long term goals (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008). For instance, research found that supervisors are less inclined to give access to family friendly arrangements to employees with special skills and working on more critical tasks because of the expected disruption of the employee's work (Powell & Mainiero, 1999). However, at the same time, other research revealed that employees who perform well and are difficult to replace are more often allowed work-life arrangements, because supervisors would try to retain this valuable employee on whom they feel dependent (Klein et al., 2000).

Next, some *organizational characteristics* were found to be important antecedents of supervisor support for work-life issues. For instance, the supervisors' awareness of family friendly arrangements appears to be important for their support (Capece & Akers, 1995; Casper et al., 2002; Nord & Littrell, 1990). This awareness can be stimulated by the organization, for instance via a work-life training, which Hammer and colleagues (2011) found to have a positive effect on the supervisors' family supportive behaviors. The literature also suggests that the organizational work-life culture and organizational support may be related to the supervisor's self-reported support for work-life issues (Frear et al., 2017).

Finally, since supervisors are functioning as part of a team, on which they depend for their own performance, team-level factors are possibly affecting their support. Supervisors occupy a particular position in an organization, which urges

them to balance between two interests that are not always easy to reconcile (McConville & Holden, 1999). On the one hand, supervisors are held responsible for attaining productivity goals, but on the other hand, they have to keep their employees satisfied – also with respect to their work-life issues –, who finally also contribute to the attainment of these goals (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008). Thus, more recently, a few studies have turned to characteristics of the *team members*, including team members' educational profile, supervisory responsibilities, and specialized knowledge and skills, which shape team members' relation to the supervisor (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008; Peters et al., 2010). Two main theories feature in this literature: work disruption theory and dependency theory. Work disruption theory (Powell & Mainiero, 1999) posits that, as supervisors are primarily evaluated and rewarded for the results they achieve, their (lack of) support reflects the disruption in the team members' work processes they anticipate. Dependency theory rather explains supervisor support in terms of supervisors' dependency on their team members. When employees are difficult to replace – for instance because of their specialized knowledge/skills –, supervisors depend more on them for achieving their goals and are therefore likely to be supportive to keep them in the organization. Further research based on both theories can provide more insight in the key role of structural aspects in creating supervisor support.

5. Goals of this dissertation

This dissertation focuses on the role of supervisor support as a source for employees' experiences of work-to-life conflict and on the antecedents of this supervisor support. Current research on the role of supervisor support for employees' work-to-life conflict and on the antecedents of supervisor support presents several gaps. This dissertation fills these gaps and thus extends the existing literature. More precisely, this dissertation has three goals.

First, the relative impact of perceived supervisor support on work-to-life conflict, compared to other sources, is unclear. Existing literature thus far has paid attention to the multiple sources of work-to-life conflict, which have been summarized in meta-analyses (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). In those meta-analyses, perceived supervisor support was identified as an important source, able

to mitigate work-to-life conflict, next to many other antecedents, such as co-worker support, job dimensions and work-family policy use. Given these multiple sources, it is important to assess its relative impact on the conflict employees experience. This dissertation fills these gaps by looking at the relative importance of perceived supervisor support for the employees' work-to-life conflict, compared to co-worker support and to the organization of work, in terms of job characteristics and work-family policy use, using hierarchical linear regression analysis.

Second, the literature identified four specific types of supervisor support as resources or stressors of work-to-life conflict, including emotional support, instrumental support, role modeling behavior and creative work-family management (Hammer et al., 2007; 2009). As far as we know, no study thus far has investigated these four types of support simultaneously and their impact on the employees' work-to-life conflict. Moreover, most studies focus on perceived supervisor support and not on the self-reported supervisor supportive behaviors, which means that the effect of these behaviors on employees' work-to-life conflict is unclear. Also, the literature mostly ignores the possible negative side-effects of the supervisor's supportive behaviors, by stressing their expected decreasing effect on employees' work-to-life conflict. It is important to look at the role of these four types of supervisor supportive behavior and its positive as well as negative relationship with work-to-life conflict. In this dissertation, we study the relationship between these four types of supervisor support (emotional support, instrumental support, role modeling behavior and creative work-family management) and work-to-life conflict using a multilevel approach, taking into account the reducing as well as the increasing influence of these supportive behaviors on the employees' work-to-life conflict.

Third, studies on the antecedents of supervisor support in the work-life domain are lacking. The scarce literature in this field mostly refers to antecedents at the level of the individual supervisor or the employee to explain supervisor support. Team-level factors are under-investigated, especially team-level factors at the global team-level, even though they may play an important role, also in the support of the supervisor for specific family friendly arrangements. For instance, the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework may depend on team-level characteristics indicative for the potential disruptiveness of teleworking for the

team's work activities. This dissertation will fill this gap by investigating team-level elements that influence a specific form of supervisory support, i.e., the support of supervisors for teleworking, using a mixed method approach.

6. Data

To address the above mentioned research gaps, we conducted three studies based on quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data collected in several organizations in Belgium. In this section, we explain the data and in the next section, we will explain the different studies.

First, quantitative survey data were collected among a convenience sample of hospital nurses in all hospitals in Flanders, using an online survey. The first chapter in this dissertation is based on these data. Second, the other two chapters in this dissertation are based on survey data collected in four organizations. These organizations employ a considerable number of supervisors and have an official work–life policy, offering a variety of work–life arrangements to their employees, such as telework. The participating organizations are in four different sectors: telecom (private sector, 1800 employees), fast moving consumer goods (private sector, 200 employees), local social policy organization (public sector, 1800 employees) and research and higher education (public sector, 1000 employees). In these organizations, an online survey was sent in three waves to all supervisors and to all their employees. Matched datasets for the supervisors and their employees were obtained.

Qualitative data were collected through 39 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with supervisors in three of the four organizations mentioned here above. No qualitative data could be collected in the public sector organization. In each organization, we first interviewed the HR manager and collected policy documents and other data about the organization's and employees' profile to prepare the qualitative, but also the quantitative study. Each organization selected a list of potential interviewees and transmitted their name, company e-mail addresses and background information (department, length of service …) to us. From this list, we made a selection of supervisors in such a way that we maximized heterogeneity of department and length of service in the organization and obtained a gender balanced sample. The questionnaire included questions on the

following topics: the supervisor's background, team characteristics, formal work–life policies, implementation of work–life practices, allowance decisions, evaluation of work–life policies and personal experiences as work–life policy user. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. Each interview was recorded with permission of the interviewee and fully transcribed. In the third chapter of this dissertation, using a mixed-method approach, the findings based on these qualitative data are reported.

7. Structure of this dissertation

This dissertation includes three empirical studies, presented in three chapters. The first chapter is titled "*A study of the determinants of work-to-family among hospital nurses in Belgium*". In this chapter, we study the role of **supervisor support**, as one of the possible sources of work-to-life conflict among employees. Based on a Belgian sample of 384 nurses, we empirically assess the relative impact of three sources of work-to-family conflict among hospital nurses: work–family policy use (childcare assistance, schedule flexibility, part-time work), job dimensions (work overload, job autonomy, overtime hours, night shifts, regularity in type of shift, weekend work, hierarchical position, variation in tasks) and perceived organizational support (physician/co-worker support). Data were collected using a web survey and hierarchical linear regression was performed.

In the second chapter, "*Family supportive supervisor behaviors and employees' work-to-life conflict: A multilevel study on the mediating role of perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and work overload*", we again focus on **supervisor support** as a source for work-to-life conflict. We look specifically at four types of supervisor support for work-life issues, defined as supposedly family supportive supervisor behaviors, which refers to Hammer and colleagues' (2007; 2009) typology, including instrumental support, role modeling behavior, creative work-family management and emotional support. These four types are respectively conceptualized as supervisors' access allowance to formal work-life policies, their own use of work-life policies, the provision of informal flexibility and the creation of a flexible work time culture. Based on the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001), the relationship between these four supposedly family supportive supervisor

behaviors and the employees' work-to-life conflict is assessed through two mediators: perceived supervisor support (perceived support path) and perceived work overload (work overload path), using a multilevel analysis on matched data of 726 employees and their 224 supervisors.

The third chapter, "*The impact of team characteristics on the supervisor' attitude towards telework: A mixed-method study*", looks at the **antecedents** of supervisor support, and more precisely to the team-level factors influencing the supervisor's attitude towards telework. Based on dependency theory (Bartol & Martin, 1988) and work disruption theory (Powell & Mainiero, 1999), we investigate how supervisors' attitudes towards telework are related to the potential disruptiveness of telework for the organization of work (work disruption theory) and their dependency on their team to achieve their goals. Although these two theories are often portrayed as contradicting each other, we conceptualize disruption and dependency arguments as complementary, in that sense that they are mobilized simultaneously, with disruption arguments moderated by the supervisor's degree of dependency on his or her team. This study is based on a mixed method approach. In the quantitative part, we test hypotheses drawing on disruption and dependency theory, using survey data of 205 supervisors from four Belgian organizations. The qualitative data are collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 39 supervisors, to gain a better understanding of supervisors' reasoning behind their attitude towards telework. Table 1 gives a concise overview of the different chapters.

Table 1. Overview of the chapters, including measures of supervisor support and conflict, method and sample.

Chapter	Supervisor support	Conflict outcome	Method	Sample
Chapter 1	Perceived supervisor support	Work-to-family conflict	Hierarchical linear regression analysis	N=384 nurses
Chapter 2	Supposedly family supportive supervisor behaviors	Work-to-life conflict	Multilevel analysis	N=726 employees and their 224 supervisors
Chapter 3	Supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework	/	Mixed method: moderated linear regression analysis and qualitative content analysis	N=205 and N=39 supervisors

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CHAPTER 1

A study of the determinants of work-to-family conflict among hospital nurses in Belgium.

CHAPTER 1

A study of the determinants of work-to-family conflict among hospital nurses in Belgium[3]

Lieve Lembrechts, Vickie Dekocker, Patrizia Zanoni & Valeria Pulignano

1. Abstract[4]

Aim(s) This study examines the relative impact of three sources of work-to-family conflict among hospital nurses: work-family policy use (childcare assistance, schedule flexibility, part-time work), job dimensions (work overload, job autonomy, overtime hours, night shifts, regularity in type of shift, weekend work, hierarchical position, variation in tasks) and organizational support (physician/co-worker support).

Background Many studies claim organizational support and job dimensions as more important sources of work-to-family conflict than work-family policy use, a relation that has not been fully investigated. This study attempts to fill this gap by empirically assessing the relative impact of these sources on nurses' work-to-family conflict.

Method(s) 453 Belgian nurses completed a web survey. The sources of work-to-family conflict were analysed using a hierarchical linear regression.

Results Organizational support influences work-to-family conflict, above and beyond work-family policy use and job dimensions, while policy use has no influence. Physician and co-worker support have a unique decreasing effect, while work overload and overtime hours increase work-to-family conflict.

Conclusion(s) Organizational support, lack of work overload and absence of overtime hours reduce work-to-family conflict, whereas work-family policy use does not.

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[3] This chapter has been published as Lembrechts, L., Dekocker, V., Zanoni, P. & Pulignano, V. (2015). A study of the determinants of work-to-family conflict among hospital nurses. *Journal of Nursing Management*, *23*(7), 898-909.

[4] The format of this abstract is conform to the style of the journal.

Implications for Nursing Management To retain and attract nurses by reducing work-to-family conflict, hospitals should not (only) rely on work-family policies but should also invest in organizational support and adapted job dimensions.

2. Introduction

In the past twenty years, many hospitals and care facilities have been confronted with an increasing demand for health care due to an ageing population. In Western countries the statistics are showing there is a need to solve the shortage of nurses and care staff in order to deal with this demand (McDermid et al., 2012). One of the possibilities is to reduce the heavy work demands causing high turnover (Bruck et al., 2002; Burke & Greenglass, 2001). Nurses, and health care workers in general, are indeed frequently confronted with an imbalance between their work and family life, often referred to as work-family conflict (Kovner et al., 2006; Pal & Saksvik, 2008; Simon et al., 2004). Work-family conflict is deemed to work in two directions: family-to-work conflict – or the influence of the family role on the execution of the work role – and work-to-family conflict – or the influence of the work on the family role. Nurses' work-(to-)family conflict negatively affects their retention (Duffield et al., 2004; O'Brien-Pallas et al., 2004; Parsons & Stonestreet, 2004; Simon et al., 2004), job satisfaction (Cohen & Liani, 2009; Cortese et al., 2010; Munir et al., 2012; Yildirim & Aycan, 2008), psychological wellbeing (Burke & Greenglass, 2001; Munir et al., 2012), work stress (Pal & Saksvik, 2008) and organizational commitment (Benligiray & Sönmez, 2012).

One of the most common organizational strategies to reduce employees' work-to-family conflict is to offer work-family policies (Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Work-family policies are interventions "designed to assist employees with the integration of paid work with other important life roles" (Ryan & Kossek, 2008:295), such as part-time work, schedule flexibility and childcare assistance. Despite the proliferation of work-family policies in contemporary organizations, the little empirical research on the relationship between work-family policy use and individual outcomes has failed to produce conclusive results. Whereas some studies found that the use of some family-friendly practices decreased work-to-family conflict (Russell et al., 2009; van Rijswijk et al., 2004), others could not

assess a significant relationship (Jones et al., 2008) or even found that work-family policy use increased work-to-family conflict (Schieman et al., 2006; Schieman & Glavin, 2009; White et al., 2003).

It has been argued that the ambiguous impact of work-family policies can be explained by the fact that work-to-family conflict depends more on the organizational context, e.g. job dimensions and support, than on work-family policy use, as such policies are less embedded in the organization (Bond et al., 2002; Grzywacz et al., 2008; Hill et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2008; Munir et al., 2012; O'Driscoll et al., 2003). Nonetheless, this claim is mainly a hypothetical one. Empirical research has to date not assessed the relative effect of multiple sources of work-to-family conflict, as it is often limited to one or two types of predicting factors. For instance, Cortese and colleagues (2010) found that emotional charge, job demands and absence of a supportive management increased nurses' work-to-family conflict. According to Pal and Saksvik (2006), high job demands, lack of job control and inflexibility in working hours intensify work-to-family conflict.

Based on a Belgian sample, this study intends to contribute to the literature by empirically assessing the relative impact of work-family policy use, job dimensions and organizational support on work-to-family conflict among nurses.

3. Theoretical background and overview of the literature

3.1. Work-to-family conflict

The conflict theory provides a useful approach to remedy the current lack of research on the relative impact of multiple sources of work-to-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The conflict theory defines work-family conflict as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985:77). The work and family domains refer to workplace activity and family engagement and leisure as well as to the ideologies about the appropriate roles and norms attached to them (e.g. working days and holidays) (van der Lippe, 2007:395).

According to the conflict theory, some sources are deemed to increase or decrease work-family conflict. The former represent 'stressors' and the latter

'resources'. Within the literature, most researchers distinguish between two groups of sources of work-family conflict: family-related sources and work-related sources (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011), depending on the direction of the work-family conflict (Anderson et al., 2002; Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). Meta-analyses have demonstrated that family-to-work conflict is determined by family sources, like parental demands and family social support (Byron, 2005; Major et al., 2008; Michel et al., 2011), whereas work-to-family conflict is mainly determined by work-related sources, such as job dimensions (e.g. work role stressors, work role involvement and work social support). The conflict theory assumes that work-to-family conflict depends on sources in the work domain. These sources can have a potential hindering role (as 'stressors') or facilitating role (as 'resources') in terms of time, strain and behavior. Since the role in the work domain has an impact on the role in the family domain, a hindered work role will intensify work-to-family conflict, while a facilitated work role will mitigate work-to-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work overload and lack of supervisor support for example hinder one's work role, exacerbating the negative impact from the work domain on the family domain.

Work-to-family conflict is an important issue for employers because of its possible negative effects on both work (e.g. job satisfaction, productivity, turnover) as well as family-related outcomes (e.g. stress, family satisfaction) (Allen, 2001; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Simon et al., 2004; Thompson & Prottas, 2005). The management literature has investigated the role of three work-to-family sources – work-family policy use, job dimensions and organizational support – on work-family conflict.

3.2.   *Work-family policy use*

The first source included in the study is employees' use of work-family policies. According to the conflict theory, the use of these policies is deemed to help employees decrease work-to-family conflict by reducing the difficulty of balancing multiple roles and enabling employees to cope with conflicting demands (Allen, 2001). Nonetheless, for most work-family policies no consistent relation with work-to-family conflict has been found so far. For instance, some studies have found that schedule flexibility reduced work-to-family conflict (Anderson et al., 2002; Byron, 2005; Hill et al., 2001; Russell et al., 2009) while others have found

that schedule flexibility increased it (Schieman et al., 2006; Schieman & Glavin, 2009; White et al., 2003). Similarly conflicting results have been found for part-time work: some studies have demonstrated that part-time work reduces work-to-family conflict (Russell et al., 2009; van Rijswijk et al., 2004), while others have found no clear effect (Hill et al., 2004; Plantega, 2002; Walsh, 2007; Warren, 2004).

Research on the impact of work-family policy use on work-to-family conflict among nurses is rare. Two studies however did associate low flexibility and choice in working hours with higher work-to-family conflict (Pal & Saksvik, 2006; Pryce et al., 2006).

3.3. *Job dimensions*
Research shows that different job dimensions are important sources of work-to-family conflict (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). In line with the conflict theory, job dimensions such as irregular working schedules, night shifts, weekend work, variation in tasks, high work time demands, higher status jobs and work overload were found to be stressors causing the individual to invest a lot of his/her resources in the work domain (European working conditions survey, 2005; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; McRea et al., 2001; Michel et al., 2011). As a result, less time and energy is left for the family domain, increasing work-to-family conflict. On the contrary, job dimensions that reduce the time and energy spent at work, such as job autonomy, can be considered as resources, since these job dimensions leave more time and energy for family (Bolino & Turnley, 2005), decreasing work-to-family conflict (Behson, 2005; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Michel et al., 2011).

Nurses' jobs are typically characterized by many stressors, such as night and weekend work, irregular shifts and work overload (Kovner et al., 2006; Simon et al., 2004). Some studies on the outcomes of nurses' job dimensions on work-to-family conflict indeed demonstrated that work overload (Yildirim & Aycan, 2008), work variability, frequent stress events, intensity of work (Simon et al., 2004), workplace threats (e.g. perceived job insecurity) (Burke & Greenglass, 2001), irregular work hours (Beigi et al., 2012) and being pressured to work overtime (Simon et al., 2004) increase work-to-family conflict. Other studies found that work-to-family conflict was related to the lack of ownership and choice over the way work was organized, regardless of the specific nature of the work schedules

(Fujimoto et al., 2008; Pryce et al., 2006), and other sources such as job demands and emotional charge (Cortese et al., 2010). Furthermore, nurses in managerial and senior positions experience higher levels of work-to-family conflict than nurses in lower status jobs because of their additional responsibilities (Burchielli et al., 2008).

3.4. Organizational support

A third source of work-to-family conflict is organizational support. According to the conflict theory, organizational support reduces the strain that an individual experiences in the work domain, increasing the resources left for the family domain, as empirical research also demonstrated (Michel et al., 2011; Thompson & Prottas, 2006). Attention for organizational support grew out of the finding that work-family policy users often experience negative reactions from their co-workers and supervisors and suffer from negative career consequences (Allen, 2001). These effects are likely to considerably reduce the possible positive effect of policy use on work-to-family conflict.

Research on organizational support mostly focuses on managerial, supervisor and co-worker support. Some examples are managers' and supervisors' support for work-family policies (Bardoel, 2003; Maxwell, 2005; Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010) and work-family balance in general (Allard et al., 2011; Wise & Bond, 2003). Along the same lines, studies on co-worker support examine support for work-family policy use (Allard et al., 2011; Valcour et al., 2011) and work-family balance in general (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006; Thompson & Prottas, 2005). The accessibility or availability of policies (i.e.: the perception that work-family policies can really be used without negative career consequences or other downsides) has also been considered as an indicator of a family-supportive culture (Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

Empirical studies consistently find that organizational support is indeed crucial to tackle work-to-family conflict. Employees who experience supportive supervision, supportive co-workers and perceive work-family policies as accessible are less likely to experience work-to-family conflict (Allen, 2001; Anderson et al., 2002; Behson, 2005; Michel, 2011; Valcour et al., 2011).

Also for nurses, research has shown that organizational support, and especially supportive co-workers and physicians reduce work-to-family conflict

(Beigi et al., 2012; Cortese, 2007; Cortese et al., 2010). According to Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2012) co-worker trust has a positive impact on nurses' work-family balance, while Fujimoto et al. (2008) found that perceived support in the workplace around childcare decreased work-to-family conflict.

3.5.   Hypotheses of the study

The study aimed to assess the relative impact of work-family policy use, job dimensions and organizational support as sources of work-to-family conflict (see Figure 1). The hypotheses were formulated in line with the conflict theory, which states that sources in the work domain that can be considered as resources are associated with low levels of work-to-family conflict, and that sources in the work domain that can be considered as stressors are associated with high levels of work-to-family conflict.

Moreover, based on empirical research, a hierarchy in the impact of work-family policy use, job dimensions and organizational support on work-to-family conflict was hypothesized (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). Work-family policy use was expected to be the least important, and organizational support the most important source. In line with previous studies, work-family policy use was delimited to child care assistance, schedule flexibility and part-time work, while job dimensions that can be considered as resources included lack of work overload, lack of overtime hours, lack of night shifts, lack of weekend work and lack of variation in tasks on the one hand, and job autonomy, regularity in type of shift and low hierarchical position on the other hand. Organizational support was defined as physician support and co-worker support.

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

>   **Hypothesis 1:** *Work-family policy use decreases work-to-family conflict.*
>   **Hypothesis 2:** *Job dimensions that can be considered as resources decrease work-to-family conflict, even after taking into account work-family policy use.*
>   **Hypothesis 3:** *Organizational support decreases work-to-family conflict, even after taking into account work-family policy use and job dimensions.*
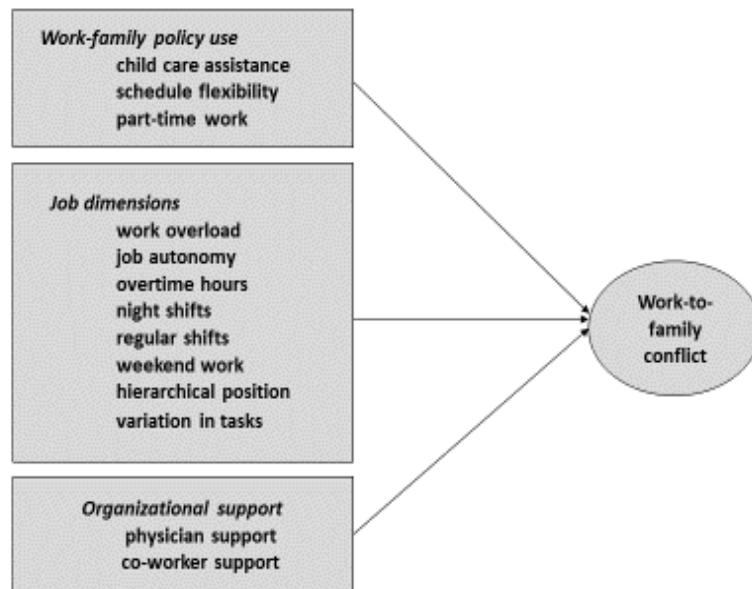
Figure 1. Hypothesized model for the antecedents of work-to-family conflict.

4. Method

4.1. National context

The Belgian health sector has seen an exponential growth since the mid-1970s (Pacolet, 2002) due to the ageing population. Figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicate that Belgium has relatively high rates of nurses per 1000 residents (15), compared to the OECD average of 8 (OECD, 2011). At the same time, the sector has been confronted with high staff turnover (Stordeur et al., 2007).

4.2. Data collection

The data collection was conducted in two phases. First a pilot study based on face-to-face interviews was set up (between February and April 2010) in order to test the questionnaire's applicability to nurses. The testing phase was necessary as the questions were slightly adapted from existing studies, most of which had been conducted in other sectors. Some items were not applicable to our population. For instance, given that the target population were hospital nurses, it would have made little sense to ask respondents whether they had job autonomy in terms of being able to choose where to work. Their work activities occur in the hospital. Yet this question has been used to assess the job autonomy of employees in other sectors.

The pilot study was organized in a hospital renowned for its heterogeneous work systems for nurses in different departments. A total of 83 nurses participated. They were selected to reflect the Belgian nursing population in terms of several socio-demographic variables like gender (85% female and 15% male), age (70% between 35-55 years), function (70% certified nurses – 30% support care staff) and marital status (75% married or cohabiting). Thus, the pilot study allowed us to test the applicability of the questionnaire to a variety of nursing jobs and respondents with different profiles. Although the questionnaire was mainly based on validated measures (e.g. from the European Social Survey 2004 and the European Working Conditions Survey 2004), the pilot study allowed us to adapt some questions (e.g. the meaning of job autonomy) and answer categories (the different work schedules and timetables) to the target population.

The actual data collection took place in early 2011 in collaboration with the three largest Belgian trade unions. To respect union members' privacy, a web survey was set up and the link was sent to the national and regional trade union representatives, who subsequently forwarded it to all their local representatives and to unionized hospital nurses. A reminder was sent two months later. The initial aim was to cover all Belgian nurses. Therefore personal contact had been made with the trade unions representing nurses and the organization representing hospitals. However, the latter ultimately withdrew as it feared that the survey would have raised expectations among nurses concerning work-life balance initiatives. As a consequence, we conducted the study solely in collaboration with the trade unions and our target population ultimately became unionized nurses, or 40% of the total nursing personnel in Belgium.

4.3. Sample

In line with previous research in nursing (Day et al., 2007; Abualrub & Alghamdi, 2012), a convenience sample of nurses was drawn through the trade unions. More specifically, the data collection took place through a cascade system. The link to the web survey was sent to national union representatives, who in turn sent it to the trade union representatives in the hospitals, who forwarded it to the unionized nurses. Although the administration of the questionnaire relied on a third party, the questionnaire was developed by the authors with no external interference to attain the research goals. Nor had the trade unions access to the collected data. Through the on-line survey we obtained 453 completed questionnaires. The population size, the sample size as well as the response rate could not be calculated due to the fact that we relied on a third party to collect the data. As the total number of members in the sector is a sensitive piece of information, unions were not willing to reveal the total number of members in the sector.

Since the measure of work-to-family conflict was aimed at respondents who have a partner and/or children, we only included the respondents who met this criterion for the current study (N=384). The respondents were mostly female (76.3%). This proportion reflects the overall population in the health sector in Belgium, which employs 73.5% women and 26.5% men (European Union Labour Force Survey, 2010). Their mean age was 43.3 years (SD=10). 26.6% worked in a small hospital (less than 250 employees), 36.3% in a medium sized hospital

(between 250 and 999 employees) and 37.1% in a large hospital (1000 employees or more).

4.4.   Measures
Work-to-family conflict

The dependent variable was measured by four items on a five-point scale. The items were based on the European Social Survey (2004). This scale has been used to examine work–family conflict in the UK and across Europe (Gallie & Paugam, 2002; White et al., 2003), and has also been replicated in international research articles, for instance by Russell and colleagues (2009). A sample item is: 'How often are you worried about problems at work when you are not working?'. The respondents were given following response options: never (=1), rarely (=2), sometimes (=3), often (=4) and always (=5). The scale was reliable (Cronbach's alpha=0.768) (mean=2.64; SD=0.56). We preferred this scale because its items reflect well the influence of the work role on the family role.

Work-family policy use

Part-time work was measured by asking if the employee had a fulltime or part-time employment contract. *Use of childcare assistance* included daily childcare, childcare when children are ill and childcare during holidays, all offered by the employer. When a respondent indicated that he/she made use of at least one of these services, her answer was coded as 'yes', while respondents who did not use any of the childcare provisions, were coded as 'no'. The measurement of *schedule flexibility* was based on the European Working Conditions Survey. The question was: 'How is your work schedule determined?'. Respondents were directed to four possible response options: 'By the company and the organization, and no changes are possible' (=1), 'You can choose between different fixed work schedules determined by the organization' (=2), 'You can set your own hours within certain limits' (=3) and 'You set your own hours' (=4).

Job dimensions

Work overload was measured using three items of the satisfaction in nursing scale (Lynn et al., 2009). A sample item is: 'I have to scale back the care I give because of other demands'. The items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly

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disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=5). The internal consistency of the scale was rather low but acceptable (Lance et al., 2006) (Cronbach's alpha=0.624) (mean=1.94; SD=0.48)*. The *job autonomy* scale was based on the European Working Conditions Survey (2004) and measured to what extent employees can decide how they do their job. Respondents answered with yes/no to the set of questions regarding opportunities to change work rhythm, method or sequence of tasks. The answers to the three questions were tabulated and summed as a total score for job autonomy. The number of *overtime hours* was measured as a continuous variable. Respondents were also asked if they had done *night shifts* (i.e. between 9PM and 7AM) in the past 6 months, if they had *regular or irregular* (i.e. variable time schedules) *shifts*, and if they usually *worked during weekends*. Furthermore, the respondent indicated his/her *hierarchical position*, coded as a continuous variable. *Variation in tasks* was measured using an item from the European Social Survey: 'My job requires that I keep learning new things', on a four-point scale between 'not at all true' (=1) and 'very true' (=4).

Organizational support

Physicians' support was measured using five items of the Hospital Culture Scale (Klingle et al., 1995). The items were rated on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=5). A sample item is: 'The nurse-physician relationship is characterized by mutual respect' (Cronbach's alpha=0.848) (mean=3.63; SD=0.90). *Co-worker support* was measured using three items of the satisfaction in nursing scale (Lynn et al., 2009), rated on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=5). A sample item was: 'The nurses with whom I work show concern for each other' (Cronbach's alpha=0.866) (mean=2.26; SD=0.47).

Control variables

Care for dependents (yes/no), *partnership* (yes/no), *gender* (man, woman) and *age* (continuous) were selected as control variables, as they had been found to account for different levels of work-to-family conflict (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011).

4.5. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows 20.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). A hierarchical linear regression method was used for the statistical analysis in this study. This method is commonly used to assess the relative impact of independent variables on work-(to-)family conflict (Clark, 2001; Hayman, 2009; Morganson et al., 2010; Raghuram & Wiesenfeld, 2004; Shockley & Allen, 2007; Spence Laschinger et al., 2009; Wayne et al., 2006) and to test the hypothesized hierarchy. In this analysis, the dependent variable was work-to-family conflict, and the independent variables socio-demographics as control variables (step 1), work-family policy use (step 2), job dimensions (step 3) and organizational support (step 4). Linear regression analysis requires that all values are obtained from respondents. Any respondent with a missing value was excluded from the study. In this study, 195 respondents had not fully completed they survey, leading to a final sample size of N=189. The sample size remained, however, large enough to conduct the statistical analyses.

5. Results

The hierarchical regression analysis (see Table 2) revealed that the final model (model 4) including work-family policy use, job dimensions and organizational support explained 22.3% of the variance in work-to-family conflict.

Table 2. Regression models of independent variables and work-to-family conflict (N=189).

	Step 1 (ß coefficient)	Step 2 (ß coefficient)	Step 3 (ß coefficient)	Step 4 (ß coefficient)
STEP 1: Socio-demographic variables				
Care for dependents	0.101	0.118	0.111	0.101
Partnership	0.038	0.034	-0.002	0.012
Age	-0.102	-0.080	-0.060	-0.078
Gender	0.060	0.066	0.093	0.096
STEP 2: Work-family policy use				
Part-time work		0.062	0.057	0.070
Childcare assistance		-0.001	-0.024	-0.014
Schedule flexibility		-0.108	-0.108	-0.083
STEP 3: Job characteristics				
Work overload			0.214**	0.192**
Job autonomy			-0.146*	-0.102
Overtime hours			0.166*	0.143*
Night shifts			0.031	0.035
Regular shifts			-0.058	-0.066
Work during weekend			0.041	0.049
Hierarchical position			-0.050	-0.040
Variation in tasks			-0.006	0.041

STEP 4: Organizational support

Physician support				-0.148*
Co-worker support				-0.166*
R² **change**	0.039	0.013	0.124**	0.046**
R²	0.039	0.053	0.176	0.223

*p ≤ 0.05, ** p ≤ 0.01

Our results did not confirm hypothesis 1: the change in R^2 between the first and the second step was not significant, which meant that work-life policy use as a block had no significant influence on work-to-family conflict (R^2 change=0.013; $p > 0.05$). By contrast, job dimensions as a block significantly added to the variation in the work-to-family conflict, which was explained by the work-family policy use (R^2 change=0.124; $p \leq 0.01$). The results supported hypothesis 2. Also, adding the block with organizational support variables significantly increased the proportion of the variance explained (R^2 change=0.046; $p \leq 0.01$), thus confirming hypothesis 3.

In the final model on work-to-family conflict, work overload (β =.192; $p \leq 0.01$) and overtime hours (β =.143; $p \leq 0.05$) significantly increased the conflict, while physician (β =-.148; $p \leq 0.05$) and co-worker support (β =-.166; $p \leq 0.05$) significantly diminished this conflict. The strongest and weakest predictors were, in respective order, work overload source, co-worker support, physician support and overtime hours.

6. Discussion

The model tested in this study assesses the relative impact of work-family policy use, job dimensions and organizational support as predictors of work-to-family conflict among nurses. Prior empirical research among nurses has only investigated the relation between work-to-family conflict and two types of sources in one statistical model.

The results of this study demonstrate that job dimensions and organizational support together significantly influenced work-to-family conflict, while this effect could not be found for work-family policy use. The results partially supported the predicted relationships based on the conflict theory. As hypothesized, organizational support influenced work-to-family conflict, above and beyond work-family policy use and job dimensions (see hypothesis 3), while job dimensions also explained a significant amount of variance, above and beyond work-family policy use (see hypothesis 2). The lack of confirmation of the hypothesis that work-family policy use has an influence on work-to-family conflict (see hypothesis 1) is inconsistent with the conflict theory, but not totally unexpected, since empirical research thus far has led to inconclusive results

(Schieman et al., 2006; Schieman & Glavin, 2009; White et al., 2003). Apparently, the use of work-family policies does not represent a resource to efficiently cope with work-life conflict. Rather, in line with previous findings, it is the perceived availability of such work-family policies that represents a resource (Behson, 2005; Wayne et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2008). In other terms, the perception that the organization is supportive depends on other sources than work-family policy use.

As for organizational support, both variables in the block explained significant unique variance in work-to-family conflict. Co-worker support was a stronger predictor than physician support.

As for job dimensions, only a lack of work overload and a lack of overtime hours explained significant unique variance in work-to-family conflict (the amount of work overload being the strongest predictor), and not job autonomy, regular shifts or no weekend work, low hierarchical position and variation in tasks. Weekend work, night work, irregular shifts and variation in tasks are variables that refer to the a-typical character of nurses' jobs, which according to the literature constitutes a stressor in the work domain and thus – in line with the conflict theory – should increase work-to-family conflict (European working conditions survey, 2005; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; McRea et al., 2001; Michel et al., 2011). It may seem surprising that we found these three job dimensions (irregular work schedules, low hierarchical position and lack of variation in tasks) did not have a significant unique influence, yet this lack of influence could be due to the predictability of these sources, which might allow nurses to organize their family lives according to their work schedule (Havlovic et al., 2002). The lack of impact can also be explained by the fact that nurses deliberately choose to work according to a-typical schedules; indeed, choice of work schedules has been found to increase work-family balance among nurses (Pryce et al., 2006). On the contrary, nurses have less or no control over overtime hours and work overload, which can explain why these job dimensions do have a significant impact on work-to-family conflict.

Nurses in leadership, management and supervisory positions were expected to have a higher work-to-family conflict since a high rank job usually implies more responsibilities (Pichler, 2009; Schieman & Reid, 2009) but this could not be confirmed. Possibly these results indicate that levels of responsibility might not be a strong predictor of work-to-family conflict.

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The lack of impact of job autonomy is surprising, since previous research repeatedly demonstrates that work-to-family conflict can be reduced by job autonomy (Behson, 2005; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Michel et al., 2011). The results (see Table 2) illustrate that job autonomy was a significant predictor of work-to-family conflict. However, an interesting new finding was that autonomy became an insignificant predictor when organizational support was included in the model. This could indicate that organizational support mediates the relation between job autonomy and work-to-family conflict. For example, nurses with a high degree of job autonomy could be more likely to perceive their co-workers and physicians as supportive, and thus would have lower work-to-family conflict than nurses with a limited degree of job autonomy. Indeed, Thompson and Prottas (2006) found that job autonomy is related to employees' perceived organizational support and that this support is in turn related to work-to-family conflict.

7. Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the cross-sectional design, which makes it less evident to draw conclusions in terms of causal relationships, although many other authors have used similar designs for the same type of studies (Cortese et al., 2010; Giallonardo et al., 2010; Simon et al., 2004; Spence Laschinger et al., 2009). Further research might want to test our findings by means of a longitudinal design. A second limitation concerns the reliance on trade unions for the survey administration. We cannot exclude that the sampling procedure, which only included unionized nurses might have introduced a bias in our results. However, we should stress that union membership is common in Belgium as, following the so-called Ghent system, trade unions administer unemployment benefits (Scruggs, 2002). Moreover, the rare prior research on job satisfaction and commitment found no differences between union members and non-members (Bryson et al., 2004).

8. Implications for nursing management

Our findings suggest that hospitals which aim to reduce work-to-family conflict should do so in the first place by creating a family-friendly working environment and through job redesign.

A central factor in a family-friendly work place is supervisor support. Research has demonstrated that this support depends on organizational features which can be modified: for instance, top management's openness towards work-life issues, a focus on long term goals, an organization's instrumental support and an adapted evaluation, assessment and reward system are deemed to increase supervisors' supportiveness (Lauzun et al., 2010; Straub, 2012). Work overload and overtime hours can be reduced by the introduction of technologies which enable nurses to deal with standardized tasks more efficiently or the redesign of jobs, devolving other than medically-related care tasks to personnel with other occupational profiles (e.g. administrative personnel and nurse assistants).

Although work-family policy use had no impact on work-to-family conflict, the mere presence of work-family policies may however be desirable. More specifically, it can enable employers to signal to potential employees that the organization cares about reducing work-to-family conflict (Budd & Mumford, 2006; Valcour et al., 2011). To external stakeholders, the prevalence of work-family policies is more visible than organizational support and job dimensions.

9. Conclusions

Testing the relative importance of work-family policy use, different job dimensions and organizational support on work-life conflict, our study found that organizational support was the most important source in reducing work-to-family conflict. Also job dimensions had an important influence on work-to-family conflict, while this effect could not be found for work-family policy use. With the exception of the last finding, these results support the predicted relationships based on the conflict theory. In line with what was predicted by the conflict theory, informal supportiveness and advantageous job designs are deemed to eliminate stressors in the work domain. However, contrary to what was predicted by the

conflict theory, in line with previous findings, work-family policy use in itself is not a resource to cope with work-to-family conflict.

10. Ethical approval

For the pilot study, special attention was devoted to the anonymity of the participants. As the nurses worked in the same hospital, all personal data which could enable researcher to identify the respondent was redacted and a numerical ID was addressed instead. For the respondent of the main web survey, anonymity was already enhanced as the link was spread by the trade unions internally. In order to guarantee full anonymity, e-mail addresses, used to complete the survey, have been deleted from the data files.

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CHAPTER 2

Family supportive supervisor behaviors and employees' work-to-life conflict: A multilevel study on the mediating role of perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and work overload.

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Lieve Lembrechts, Marijke Verbruggen & Patrizia Zanoni

1. Abstract

This study examines the relationship between supervisor behaviors that are considered in the literature as family supportive – which we label "supposedly family supportive supervisor behaviors" (SFSSBs) – and employees' work-to-life conflict. Specifically, we investigate the relation between four SFSSBs (Hammer et al., 2009; 2011) and employees' work-to-life conflict via employees' perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and work overload. Drawing on job demands-resources theory, we expect that all SFSSBs signal supervisor support for work-life issues, but that some SFSSBs have a negative side-effect in the form of increased work overload, and are thereby related to respectively a decreased and an increased work-to-life conflict among employees. Hypotheses were tested in a multilevel study with matched employee-supervisor data (N=726). Supervisors' creation of a flexible work time culture was found to decrease employees' work-to-life conflict via increased perceived support for work-life issues and lowered work overload, whereas supervisors' personal use of work-life policies was found to increase employees' work-to-life conflict via lowered perceived supervisor support and increased work overload. No effect of supervisors' formal work-life policy allowance or the provision of informal flexibility on employees' work-to-life conflict was found. These results indicate that not all SFSSBs are equally effective in facilitating the multiple role management of employees. Implications for the literature and practice are discussed.

2. Introduction

Due to the rise in dual-earner and single-parent households, an increasing number of employees has to combine work and non-work roles. This has increased the prevalence of work-to-life conflict (Drobnič, 2011; Eurofound, 2017), i.e. a form of inter-role conflict in which individuals' work role prevents them from completing their non-work roles successfully (Frone et al., 1997; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Gutek et al., 1991). Work-to-life conflict is an important concern of both employers and employees since it has been related with negative work-related outcomes (e.g. lower job satisfaction, lower job performance, less organizational commitment and higher turnover), family-related outcomes (e.g. more stress and less family satisfaction) and domain-unspecific outcomes (e.g. cardiometabolic risks, more stress and anxiety) (Allen, 2001; Allen et al., 2000; Amstad et al., 2011; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Berkman et al., 2015; Brauchli et al., 2011; Butts et al., 2013; Frone et al., 1992; Frone et al., 1997; Huffman et al., 2008; Lee & Hui, 1999; Simon et al., 2004; Thompson & Prottas, 2005). Gaining a better understanding of the factors affecting work-to-life conflict and how this latter can be reduced is thus relevant for employers, employees and society at large.

Research on determinants of work-to-life conflict has pointed to the crucial role of the employees' supervisor (Allen, 2001; Frone et al., 1997; Hammer et al., 2007; Kossek et al., 2011; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Michel et al., 2011; Straub, 2012; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999). The vast majority of this literature focuses on employees' perceived supervisor support for work-life issues, which refers to employees' feeling that their supervisor is family supportive (e.g., Kossek et al., 2011; Straub, 2012). These studies have consistently shown that employees who perceive family-related support from their supervisor tend to experience less work-to-life conflict (Frone et al., 1997; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999). More specifically, the perception of supervisor support is assumed to function as a resource that can reduce the work-to-life conflict employees experience (Hammer et al., 2009; O'Driscoll et al., 2003; Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

Given the important role supervisors play in employees' work-to-life conflict, Hammer and colleagues (2007; 2009) called for an examination of which behaviors of supervisors are perceived as family supportive. They identified four

types of family supportive supervisor behaviors: instrumental support, role modeling behaviors, creative work-family management (i.e., managerial-initiated actions to restructure work to facilitate employee effectiveness on and off the job) and emotional support, and developed a measure to assess employees' perceptions of these behaviors. Empirical validations of this measure showed that employees' perceptions of each of these four behaviors are related with lower work-to-life conflict (Hammer et al., 2009; 2011; 2013).

Although the measure of Hammer and colleagues (2011) provides concrete descriptions of family supportive supervisor behaviors, as it is based on employees' perceptions, it does not allow to assess whether supervisors who perceive themselves as engaging in these behaviors effectively reduce their employees' work-to-life conflict. This might not always be the case for two reasons. First, as research in HRM has long shown, there often is a gap between what the management and supervisors report they are doing (what is typically called "actual HRM") and the perceptions of the employees (what is referred to as "perceived HRM") (Wright & Nishii, 2013). It is therefore important in empirical investigations to distinguish between supervisor behaviors that are assumed to be family supportive as reported by the supervisors and employees' perceptions of family supportive supervisor behaviors. Second, the extant literature overlooks that these supervisor behaviors may also have an impact on the organization of the work (Karimi et al., 2014; Lambert et al., 2009) influencing the work overload experienced by employees. Some supervisor behaviors may lower the work overload: e.g., offering informal flexibility may allow employees to plan their tasks more freely and could in that way lower the work overload they experience (Ahuja et al., 2007). Other behaviors may, on the contrary, increase the work overload: e.g., a supervisor who works part-time to better combine work and non-work roles – in that way showing role model behavior – may delegate certain tasks to his/her subordinates, which can in turn increase the work-to-life conflict employees experience (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011).

The aim of this study is therefore to examine whether and how supervisors' behaviors which are typically seen as family-supportive – which we label "supposedly family-supportive supervisor behaviors" or SFSSB – are associated with employees' work-to-life conflict, using the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). In line with the

literature on family supportive supervisory behaviors, we expect that when supervisors show these behaviors, employees are more likely to perceive supervisor support, which may in turn relate to less work-to-life conflict (i.e., perceived support path). On the other hand, we posit that these behaviors may also affect employees' work overload, with some of these behaviors having a work overload-reducing effect but other behaviors having a work overload-enhancing effect (i.e., work overload path).

In line with Hammer and colleagues (2011), we include the following four types of behaviors. First, supervisors can offer instrumental, or practical support, for instance by allowing employees to make use of work-life practices such as telework or part-time work. Second, supervisors may act as a role model, illustrating how they personally tackle work-to-life issues, for instance by using work-life practices themselves. Third, supervisors can apply creative work–family management techniques, for instance by allowing employees to reschedule their work in function of family obligations. Finally, supervisors can offer emotional support by listening to their employees and creating a safe climate in which employees feel comfortable to talk about work-life issues.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, we assess family supportive supervisor behaviors at the level of the supervisor and examine to which extent these behaviors are perceived as family supportive by their employees. In doing so, this study addresses the call of several researchers to take into account the supervisor's perspective in research on supervisor support for work-life issues and not exclusively the individual employee's perception (Baran et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2016; Kossek et al., 2011; Li et al., 2017). Second, based on the JD-R model, we assess both a perceived support path and a work overload path. In that way, we acknowledge that some SFSSBs may not only signal support but could also have unexpected negative effects, a possibility which has been largely ignored in research on family friendly supervisor behaviors to date. Third, differentiating between four specific SFSSBs enables us to identify which behaviors induce which effects and to formulate more accurate policy implications for supervisors and organization about the potential influence of supervisor behavior (Goh et al., 2015).

3. Theoretical background

3.1. Family supportive supervisor behaviors and work-to-life conflict

Family supportive supervisor behaviors represent a subtype of perceived social support in the professional domain, which also includes the perceived support of colleagues and of the organization as a whole. Defined as "feeling cared for and appreciated" and "having access to direct or indirect help" (Kossek et al., 2011: 291), perceived social support has been shown to be an important resource to reduce the stress and difficulties employees experience with combining roles in different domains of life (Bakker & Geurts, 2004; Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Kossek et al., 2011; Peeters et al., 2005) and, more particularly, to cope with work-to-life conflict (Hammer et al., 2009; Kossek et al., 2011).

Kossek and colleagues (2011) identified perceived supervisor support for work-life issues as a content specific subdomain of general perceived supervisor support. They further specified that supervisor support for work-life issues includes attitudes (e.g. empathy for work-life issues) and helping behaviors, even though empirically they cannot be always distinguished (e.g. empathy as an attitude versus emotional support as helping behavior). Family supportive supervisor behaviors (e.g. Hammer et al., 2011) then refer to the specific supervisor behaviors which an employee perceives as facilitating his or her multiple role management.

Whereas research on family supportive supervisor behaviors has long focused on emotional support, Hammer and colleagues (2007, 2009, 2011, 2013) recently identified four types of supervisor behaviors that can be considered as family supportive. First, a supervisor can offer **instrumental support**, which refers to the supervisor responding to an employee's work and family needs in the form of day-to-day management transactions. In this study, we will include formal work-life policy allowance as an indicator of this instrumental support. Second, supervisors can demonstrate **role modeling behaviors**: through their behaviors on and off the job, supervisor can show their employees how to synthesize work and family. Role modeling behavior will be measured in this study via the supervisor's personal use of work-life policies. Third, Hammer and colleagues identify **creative work–family management**, referring to supervisor-initiated actions to restructure work in such a way that it facilitates employee effectiveness

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on and off the job. This type of support differs from instrumental support in the sense that its elaboration is left to the free interpretation of the supervisor, while instrumental support refers to supportive tools already installed at the workplace. In our study, we will use the provision of informal flexibility as an indicator of creative work-family management. The fourth type is **emotional support**, which stands for the support that supervisors provide by listening, showing care for employees' work–family demands and creating a culture which is family supportive. We will study emotional support by focusing on the flexible work time culture the supervisor creates, i.e., the creation of a culture in which employees feel and believe that they can work when and where they want without having to fear penalties for not being present at the workplace.

Existing research on supervisor support for work-life issues typically assesses perceptions of support with the employee. Research including the supervisors' perspective on their supportive behaviors for work-life issues and its relationship with the employees work-to-life conflict is largely lacking to date. A few studies, however, have used aggregated scores of perceived support. That is, they assessed perceived support at the level of the employees and then aggregated the individual scores to the team or organizational level (Epstein et al., 2015; Goh et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2016; O'Neill et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2004). For instance, Thompson et al. (2004) aggregated the individual employees' perceptions of supervisor emotional work-family support to the group level, yet found no impact on work-to-life conflict. More recently, Hill et al. (2016) measured teachers' perceptions that their supervisor behaves in family supportive ways using the scale developed by Hammer et al. (2009), including four types of support. They aggregated the teachers' answers to the school level, and this aggregation was found to relate to decreased individual work-to-life conflict, but only if the organization was also perceived to be family supportive. Overall, these studies show that when perceived support is constructed at the team or organizational level, the effects on work-to-life conflict are less strong and less consistent. These findings point to the complexity of the relation between supervisor support and employees' work-to-life conflict and thus underscore the need to examine mediators of this relationship.

3.2. *Hypotheses*

We expect that SFSSBs are related to employees' work-to-life conflict via two paths: a perceived support path (via perceived supervisor support for work-life issues) and a work overload path (via work overload), building on the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001) (see Figure 2).

The JD-R model states that irrespective of the specific occupation, work outcomes – in this study work-to-life conflict – depend on two sets of characteristics of the work context: job demands and job resources. More precisely, the model stipulates that negative outcomes such as work-to-life conflict are the result of the presence of demands and the absence of resources. Job demands are "those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007:313). Job resources stand for "those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are either/or functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, stimulate personal growth, learning, and development" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007:313). Thus, job resources have positive effects on their own, but are also important for reducing job demands. The JD-R model states that demands and resources are related to work outcomes through two distinctive psychological mechanisms. On the one hand, job demands may lead to exhaustion through the depletion of mental and physical resources, hindering employees to combine work and non-work roles and thus increasing the employees' work-to-life conflict. On the other hand, job resources have a motivational impact on employees, thus supporting them to handle work-life issues and reducing work-to-life conflict (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011).

According to the JD-R literature, SFSSBs can be considered as resources, possibly reducing the employees' work-to-life conflict (Bakker, 2008; Bakker et al., 2007; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). The JD-R model is usually applied to the employees' *perceptions* (Peters et al., 2014). Previous research indeed demonstrated that *perceived* supervisor support is related to a reduction of work-to-life conflict (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). Nonetheless, the JD-R model is also relevant for studying family supportive behaviors as *self-reported* by the supervisor (Peters et al., 2014). In this contribution, we argue that SFSSBs may

affect both employees' perceived resources and their perceived demands and therefore employees' work-to-life conflict. More specifically, we expect that all SFSSBs trigger perceptions of supervisor support for work-life issues, which is advanced as a job resource motivating employees and thereby reducing work-to-life conflict. At the same time, however, we expect that some SFSSBs may lower employees' work overload whereas other SFSSBs may increase their work overload, with work overload being considered as a job demand leading to exhaustion and thereby increasing work-to-life conflict.

In sum, based on the JD-R model, work-to-life conflict is expected to decrease under the influence of perceived supervisor support for work-life issues (as a resource) and increase under the influence of work overload (as a demand), both depending on specific supervisor behaviors functioning as resources and/or stressors via perceived supervisor support and work overload. Former studies based on the JD-R perspective also found evidence for workload as a demand (Bakker & Geurts, 2004; Peeters et al., 2005) and supervisor support as a resource (De Hauw, 2014; Schieman et al., 2009) for employees' handling of work-life issues.
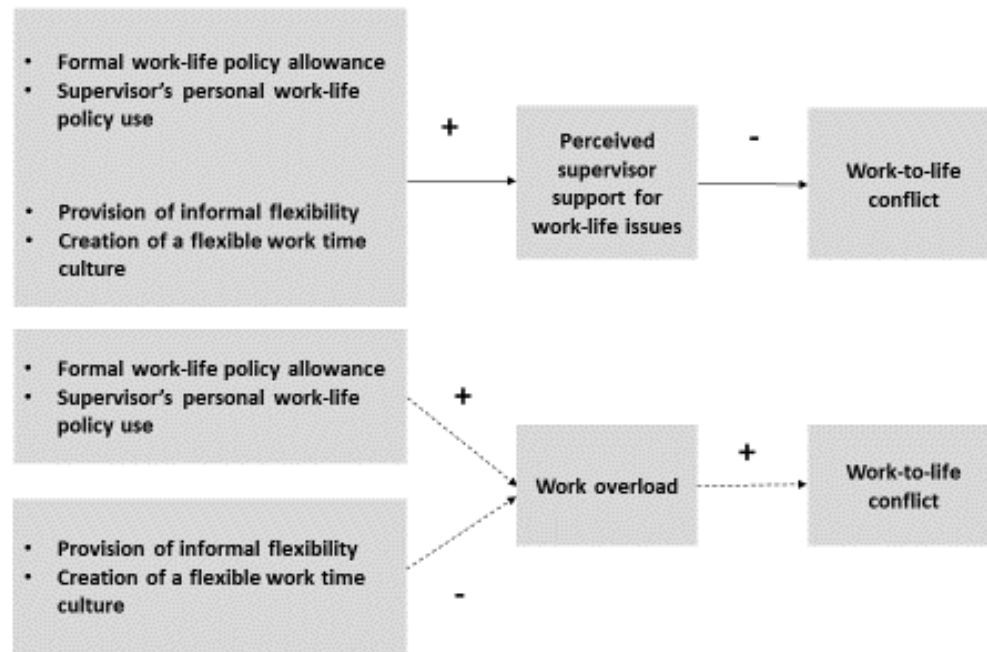
Figure 2. Hypothesized model for the relationship between SFSSBs and work-to-life conflict.
(full lines refer to the perceived support path, dotted lines refer to the work overload path)

3.3. Perceived support path

We first of all expect the SFSSBs included in this study to be related to work-to-life conflict via a perceived support path. The basic reasoning for this path is that supervisors, by demonstrating specific family supportive behaviors, can induce employees' perceptions of supervisor support for work-life issues, which in turn is expected to be a resource able to reduce their work-to-life conflict (Allen, 2001; Anderson et al., 2002; Behson, 2002; Michel et al., 2011; Valcour et al., 2011). This expectation is also in line with signaling theory (Casper & Harris, 2008), according to which it can be stated that SFSSBs are observable actions demonstrated by the supervisor which employees interpret as a signal that their supervisor cares about them, thus leading to perceived supervisor support for work-life issues.

   The work-life literature has repeatedly suggested that specific behaviors of a supervisor can lead to an employee's perception that the supervisor is supportive of work-life issues, even though empirical evidence is scarce. Studies investigating the link between specific types of SFSSBs and perceived supervisor support for work-life issues mainly demonstrate that supervisors who support the organization's work-life policy can induce the perception of supervisor support with their employees, among others because this supervisor behavior facilitates the availability and use of flextime and flexplace (Allen et al., 2013) or neutralizes the possible repercussions of using work-life policies, such as missed promotions (Kossek et al., 2011). We assume that other SFSSBs have a similar impact on the employee's perception of supervisor support. In particular, we expect that formal work-life policy allowance, supervisor's personal use of work-life policies, the provision of informal flexibility and the creation of a flexible work time culture signal that the supervisor is supportive, thus creating the perception of supervisor support. We thus hypothesize that each of the four types of SFSSBs included in this study is positively related with employees' perceived supervisor support for work-life issues.

   Hypothesis 1: (a) Formal work-life policy allowance, (b) supervisor's personal use of work-life policies, (c) the provision of informal flexibility

*and **(d)** the creation of a flexible work time culture are positively related to the employees' perceived supervisor support for work-life issues.*

In line with the JD-R model, we expect that perceived supervisor support for work-life issues functions as a resource that decreases employees' work-to-life conflict. Indeed, numerous empirical studies have shown that perceived supervisor support is negatively related with work-to-life conflict (e.g. Byron, 2005; Frone et al., 1997; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Kelly et al., 2008; Michel et al., 2011; Muse & Pichler, 2011). Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 2:** *Perceived supervisor support for work-life issues is negatively related to the employees' work-to-life conflict.*

3.4.   *Work overload path*

Second, we hypothesize a work overload path linking SFSSBs and work-to-life conflict via experienced work overload. Work overload is a popular topic in the work-life literature, amongst others because of its important increasing impact on work-to-life conflict (Ahuja et al., 2007; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Frone et al., 1997; Goh et al., 2015). Research has shown that supervisors can play an important role in affecting employees' work overload, for instance because of their (co-) determination of the work design (Bakker et al., 2003). As will be explained more in detail further on, we expect some SFSSBs to decrease employees' workload, while other SFSSBs are more likely to have an increasing impact. In that line of reasoning, not all four types of SFSSBs mentioned by Hammer et al. (2009; 2011) may be equally effective in reducing employees' work-to-life conflict.

We expect that formal work-life policy allowance (as a form of instrumental support) and the supervisor's personal use of work-life policies (as a form of role modeling) may be related with more work overload for the employee. There are several indications in the literature that formal work-life policy allowance, e.g., allowance to work part-time or to use telework, may be related with more work overload (Richman et al., 2008). For instance, research found that flexible workers experience work intensification, which may be explained by their willingness to do

an extra effort in exchange for flexibility (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Also employees who work part-time often witness having to do the same amount of work as a full-time employee in less hours (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002), because the appraisal systems do not take into account the employee's work-life policy use (Brown & Benson, 2005). In addition, research on employees who use telework shows that these employees have more difficulties with disconnecting from their work (Lapierre & Allen, 2006), which may lead to an increased workload. There are also reasons to expect that a supervisor's own use of work-life policies can increase employees' work overload. When a supervisor works part-time or telecommutes, part of the supervisor's workload may be redirected to the supervisor's employees. For instance, research demonstrated that part-time managers more often delegate their tasks than fulltime managers (Raabe, 1998). For these reasons, we expect that employees who are working for a supervisor who allows them to use work-life policies (instrumental support identified by Hammer et al., 2007; 2009) or for a supervisor who makes personal use of work-life policies (role modeling identified by Hammer et al., 2007; 2009), experience more work overload than employees with a supervisor that does not demonstrate these behaviors. This leads to the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 3: (a)** Formal work-life policy allowance and **(b)** supervisor's personal use of work-life policies are positively related to the employees' work overload.

By contrast, we expect that the supervisor's informal work-life support and the creation of a flexible work time culture may decrease the work overload employees experience. Former research demonstrates that informal flexibility might mitigate employees' work overload, because this flexibility allows them to plan their tasks more freely (Ahuja et al., 2007). Similarly, employees perceiving flexibility in when to work – which is an important aspect of a flexible work time culture – appear to experience lower levels of workload compared to employees who do not perceive this flexibility (Hill et al., 2001). Based on this, a negative relationship between the provision of informal flexibility (creative work-family management identified by Hammer et al., 2007; 2009) and the creation of a flexible work time culture (emotional support identified by Hammer et al., 2007; 2009) on the one

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hand and work overload on the other hand is expected, with both types of supportive behavior decreasing the work overload individual employees experience. Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 3: (c) *The provision of informal flexibility and* *(d)* *the creation of a flexible work time culture are negatively related to the employees' work overload.*

Numerous studies found that work overload is positively related to work-to-life conflict. In line with JD-R theory, work overload can be considered as a demand, that increases the experience of work-to-life conflict, as previous research also found (Boyar et al., 2003; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Yildirim & Aycan, 2008). Also the meta-analyses of Byron (2005) and Michel et al. (2011) clearly demonstrate that work role overload is an antecedent of work-to-life conflict. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 4. *Work overload is positively related to the employees' work-to-life conflict.*

4. Methods

4.1. Sample and data

Survey data were collected in three large Belgian organizations offering work-life policies. The selected organizations were in three different types of sectors: telecom, fast moving consumer goods and public sector. A web survey was sent to all supervisors and employees of the participating organizations. Supervisors and employees received a different survey. This study is based on matched supervisor-employee data.

Seven hundred twenty six employees and 224 matching supervisors at least partially completed the questionnaire. A small majority of the supervisors was male (55,1%) and their mean age was 45,6 years. Of these supervisors, 83.6% had a partner and 68,5% had children living at home. The employees were mostly female (69,5%). Their mean age was 41,1 years, while 83,5% had a partner and 58,9% had children living at home.

4.2. Measures

Formal work-life policy allowance was assessed with the supervisors in two steps. First, we assessed whether supervisors had (at least some) decisional power in allowing their team members to respectively work at home, work part-time and make use of flexible working hours. Even though many supervisors have this decisional power (Wise & Bond, 2003), it is important to limit our analysis to the supervisors who (at least partially) control this access, because only these supervisors are able to support their employees by allowing formal work-life policies. Seven supervisors indicated that they had no such decisional power for work at home, 15 for part-time work and 29 for flexible working hours. In total, 46 supervisors were excluded because they had no decisional power for these work-life policies. Second, we asked supervisors with at least some decisional power if they allowed their employees to make use of these formal work-life policies(to work at home, to work part-time and to use flexible hours). Working at home, part-time work and flexible working hours were included as formal work-life policies because they were offered in all three participating organizations. Supervisors who allowed their team members to use each of those three policies, were coded as 1; supervisors who did not do so were coded as 0. This dummy coding is in line with the measurement of work-life policy use (see for instance Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Wharton et al., 2008).

Supervisor's personal use of work-life policies was measured by asking the supervisor (a) if he/she worked part-time, (b) worked regularly at home during the past six months and/or (c) made use of flexible hours during the past six months. In line with the measurement by Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) and Wharton et al. (2008), supervisors who gave a positive answer to at least one of those questions were coded as 1. Supervisors who did not use at least one of those three work-life policies, were coded as 0. These three specific types of work-life policies were selected because they were available for and applicable to each supervisor (which is not the case for work-life policies such as childcare).

The provision of informal flexibility was assessed with the supervisors using the scales of Thomas and Ganster (1995) and Hill et al. (2001), which were adapted in function of the literature on informal flexibility (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002) and the specific setting of this study. This scale measures informal flexibility in terms of time (when the work is done), place (where the work is done) and

sequences (when a specific task is done). Supervisors were asked to evaluate seven items on a five-point Likert scale between one (totally disagree) and five (totally agree). A sample item was: 'I occasionally allow my employees to arrive an hour later or to leave an hour sooner to handle private affairs' (see Annex). The scale showed good reliability (Cronbach's alpha=0.80).

The creation of a flexible work time culture was measured with employees using the face time culture scale of O'Neill (2012). Employees were asked to evaluate four items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item was: 'It happens that employees come to work early or leave late just so to create the impression they work hard'. The answers to the items were reverse coded to transform the scale from a face time culture-scale to a flexible work time culture (or lack of face time culture) scale. The scale was reliable (Cronbach's alpha=0.90). The ICC value of flexible work time culture was .24, which indicates that the individual scores can be aggregated to the group level (Bliese, 2000). The team's mean score was then calculated and used in the analyses.

Perceived supervisor support for work-life issues was measured with employees using four items of the validated managerial support for work-life scale by Thompson et al. (1999). The original scale counts 11 items, but – as Allen (2001) and Mauno et al. (2006) explain – six of them refer to the organization and not to the manager or supervisor, which makes them less suitable to measure perceived supervisor support. Based on this reasoning, Mauno et al. (2006) developed a five item supervisor support scale, with an Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. One of these five items is not appropriate for the present study, since it concerns the relationship between the higher and lower level of management ('Higher management in this organization encourages supervisors to be sensitive to employees' family and personal concerns'), which is not relevant for the majority of the employees involved in this study. Thus, an abbreviated version of this scale was used, including the four remaining items that explicitly refer to supervisor support for work-life. In these four items, terms such as 'manager' were substituted by 'immediate supervisor', to assure that the items measured the employee's perception of the immediate supervisor's support. A sample item was: 'In general, my immediate supervisor is quite accommodating of the family-related needs of his/her employees', rated by the employee on a scale between 1

(totally disagree) and 5 (totally agree). The scale was reliable (Cronbach's alpha =0.86).

   Work overload was assessed with the three-item scale of Bakker et al. (2003; 2005), scored on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always), measuring the employee's experience. A sample item is: 'How often do you have to work extra hard to finish something?'. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.84.

   Work-to-life conflict was measured with employees using the six-tem scale developed by Carlson et al. (2000), inspired on Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). Employees were asked to evaluate three items measuring time-based conflict and three items measuring strain-based conflict. A sample item for time-based conflict was: 'My work keeps me from my private activities more than I would like' and for strain-based conflict: 'I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me to from contributing at home'. All items were rated on a scale ranging from one (1: strongly disagree) to five (5: strongly agree). The scale was found to be reliable (Cronbach's alpha=0.89).

   Control variables were gender (0: man; 1: woman), age (continuous), having a partner (0: no; 1: yes) and having children living at home (0: no; 1: yes) of both the supervisor and the employee.

4.3.   *Data analyses*

Employees who participated in this study were working in different units, led by their direct supervisor. Because of this nested structure, multilevel analyses – also known as hierarchical linear modelling analyses – were adopted to test the hypotheses (Luke, 2004; Hox et al., 2010). The intraclass correlation for the mediators and the dependent variable work-to-life conflict were calculated (Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). The ICC(1) value for perceived supervisor support for work-life issues was 0.22, for work overload 0.18 and for work-to-life conflict 0.04. This means that 22% of the variance in perceived supervisor support for work-life issues, 18% of the variance in work overload and 4% of the variance in work-to-life conflict can be explained at the supervisor-level, i.e., by membership of a team with the same supervisor. All individual variables were group mean centered and all variables at the level of the supervisor or team were grand mean centered.

   We followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) three step approach to test the mediation. In the first step, it is tested if the independent variables and control

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variables are correlated with the outcome variable work-to-life conflict. The second step tested if the independent and control variables are correlated with the mediators perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and work overload. In the last step, it is checked if the mediators are correlated with the outcome variable work-to-life conflict, by testing a model including both the mediators and the independent and control variables, which is compared with the first model without mediators. The analyses were ran for male and female employees separately, which did not lead to aberrant results. The results we report are those for male and female employees taken together.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 3 resumes the correlations, mean and standard deviation for specific SFSSBs, perceived supervisor support for work-life issues, work overload and employee's work-to-life conflict. Table 4 shows the results of the multilevel analysis.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and correlations for SFSSBs, mediators and work-to-life conflict.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Formal work-life policy allowance	0.80	0.41	/	0.35***	0.06	0.14	0.03	0.14	0.03
2. Supervisor's use of work-life policies	0.78	0.41	0.35***	/	0.25***	0.06	-0.04	0.01	0.05
3. Provision of informal flexibility	2.74	1.16	0.06	0.25***	/	-0.10**	0.02	-0.14***	0.01
4. Creation of a flexible work time culture	2.47	0.59	0.14***	0.06	-0.10**	/	0.06	-0.20***	-0.24***
5. Perceived supervisor support for work-life issues	3.88	0.72	0.03	-0.04	0.03	0.06	/	0.02	-0.21***
6. Work overload	3.53	0.62	-0.14	0.02***	-0.14***	-0.20	-0.02	/	0.11**
7. Work-to-life conflict	2.65	0.95	0.03	0.05	0.06	-0.24***	-0.21***	0.11**	/

*** $p \leq 0.01$; **$p \leq 0.01$

Table 4. Multilevel results of the moderation model for employees' work-to-life conflict.

	Effects of independent variables on perceived supervisor support for work-life issues	Effect of independent variables on work overload	Effects of independent variables on work-to-life conflict	Effects of independent variables on work-to-life conflict, including mediators
	Estimate (b)	Estimate (b)	Estimate (b)	Estimate (b)
INTERCEPT	3.88***	3.52***	2.64***	2.59***
Gender employee	-0.10	-0.14	0.00	0.04
Age employee	-0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00
Partnership employee	0.30**	-0.04	0.07	0.13
Children employee	0.02	-0.04	-0.00	0.03
Gender supervisor	0.17(*)	-0.08	-0.08	-0.10(*)
Age supervisor	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Partnership supervisor	0.17	0.20	0.04	0.09
Children supervisor	0.04	-0.07	-0.20(*)	-0.19(*)
Formal work-life policy allowance	0.15	0.07	-0.00	-0.02
Supervisor's use of work-life policies	-0.34*	0.27*	0.37**	0.34*
Provision of informal flexibility	-0.03	-0.04	0.05	0.02

Creation of a flexible work time culture	0.14(*)	-0.16**	-0.42***	-0.41***
Perceived supervisor support for work-life issues				-0.15**
Work overload				0.52***
AIC	922.13	828.16	1173.01	1099.23
BIC	981.58	888.29	1233.18	1166.52

Note: Estimates represent standardized regression coefficients.

(*) $p \leq 0.10$, * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

5.2.   *Perceived support path*

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between the four types of SFSSBs and perceived supervisor support for work-life issues. Hypothesis 1a was rejected as no significant relationship between formal work-life policy allowance and perceived supervisor support for work-life issues was found ($b = 0.15$, $p > 0.05$; see Table 4, column 2). The analysis revealed a significant relationship between supervisor's personal use of work-life policies and perceived supervisor support for work-life issues ($b = -0.34$, $p < 0.05$; see Table 4, column 2), but this relationship appeared to be negative and not positive, as hypothesized. Hypothesis 1b is thus rejected. No significant relationship was found between the provision of informal flexibility and employees' perceived supervisor support for work-life issues ($b = -0.03$, $p > 0.05$; see Table 4, column 2). Thus, hypothesis 1c was rejected. A marginally significant positive relationship between the creation of a flexible work time culture and perceived supervisor support for work-life issues was found ($b = 0.14$, $p < 0.09$; see Table 4, column 2). This supports hypothesis 1d.

Next, hypothesis 2 predicting a significant negative relationship between perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and employee's work-to-life conflict was tested. We found a negative relationship between perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and employee's work-to-life conflict ($b = -0.15$, $p < 0.01$; see Table 4, column 5). Thus, hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

5.3.   *Work overload path*

Hypothesis 3a and 3b predicted a positive relationship between formal work-life policy allowance (3a) and the supervisor's personal use of work-life policies (3b) on the one hand and work overload on the other hand. No support was found for hypothesis 3a, expecting a positive relationship between formal work-life policy allowance and work overload ($b = 0.07$, $p > 0.05$; see Table 4, column 3). Thus, hypothesis 3a was rejected. We found a positive relationship between supervisor's personal use of work-life policies and work overload ($b = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$; see Table 4, column 3). Thus, hypothesis 3b was confirmed. Hypotheses 3c and 3d predicted a negative relationship between the provision of informal flexibility (3c) and the creation of a flexible work time culture (3d) on the one hand and work overload on the other hand. For the relationship between the provision of informal

flexibility and work overload, no significant relationship was found (b = -0.04, p > 0.05; see Table 4, column 3). Thus, hypothesis 3c was not confirmed. The results show a significant negative relationship between the creation of a flexible work time culture and work overload (b = -0.16 , p < 0.05; see Table 4, column 3). Thus, hypothesis 3d was confirmed.

We also found a positive relationship between work overload and work-to-life conflict (b = 0.52, p < 0.001), indicating that work overload increases the work-to-life conflict employees experience. Thus, hypothesis 4 was confirmed (see Table 4, column 5).

5.4.   Full or partial mediation?

When we look at columns 4 and 5 of Table 4, we see that supervisors' formal work-life policy allowance and supervisors' provision of informal flexibility are not related with employees work-to-life conflict. Supervisors' personal use of work-life policies is positively related with work-to-life conflict. This relationship is thus partially – not fully – mediated by the mediators perceived support for work-life issues and work overload since the beta coefficient of supervisors' personal use of work-life policies in column 5 of Table 4 is slightly lower than the coefficient in column 4 but still significant. Finally, the creation of a flexible work time culture is related with less work-to-life conflict. Also this relationship is only partially mediated by the mediators perceived support for work-life issues and work overload since the beta coefficient of this variable in column 5 of Table 4 is slightly lower compared to the coefficient in column 4 but still significant.

Not hypothesized but marginally significant was the finding that employees experience less work-to-life conflict when their supervisor has children (b =-0.20, p < 0.08). Also marginally significant, was the finding that employees with a female supervisor experience more supervisor support for work-life issues (b = 0.17, p < 0.08).

6. Discussion

This study aimed to respond to the plea in the literature for including supervisors' perspective in the study of family supportive supervisor behaviors. To this end, we examined the relationship between four supervisor behaviors that are

commonly considered to be family supportive – formal work-life policy allowance, the supervisor's personal use of work-life policies, the provision of informal flexibility and the creation of a flexible work time culture – and employees' work-to-life conflict. Building on JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001), we proposed that this relationship would be mediated by perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and work overload. We tested our hypotheses through a multilevel design with matched supervisor and employee data.

Our hypothesized perceived support path was partially confirmed: the creation of a flexible work time culture was found to decrease employees' work-to-life conflict via perceived supervisor support for work-life issues. Also, we found partial support for a work overload path: a flexible work time culture and the supervisor's work-life policy use were found to respectively decrease and increase the employees' work-to-life conflict via work overload. Nonetheless, the perceived support path and work overload path could not be entirely confirmed. First, for the perceived support path, we found an unexpected positive relationship between the supervisor's work-life policy use and the employees' work-to-life conflict. A possible explanation is that a supervisor using work-life policies may be perceived as less present, approachable and available to listen to the employees' concerns (Raabe, 1998), which can cause the supervisor to be perceived as non-supportive. Alternatively, employees might perceive supervisors taking up work-life policies as less 'powerful' and thus as less able to support them, for instance against the negative consequences of the use of work-life policies (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). Second, we found no relationship between supervisors' work-life policy allowance and the provision of informal flexibility on the one hand and employees' work-to-life conflict on the other hand. Possibly, *how* the supervisor makes these arrangements accessible is more important than the provision of access as such. Former research found that supervisors promoting these arrangements as being accessible do not always create this perception among their employees, for instance because they negatively comment on employees' requests for work-life policies (Bardoel, 2003; Eaton, 2003; Kossek et al., 2010; McCarthy et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2005). In addition to the partial confirmation for a perceived support path and work overload path, we also found a direct relationship between the supervisor's work-life policy use and the creation of flexible work time culture

on the one hand and work-to-life conflict on the other hand. This suggests that such behaviors are not only affecting work-to-life conflict through the experience of employees, but possibly also via other mediators.

6.1. Contributions

Our study makes multiple contributions to the literature. First of all, taken together, our findings confirm that the alignment between SFSSBs and employees' perception of these behaviors often assumed in the literature might be misplaced. The results show that employees do not consider all SFSSBs as work-life friendly. This is particularly true for formal work-life policy allowance and the provision of informal flexibility (for which no significant relationship was found) and the supervisor's personal use of work-life policies (which was found to be related to an increased work-to-life conflict among employees). Accordingly, future research might want to systematically include measures both at the supervisor and employee level of analysis, in line with recent calls (Baran et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2016; Kossek et al., 2011; Li et al., 2017). These findings emphasize that supervisor behaviors and the employees' perception of these behaviors should be clearly empirically distinguished. Further research is also needed about how the gap between SFSSBs and the employees' perception of these behaviors as supportive can be closed: what contributes exactly to the employees' perception of supervisor support and what can supervisors do to stimulate this perception? The literature indicates that supervisors should have people management skills and take into account individual employee's needs for successfully implementing HR practices (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010), which could increase the perception that the supervisor is supportive. Studies linking HR differentiation with the work-life literature also stress that employees have different preferences and needs in their work-life domain, which urge different HR practices (Marescaux et al., 2013; 2015) and thus may explain why some SFSSBs are not perceived as supportive, e.g. because of the personal work-life situation of the individual employee. Further research should investigate the processes leading to perceptions of support, ideally based on a mixed method approach.

Second, contrary to the extant literature, our findings show that SFSSBs may also have negative effects. To put it in terms of the JD-R model, some SFSSBs turned out to be job demands, increasing the employees' work-to-life conflict. The

conflict increasing impact of supervisor's use of work-life policies via work overload was in line with our hypothesis. Thus, the supervisor's supportive behaviors may not only impact on the perception of the employees, but possible also alters the organization of work, for instance causing that employees with a supervisor who works part-time, telecommutes or uses flexible hours perceive that part of the supervisor's workload is redirected to them. Future research should integrate these insights and further investigate how employees' experience their work overload to be affected by the supervisor's work-life policy use and the relationship between SFSSBs, job design and team work more in general.

Finally, we found an ICC(1) value of respectively 0.22 and 0.18 for perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and perceived work overload, indicating that a considerable percentage of the variance of both variables is explained by supervisor-level factors, i.e., by membership of a team led by the same supervisor. Further research on other supervisor-level factors possibly impacting on perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and perceived work overload seems useful. For instance, research found that supervisors that feel supported and valued by their organization are also perceived as more supportive towards employees, because supervisors would reciprocate the organizational support they experience (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). The literature also suggests that work overload is related to supervisor-level factors, such as the performance appraisal system of the supervisor (Brown & Benson, 2005; Frone et al., 1997).

In contrast, the analysis revealed a rather low ICC(1) value for employee's work-to-life conflict of 0.04, indicating that only 4% of the variance in work-to-life conflict can be explained by the supervisor-level. This suggests that employees' work-to-life conflict depends on others factors than supervisor-level factors. For instance, organizational-level factors transcending the supervisor-level may be involved, such as organizational support and the implications of employees in organizational decisions, which was found to decrease the employees' work-to-life conflict (Hill, 2005; Leineweber et al., 2014; Michel et al., 2011). Other individual-level factors not integrated in this study may also be involved, related to the individual employee's job, such as job complexity, job control and job involvement (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011) or psychological in nature, such as personality (e.g. negative affectivity, neuroticism), which were found to be related to an increased experience of work-to-life conflict (Carlson,

1999; Wayne et al., 2004). Future research should look at these antecedents of work-to-life conflict. The JD-R model may be a fruitful approach to further investigate the possible job demands and resources of work-to-life conflict.

6.2. *Implications for practice*

By distinguishing between the SFSSBs consisting in formal work-life policy allowance, the supervisor's personal use of work-life policies, the provision of informal flexibility and the creation of a flexible work time culture, this study could confirm that different SFSSBs are related differently to work-to-life conflict as an employee outcome, which allows us to formulate specific recommendations for practice.

First, the finding that supervisor's personal use of work-life policies increases employees' work-to-life conflict urges organizations to rethink the structural conditions in which supervisors and their employees operate (Kossek et al., 2010). For instance, it may be useful to appoint a supervisor ad interim when the actual supervisor is not available (for instance because of part-time work or telework), which might have at least two advantages: employees always have someone to rely on for work related and other issues – possibly linked to more perceived supervisor support – and the presence of such as supervisor ad interim could reduce the perception that the supervisor's re-allocates responsibilities to the employees – possibly linked to a perception of decreased work overload.

Next, because perceived supervisor support for work-life issues appeared to be important for the reduction of work-to-life conflict, it is recommended that organizations focus on the reinforcement or improvement of this perception. In this study, we found a significant impact of the supervisor's creation of a flexible work time culture – increasing the employees' perceived supervisor support – and the supervisor's personal use of work-life policies – decreasing the employees' perceived supervisor support. Nonetheless, these variables only partially explain why employees perceive their supervisors as supportive. For instance, organizational level antecedents may also be at stake, such as organizational support for work-life issues, as the literature found that perceived supervisor support and organizational support correlate positively (Foley et al., 2006; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Tuzun & Kalemci, 2012). Also ensuring coherence

between the supervisor's behaviors and the perception by the employees may stimulate the employees' perceived supervisor support for work-life issues.

Supervisors should be supported to create a flexible work time culture, since this was found to increase the employees' perceptions of supervisor support and decrease work overload, which subsequently diminishes the employees' work-to-life conflict. Organizations can stimulate supervisors to create such a culture by giving them discretion about the planning of their team's work.

More in general, it is important that organizations try to reinforce the supervisor's supportive behaviors for work-life issues (Kossek et al., 2010). For instance, they can assist supervisors with managing their employees' work-life issues through trainings aimed at increasing the supervisor's family supportive behavior, which according to an evaluation of Hammer and colleagues (2015) are effective in diminishing the individual employee's work-to-life conflict. The direct – and not only indirect – relationship we found between the supervisor's work-life policy use and the creation of a flexible work time culture on the one hand and the employees' work-to-life conflict on the other hand, stresses the importance of stimulating SFSSBs.

6.3.   Limitations
This study has some limitations. First, the measures related to formal work-life policies focused on only three types of work-life policies (i.e., working from home, working part-time and flexible working hours). Other formal work-life policies, such as onsite childcare, could not been included as they were not present in all three organizations involved. Moreover, we focused on work-life policy use in the past six months. Even though this retrospective approach is often used in research, memory errors cannot be completely excluded.

Second, we included four specific supervisor behaviors and found these behaviors to have different effects. It could therefore be interesting for future studies to examine the effect of other supervisor behaviors which are typically considered to be family supportive. This may provide more concrete guidelines for supervisors about how to create a family supportive culture in their team. Future research could also explore the impact of sets of behaviors. The lack of impact of an individual behavior may disappear when the supervisor exhibits two (or more) different types of behavior simultaneously. For instance, when a supervisor

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personally uses work-life policies and also allows his/her employees to make use of these policies, this may be perceived as supportive. In the same line of reasoning, formal work-life policy allowance may have a supportive effect only if informal flexibility is provided too.

Third, we used a global measure of perceived supervisor behaviors. It may be interesting to associate specific types of supervisor behaviors – as assessed at the supervisor level – to employees' perceptions of specific supervisor behaviors (i.e., the measure of Hammer et al., 2007; 2009).

Finally, since the respondents were all supervisors and employees in organizations concerned about the employee's work-life balance, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to less family friendly organizations. Another limitations of this study was the cross sectional approach, which does not allow to draw causal relations. Future research should make use of a longitudinal multilevel design.

7. Conclusion

This multilevel study examined which and how SFSSB are associated with employees' work-to-life conflict, based on survey data of 726 employees and 224 matching supervisors. Four SFSSB were included, following Hammer's et al. (2009, 2011) conceptualisation: formal work-life policy allowance, the supervisor's personal use of work-life policies, the provision of informal flexibility and the creation of a flexible work time culture. The study demonstrated that different types of FSSB are differently related to employee outcomes. Partial support was found for the perceived support path and the work overload path we hypothesized. More precisely, in line with our expectations, a flexible work time culture appeared to have both a direct and indirect effect (i.e., through the mediators perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and work overload) on employees' work-to-life conflict. The creation of a flexible work time culture appeared to decrease the employee's work-to-life conflict, directly and mediated by an increased supervisor support for work-life issues and a decreased work overload. Also in line with the work overload path, a positive relationship between supervisor use of work-life policies and work-to-life conflict was found, mediated by work overload. A positive relationship between supervisor use of work-life

policies and work-to-life conflict was found, mediated through perceived supervisor support for work-life issues, in contrast with the hypothesis in the perceived support path. These findings urge researchers to further investigate the role of SFSSBs in the employees' work-to-life conflict and other outcomes, and should encourage organizations to improve the employees' work overload, perceived supervisor support for work-life issues and supervisor's family supportive behaviors.

8. References

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Annex. Provision of informal flexibility scale

I occasionally allow my employees…

1. to make a private phone call during working hours.
2. to do private errands during working hours.
3. to arrive an hour later or to leave an hour sooner to handle private affairs.

4. to go to an appointment directly from their home, or to go home after an appointment without passing by their workplace.
5. to take an unofficial (half) day off.
6. to adapt their tasks or workload to their personal situation (e.g. no customer visit in case of illness of their children)
7. to choose how to divide their hours over a week, month or year of work.

CHAPTER 3

The impact of team characteristics on the supervisor's attitude towards telework: A mixed-method study.

CHAPTER 3

The impact of team characteristics on the supervisor's attitude towards telework: A mixed-method study[5]

Lieve Lembrechts, Patrizia Zanoni & Marijke Verbruggen

1. Abstract

This study examines the impact of team characteristics on the supervisor's attitude towards telework through a mixed-method approach. First, in the quantitative part, we test hypotheses drawing on disruption and dependency theory, using data of 205 supervisors from four Belgian organizations. The data confirm the hypothesized negative correlation between task interdependence and supervisors' supportive attitude towards telework, as well as the moderating role of supervisor's dependency on his or her team on this relation. We found no impact of team heterogeneity and lack of team effort and low performance. Second, we use qualitative data collected through 39 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with supervisors to gain a better understanding of supervisors' reasoning behind their attitude towards telework. These data provide insight into how task interdependence, team heterogeneity and lack of team effort and low performance affect it. Our team-centred conceptualization of the antecedents of supervisors' attitude towards telework enables to highlight the key role of structural aspects in shaping supervisors' attitudes towards telework. This is particularly important for policy, as organizations are better placed to remediate aspects at the team level that contribute to supervisors' negative attitude towards telework, rather than those at the inter-individual one.

2. Introduction

In recent years, telework has become a popular tool for organizations to attract and retain employees (Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Telework, defined as "an alternative work arrangement in which employees, for at least some portion of their work schedule, perform tasks elsewhere that are normally done in a primary or central workplace, using electronic media to interact with others" (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007: 1525), is expected to increase employees' job satisfaction and performance and to decrease their work-life conflict and turnover intentions (Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Perez et al., 2002). Contrary to expectations, however, research has repeatedly shown that, similar to other work-life policies, telework not only remains underutilized in many organizations (Pyöriä, 2011) but also, when used, it does not always have the expected positive outcomes. Whereas some empirical studies on the impact of teleworking found positive outcomes such as reduced work-family conflict and increased job satisfaction, other studies found no relationship or even a negative one (for a review, see Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Golden et al., 2006). This suggests that employees' use of the possibility to telework does not automatically lead to these positive effects.

Whereas some studies have related the unexpected negative outcomes of telework to co-workers' negative reaction, the lack of practical support from the organization and the lack of good working environment at home (Jaakson & Kallaste, 2010), most have pointed to the key role of supervisors' attitude towards telework (Lim & Teo, 2000; Perez et al., 2002; Peters & den Dulk, 2003). Supervisors are important because they are responsible for first-line implementation of HRM policies. They may be reluctant to support telework for many reasons, among other because they find that teleworkers escape from their direct control or because of the possible additional responsibilities non-teleworking employees might get due to their colleagues' absence from work during telework (Baruch, 2000; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Reinsch, 1997). This research has consistently shown that supervisor's lack of support does not only have a negative impact on team members' access to telework policy (Allen, 2001; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010; Thompson et al., 1999), but also that it negatively affects employees' outcomes when they make use of telework (Haines

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et al., 2002). In particular, when employees perceive that supervisors react negatively to telework and/or associate telework with career penalties (Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010), they might experience *lower* job satisfaction and feel *less* committed. In those cases, the use of telework may thus be associated with negative outcomes, opposed to those envisaged by the organization with its telework policy (Haines et al., 2002).

Given supervisors' key role in the implementation and success of telework, it is warranted to understand what affects their attitude towards telework. Research on this issue to date has mainly examined which characteristics of the *supervisor* are related to his/her attitude towards telework. These studies focused, among other, on supervisors' social and demographic traits, such as gender and family composition (Parker & Allen, 2002). The underlying idea was that their attitude towards teleworking is determined by their own individual experience of work-life conflict and work-life balance. For instance, female supervisors and supervisor with parental responsibilities were believed to be more supportive towards work-life policies than their male colleagues and colleagues without children (Parker & Allen, 2002).

More recently, a few studies have turned to characteristics of the *team members*, including team members' educational profile, supervisory responsibilities, and specialized knowledge and skills, which shape team members' relation to the supervisor (den Dulk & de Ruijter 2008; Peters et al., 2010). This is an important shift in perspective, as in this case supervisors' attitude towards telework is rather understood as emerging from the effects they believe telework may have on their team members' and their own performance. Two main theories feature in this literature: work disruption theory and dependency theory.

Work disruption theory (Powell & Mainiero, 1999) posits that, as supervisors are primarily evaluated and rewarded for the results they achieve, their attitude reflects the disruption they anticipate telework arrangements will cause to the team members' work processes. The anticipated disruption depends among others on the nature of the user's tasks, skills and responsibilities. For instance, supervisors of teams with more low educated employees are less in favor of telework because they anticipate more disruption as they feel less confident that their employees will deliver the expected results without supervision (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008). Similarly, supervisors' attitude towards telework has been found

to be significantly more negative if the potential user has supervisory responsibilities, which generally require more interaction than other responsibilities, increasing the likelihood of disruption (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008).

Dependency theory rather explains supervisors' attitude in terms of the supervisors' dependency on their team members. When employees are difficult to replace – for instance because of their specialized knowledge/skills –, supervisors depend more on them for achieving their goals and are therefore likely to grant them benefits to keep them in the organization. Among these benefits are work-life benefits such as telework (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Telework is indeed often considered as a benefit for employees since it gives employees more autonomy and may help them to attain a better work-life balance (den Dulk & De Ruijter, 2008). Employees who are given more benefits by their supervisor tend to be willing to reciprocate, for instance in terms of commitment and performance, as a positive exchange between the employee and the supervisor (Muse et al., 2008). Therefore, we expect that supervisors of difficult-to-replace employees are likely to be more supportive of telework, since they depend more on their subordinates and are therefore more willing to provide them benefits like telework (den Dulk & De Ruijter, 2008). This could in turn stimulate commitment from these highly valued employees and ensure their "positive contribution to the performance of the department" (Peters et al., 2010:526). In line with this idea, Peters and her colleagues (2010) found that supervisors are more inclined to grant telework requests from employees with specialized knowledge/skills, on whom they depend more.

The research based on disruption and dependency theory has contributed to developing a more work-related understanding of supervisors' attitude towards telework, which highlights the key role of supervisors' work objectives in their attitude towards telework. This perspective better accounts for the trade-offs they face in implementing telework due to their simultaneous responsibility to achieve work results and to implement work-life balance HR practices in their teams (Powell & Mainiero, 1999). However, this research has to date conceptualized and operationalized the relations between supervisors and their team at the inter-individual level, as one-to-one relationships between the supervisor and each team member.

In this study, we rather posit that the characteristics of the team as a collective entity affect supervisors' attitude towards telework. There are a number of reasons to expect supervisors' attitude towards telework to emerge from their anticipation of its effects on the team's functioning and performance as a whole. First, work processes in contemporary organizations are often structured in a team-based manner: in many cases employees depend on their co-workers for their work and/or are collectively responsible for a specific output (Campion et al., 1993; Davidson, 2005; Kozlowski & Bell, 2001). Furthermore, while supervisors might take specific telework allocation decisions based on individual employee characteristics, they arguably develop *one* attitude towards telework. A coherent vision on telework is also needed to justify their implementation decisions vis-à-vis individual team members, if they want to avoid perceptions of injustice with adverse effects on motivation and performance (Colquitt, 2004; Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Ryan & Kossek, 2008). For these reasons, following recent calls to pay more attention to the context characteristics in which attitudes and behavior towards work-life policies emerge (Kossek et al., 2010; Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Straub, 2012), we examine how supervisors form their attitude towards telework based on their relationship with their team as a collective entity.

This study investigates the influence of team characteristics on the supervisor's attitude towards telework through a mixed-method approach. First, we draw on disruption and dependency theory to develop hypotheses based on team characteristics, which we test using data of 205 supervisors from four Belgian organizations. Second, we use qualitative data collected through 39 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with supervisors to gain a better understanding into their reasoning behind their attitude towards telework. Empirically, we limit our investigation to home-based telework or homeworking, which refers to "working at home on a regular basis, though not necessarily (and, in fact, rarely) every day" (Perez et al., 2002:775), excluding other types of telework, such as working from a satellite office.

3. Theoretical approach

In this study we combine work disruption theory and dependency theory to model how supervisors form their attitude towards telework. These theories posit that

supervisors' attitudes towards telework are related to the potential disruptiveness of telework for the organization of work (work disruption theory, Powell & Mainiero, 1999) and their dependency on their team to achieve their goals (dependency theory, Bartol & Martin, 1988). Taken together, they offer a useful framework to explain supervisors' attitude as an effect of their simultaneous responsibility for possibly conflicting outcomes in terms of productivity and telework implementation (Todd & Binns, 2013).

Work disruption theory states that, in forming their attitude about work-life balance arrangements, supervisors are mainly concerned about the short-term productivity of their team, for which they are generally held responsible by the organization (McConville & Holden, 1999; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Striving for work continuity to ensure productivity, they try to avoid the disruption of their team's work activities. Accordingly, they are less likely to have a supportive attitude towards telework when team characteristics are such that telework might undermine the team's work continuity and thus productivity. Thus, disruption theory assumes that supervisors' attitudes towards work-life policies are based on the potential disruptiveness of these policies for the organization of work in their team (Powell & Mainiero, 1999). A number of studies have indeed empirically demonstrated that supervisors who consider work-life policies disruptive for their team members' performance have a less supportive attitude towards work-life policies (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2005; Powell & Mainiero, 1999; den Dulk et al., 2011). This all suggests that supervisors' attitude towards telework is mainly determined by their concern for short-term productivity goals rather that by possible long-term advantages of work-life policies, such as reduction of turnover and increased job satisfaction (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008).

Dependency theory rather posits that, in forming their attitude about work-life balance arrangements, supervisors take into account their dependency on their team members. The more supervisors depend on their team members, the more they will try to retain them in the longer run (Klein et al., 2000; Poelmans & Beham, 2008). In this perspective, supervisors consider work-life arrangements as a means to reward, motivate and retain the team members on which they depend (Bartol & Martin, 1988; Poelmans & Beham, 2008). In these cases, long-terms advantages of work-life policies prevail over the short-term disruption that might be caused by their utilization.

Although these two theories are often portrayed as contradicting each other, a few studies have argued that they should rather be considered as complementary, and that research should investigate under which conditions dependency versus disruption arguments dominate (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008; Poelmans & Beham, 2008). Den Dulk and de Ruijter (2008) empirically examined whether the relevance of disruption and dependency depends on the type of work-life policy. They found that disruption arguments usually dominate, but that dependency arguments prevail when team members ask to make use of less disruptive work-life policies, such as short-term leaves.

In this study, we also conceptualize disruption and dependency arguments as complementary. We however posit that they are mobilized simultaneously, with disruption arguments moderated by the supervisor's degree of dependency on his or her team. Specifically, we hypothesize that supervisors' attitude is fundamentally shaped by the concern to avoid work disruption, given supervisor's structural responsibility for work outcomes (Powell & Mainiero, 1999), yet that such relationship is additionally affected by the relation between the supervisor and his or her team captured by dependency (see Dambrin, 2004; Valsecchi, 2006). While the former relationship highlights the supervisor's deployment of teams as productive means to achieve work goals, the latter acknowledges that teams themselves retain some degree of control over their work. Work-life balance arrangements, such as telework, make thus the object of negotiation between supervisors and their teams. Accordingly, team characteristics based on which the supervisor estimates that teleworking is disruptive for the team's work are likely to negatively influence the supervisor's attitude towards telework, but this negative influence might be less pronounced, or even disappear, when the supervisor is highly dependent on the team for achieving his or her own work goals.

Figure 3 represents the hypothesized model. The three independent variables (i.e., team member tasks interdependence, team heterogeneity and lack of effort/low performance) are team characteristics derived from work disruption theory, while the moderator, i.e. the supervisor's dependency on his/her team, is derived from dependency theory.

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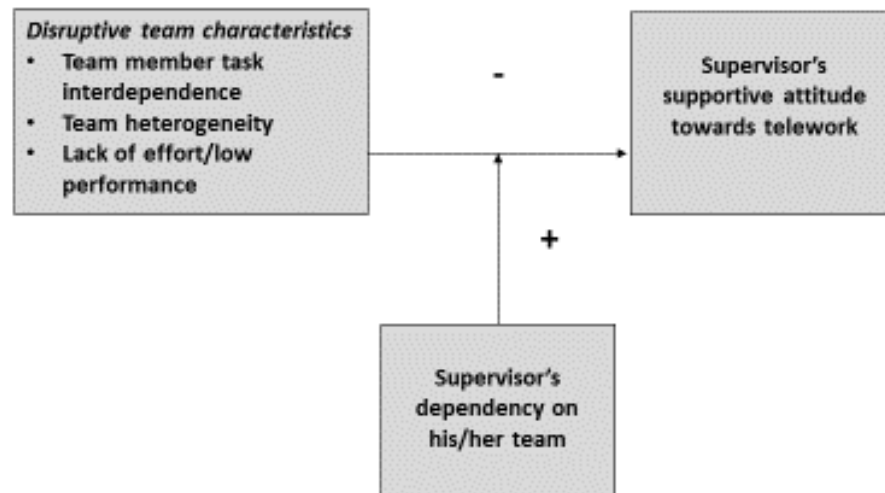
Figure 3. Hypothesized model of moderation of disruption theory effect on the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework by dependency.

3.1. Disruptive team characteristics

Based on work disruption theory, we examine three team characteristics which may affect the potentially disruptive nature of telework: task interdependence, team heterogeneity and the team's performance/effort level. Team characteristics refer to characteristics of the team in the broader sense, both in terms of job/team design and as characteristics of the team members as a collective entity. According to our definition, a team is more than just the sum of its parts (i.e.: the employees making part of it). This is in line with other literature on team characteristics (e.g. Campion et al., 1993; Hertel et al., 2004).

First, the literature identifies *task interdependence* as an important feature of the team which is possibly related to the supervisor's attitude towards telework. Task interdependence refers to "a task structure in which team members work closely with each other, must coordinate their activities frequently, and within which the way one member accomplishes her or his task has strong implications on the work process of other team members" (Hertel et al., 2004:6). Task interdependence is generally seen as a preferable team characteristic because it could increase the team members' motivation and effectiveness, e.g. because the team members feel responsible for each other's work (Campion et al., 1993). However, in teams with high task interdependence, telework is likely to have a more disruptive impact on work (Perez et al., 2002; Reinsch, 1997), as space distance hampers the communication and coordination between teleworkers and other team members (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Van Dyne et al., 2007). Because of the more disruptive impact of telework in highly task interdependent teams, supervisors of such teams are inclined to have a more negative attitude towards telework. Indeed, empirical research demonstrated that supervisors fear for instance that the lack of face-to-face contact is detrimental to teamwork (Baruch, 2000; Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010; Peters et al., 2010). In line with this reasoning, earlier research has found that supervisors of teams with high task interdependence less frequently allow telework (Poelmans & Beham, 2008). We therefore expect a negative impact of task interdependence on the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework.

Hypothesis 1:   *Team members' task interdependence is related negatively to supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework.*

Second, telework may also be experienced as more disruptive when team *heterogeneity* is high and thus the possibilities of internal replaceability in the team are poor (Campion et al., 1993; den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008). Heterogeneity*,* or the diversity in team members' experience, expertise, skills and abilities, is in generally believed to be a positive team characteristic because of its potential positive effects on productivity (Campion et al., 1993). However, the more diverse the team members' profiles, the more difficult it is to replace one team member with another (Campion et al., 1993). If team members are not able to take over their colleagues' responsibilities, the work processes are more likely to get interrupted when a team member is teleworking. Therefore, we expect higher heterogeneity among the team members to relate to a less supportive attitude towards telework of the supervisor.

Hypothesis 2:   *Team members' heterogeneity is related negatively to supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework.*

Thirdly, we expect that supervisors will experience telework to be more disruptive – and therefore have a less supportive attitude – when the team performs suboptimally. Since teleworkers escape from their supervisor's direct control, it has been suggested that supervisors' attitude towards telework strongly depends on their trust in their team members (Peters et al., 2010). Team members thus have to prove that they 'deserve' to telework, that they can function without direct control and that them teleworking will not disrupt their own and the team's functioning (Baruch, 2000; Peters & den Dulk, 2003). Team members can prove that they deserve to telework by putting in *effort* and *performing* well. Indeed, past effort and performance are typically considered as indications of the likely future effort and performance independent of direct control (Peters et al., 2010). Accordingly, supervisors of good performing teams are less likely to fear the disruptive nature of telework since they are convinced that their team members

are able to function without direct control and therefore, these supervisors may have a more supportive attitude towards telework (Peters et al., 2010). Conversely, supervisors of teams which do not put in much effort and perform badly are more likely to experience teleworking as disruptive and thus to be less in favour of telework.

> ***Hypothesis 3:***   *Lack of team members' effort and low performance is related negatively to supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework.*

3.2. Supervisors' dependency on their team

At the same time, we expect that the supervisors' attitude towards telework is not only determined by team characteristics but also by the extent to which the supervisor depends on his or her team. The literature distinguishes between at least two ways in which supervisors can depend on their team: dependency in terms of goals and dependency in terms of feedback (Campion et al., 1993; Hertel et al., 2004; Kiggundu, 1983). The former refers to the way in which the supervisor's goals are determined by the team's goals, while the latter refers to the way in which the supervisor's evaluation and rewards are determined by the team's performance.

We hypothesize that the negative impact of the three team characteristics (task interdependence, heterogeneity and lack of effort/low performance) is moderated by supervisors' dependency on their team. This hypothesis is based on the expectation that disruptiveness is the supervisor's primary concern (Powell & Mainiero, 1999), but that this concern is moderated by the nature of the supervisor-team relationship in terms of dependency (cf. Dambrin, 2004; Valsecchi, 2006). More precisely, disruptive team characteristics are likely to negatively influence the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework, but this negative influence might be less pronounced when the supervisor is highly dependent on the team for achieving his or her own work goals and obtaining rewards. Indeed, supervisors who are more dependent on their team are expected to attach more importance to the potential advantages of telework (e.g. more committed team members) than supervisors who depend less on their team. They might more easily accept the potentially disruptive impact of telework on work in

the short term in view of retaining their team in the longer run. Indeed, for supervisors who depend highly on their team, turnover of team members might have an even higher negative effect on their team's performance and, in turn, their own than short-term disruptions by telework would have. Conversely, supervisors who depend less on their team members are less likely to accept the potentially disruptive impact of telework – and because of that be less positive towards teleworking – since their own performance would be less adversely affected by team members leaving. In other words, we expect that when supervisors experience high levels of dependency on their team, the adverse effects of disruptive team characteristics on their supportive attitude towards telework will be weakened or even disappear.

Hypothesis 4: *Supervisors' dependency on their team mitigates the negative relation between a) task interdependence; b) heterogeneity and c) lack of effort/low performance and supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework, in the sense that the influence is less strong when the supervisors are more dependent on their team.*

Hereunder, we test these hypotheses based on a survey study. We then complement the quantitative results with an in-depth qualitative study based on face-to-face interviews.

4. Survey study

4.1. Procedure

We first tested our hypotheses using survey data collected with 205 supervisors from four organizations. We contacted eight large Belgian organizations employing a considerable number of supervisors and with an official work-life policy and offering a variety of work-life arrangements to their employees, including telework. Four organizations agreed to participate in the study. These organizations were in four different sectors: telecom (private sector, 1800 employees), fast moving consumer goods (private sector, 200 employees), local

social policy organization (public sector, 1800 employees) and research and higher education (public sector, 1000 employees). In the first organization, 57.5% of the employees teleworks at least occasionally, in the second organization 58.8% and in the third organization 23.6%. For the fourth organization, no information on the proportion of teleworkers was available.

   We received complete lists of the supervisors' work e-mail addresses from the HR departments. The researchers personally sent a link to the web survey to all 579 supervisors of the participating organizations, guaranteeing their anonymity and confidentiality. Two hundred seventy three supervisors at least partially completed the questionnaire. We excluded respondents with a missing value on any of the study's variables, leading to a final sample size of N=205, which equals a response rate of 35.4%. The majority of the respondents were men (57.6%). Respondents' mean age was 45.5 years (SD=7.9), 87.3% had a partner. Twenty six percent worked in the telecom organization, 12.7% in the fast moving consumer goods organization, 39% in the local social policy organization and 22.4% in the research and higher education organization.

4.2.   Measures

We measured supervisor's attitude directly at the level of the supervisors, as suggested by some authors (Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Straub, 2012), and not at the level of the individual team members as is usually the case (e.g. Allen, 2001; Hammer et al., 2009; Major et al., 2008; Thompson et al., 1999; Todd & Binns, 2013). This allows gaining a more accurate view on the attitude of the supervisors themselves, instead of on the attitude as perceived by their team members. *Supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework* was measured by three items based on Thompson et al. (1999). To the best of our knowledge, no scale exists that captures supervisors' own attitude towards telework. This is because most studies focus on how employees perceive their supervisor's attitude and thus measure how employees perceive their supervisors' support in general, or their supervisor's family support in particular (e.g. Clark, 2001; Hammer et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 1999). We therefore adapted the validated scale of Thompson et al. (1999), in line with other studies measuring the supervisor's attitude towards work-life practices and policies (e.g. Behson, 2005). The three items are: 'I don't care if a team member occasionally works at

home, as long as the work is done', 'In my view, it is a problem when one of my team members wants to work at home on a regular basis' and 'For most of the jobs of my team members, it is difficult to work at home'. The respondents rated the items on a scale between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The scale measuring supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework (Cronbach's alpha=0.72) was found to be reliable.

Team members' *task interdependence* was measured using a three-item scale, based on Pearce and Gregersen (1999), also used by Liden and colleagues (1997). A sample item is: 'The way individual members perform their jobs has a significant impact upon others in the group'. The respondents rated each item on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha=0.68) was rather low but acceptable (Lance et al., 2006). Liden et al. (1997) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74 for this scale.

Heterogeneity was measured using the 3-items scale developed by Campion et al. (1993). A sample item is: 'The members of my team vary widely in their areas of expertise'. The respondents rated each item on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We found the scale to be reliable (Cronbach's Alpha=0.82).

Team effort and performance were measured using a four-item scale developed by McClean and Collins (2011) and Hertel et al. (2004). The respondents rated the items on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is: '*My team goes above and beyond the job requirements*' (Cronbach's alpha was 0.75).

Supervisor's dependency on team members was measured using the six-item scale developed by Campion et al. (1993), including three items measuring supervisor's dependency on team members in terms of goals and three items measuring supervisor's dependency on team members in terms of feedback. A sample item for goal dependency is: '*My work activities on any given day are determined by my team's goals for that day'.* A sample item for feedback dependency is: 'Feedback about how well I am doing my job comes primarily from information about how well the entire team is doing'. The respondents rated each item on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale was found to be reliable (Cronbach's alpha=0.82).

We included *gender* (0:man, 1:woman), *age* (continuous), *partnership* (0:no, 1:yes) and a dummy per organization as control variables, as these variables had been found to account for different levels of supervisor support for telework (Lim & Theo, 2000).

4.3. *Data analyses*

We first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to test the distinctiveness of the five scales. Model fit was assessed by the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI). For RMSEA and SRMR values ≤ .08 indicate acceptable fit, and values ≤ .05 good fit; for CFI and NNFI values ≥ .90 signify acceptable fit and values ≥ .95 good fit (Bentler & Bonet, 1980; Hu & Bentler, 1998; Marsh et al., 2004). The analysis yielded a satisfactory fit (RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .06; CFI = .92, and NNFI = .90). All observed variables had significant loadings on their corresponding latent factor (between .46 and .89; p < .01).

Next, we checked for the presence and influence of common method variance using the latent marker method of Williams and colleagues (2010). To apply this method, a latent marker, i.e., a latent variable which is theoretically unrelated to any of the key variables in the study, should be included in the CFA model. We chose for the variable family-to-work, measured with the six-item scale of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), because family-to-work conflict has been shown to be mostly influenced by family factors and less by work-related factors (Frone et al., 1992; Weer & Greenhaus, 2014). Following the recommendations of Williams and colleagues (2010), we first estimated a six-factor CFA model, consisting of the basic five-factor CFA model mentioned above and the marker variable. Second, we fitted baseline model, in which the correlations between the latent marker variable and the other latent variables were fixed at zero, and the factor loadings and error terms of the marker variable indicators are fixed at the values obtained in the CFA model with marker variable. Third, we tested a constrained model (Method-C) in which all indicators of the model loaded on the latent marker variable and all factor loadings were constrained to be equal. If this model has a significant better fit than the baseline model, common method variance is likely to be present and to have an equal effect on all indicators. Table

5 shows that this was the case in our study. Fourth, we tested an unconstrained model (Method-U) in which all indicators of the model loaded freely on the latent marker. If this model fits the data better than the constrained model, common method variance is likely to be present but to have an unequal effect on the different indicators. Table 5 shows that this was not the case in our study. Finally, we estimated a model in which the correlations between the substantive latent variables were constrained to the values obtained in the baseline model (Method-R). If this model has a significantly worse fit than the constrained or unconstrained model, common method variance is likely to bias the correlations between the latent variables. Table 5 shows that this was not the case in our study. These analyses indicate that it is unlikely that common method bias has affected the relationships between our key variables (Williams et al., 2010).

Table 5. Model comparisons for CFA models with marker variable.

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	χ^2 difference	Model comparison
CFA with marker variable	476.69 (260)	.88	.86	.06		
Baseline model	483.60 (276)	.89	.88	.06		
Method-C	483.57 (275)	.89	.88	.06	0.03 (1) *ns*	vs. Baseline
Method-U	471.72 (257)	.88	.86	.06	11.85 (18) *ns*	vs. Method-C
Method-R	471.81 (267)	.89	.87	.06	0.09 (10) *ns*	vs. Method-U

Note: CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

ns = not significant.

p < .05. **p* < .01.

Table 6 contains means, standard deviations and correlation for all variables. Next, we conducted moderated hierarchical regression analyses to test the hypotheses. Following the recommendations of Baron and Kenny (1986), we entered the control variables in the first step, the main effects in the second step, and the interaction terms in the final step. Before computing the interaction terms, all variables were standardized in order to remove non-essential multicollinearity (Cohen et al., 2002).

Table 6. Means, standard deviations and correlations for supportive attitude towards telework, independent variables and moderator.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Supportive attitude towards telework	3.66	0.96	/										
2. Female[6]	0.59	0.49	0.117	/									
3. Age	45.49	7.9	-0.194 **	-0.004	/								
4. Partner[7]	0.89	0.32	0.107	0.110	-0.102	/							
5. Organization 2[8]	0.15	0.36	0.181 **	0.105	-0.179 **	-0.023	/						
6. Organization 3[9]	0.38	0.49	-0.230 **	-0.303 **	0.188 **	-0.036	-0.337 **	/					
7. Organization 4[10]	0.22	0.41	-0.097	0.084	0.119	0.086	-0.224 **	-0.415 **	/				

[6] Reference = male
[7] Reference = partner
[8] Reference = organization 1
[9] Reference = organization 1
[10] Reference = organization 1

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
8. Task interdependence	3.47	0.53	-0.125	0.049	0.178	-0.041	0.053	-0.053	0.087	/			
9. Heterogeneity	3.57	0.79	0.031	0.112	0.136*	0.07	-0.001	-0.235**	0.237**	0.285**	/		
10. Lack of effort/low performance	4.16	0.53	-0.052	0.064	-0.151*	-0.019	-0.072	-0.064	0.021	-0.300**	-0.216**	/	
11. Supervisors' dependency on team	3.39	0.67	0.100	0.072	0.056	0.011	0.055	-0.179**	-0.092	0.103	0.201**	-0.091	/

** $p \leq 0.01$; *$p \leq 0.05$

4.4. Results

Table 7 shows the results of the moderated regression analysis. Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative relationship between task interdependence and the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework. In line with this hypothesis, task interdependence was found to have a significant negative impact on supervisors' supportive attitude towards telework (β = -0.185; p ≤ 0.05). So, when the tasks of the members in a team are strongly interdependent, supervisors tend to have a less supportive attitude towards telework. Hypothesis 2 expected a negative impact of team heterogeneity on the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework. However, we found this relationship to be not statistically significant (β = 0.029; p = n.s.). Also hypothesis 3, which expected a negative relationship between lack of team effort and low performance on the one hand and the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework on the other hand, was not supported. Indeed, this relationship was found to be not statistically significant (β = -0.121; p = n.s.).

Finally, hypothesis 4 concerned the interaction between disruption and dependency theory. In particular, we expected that the supervisor's dependency on his or her team members would mitigate the negative impact of disruptive team characteristics (a: task interdependence; b: heterogeneity; c: lack of effort/low performance) on the supervisor's supportive attitude. In line with hypothesis 4a, we found a statistically significant interaction between task interdependence and the dependency of the supervisor on his/her team (β = 0.152; p ≤ 0.05). To interpret this interaction, we plotted it in Figure 4. As the figure shows, the negative impact of task interdependence on the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework is most pronounced when the supervisor's dependency on the team is low and less so when the supervisor's dependency on the team is high. Simple slopes analyses, calculated using the web tool developed by Schubert and Jacoby (2004), further showed that the former relationship was statistically significant while the latter one was not (Table 7). Thus, when the supervisor's dependency on the team is low, more task interdependency among the team members is associated with a less supportive attitude towards telework of the supervisor; however, when the supervisor is highly dependent on his or her team, task interdependency among team members has no effect on the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework. This is in line with hypothesis

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4a. Hypothesis 4b (β = -0.015; p = n.s.) and 4c (β = -0.009; p = n.s.) could not be confirmed.

We also found statistically significant results for the control variable organization. More precisely, supervisors working in organization 3 (local social policy organization) (β = -0.299; $p \leq 0.05$) and 4 (research and higher education) (β = -0.175; $p \leq 0.05$) have a significantly less supportive attitude towards teleworking than supervisor from organization 1 (telecom), while no significant difference was found between the attitude towards teleworking of these latter and of supervisors' from organization 2 (fast moving consumer goods).

Table 7. Regression models of independent variables on supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework (N=205).

	Supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework		
	Control model	Main effects model	Moderation model
Gender	0.030	0.035	0.045
Age	-0.065	-0.073	-0.070
Partnership	0.102	0.087	0.092
Organization 2	-0.034	-0.036	-0.046
Organization 3	-0.292***	-0.280**	-0.299**
Organization 4	-0.202*	-0.175*	-0.175*
Team member task interdependence		-0.167*	-0.185*
Team heterogeneity		0.034	0.029
Lack of effort/low performance		-0.123	-0.121
Supervisor dependency on team		0.047	0.063
Team member task interdependence*supervisor dependency			0.152*
Team heterogeneity*supervisor dependency			-0.015
Lack of effort/low performance*supervisor dependency			-0.009
R^2 change	0.096**	0.031**	0.022**
Total R^2	0.096	0.127	0.149
Adjusted R^2	0.069	0.082	0.091
Total F statistic	3.524**	2.811**	2.579**

Note: Estimates represent standardized regression coefficients. * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.0$
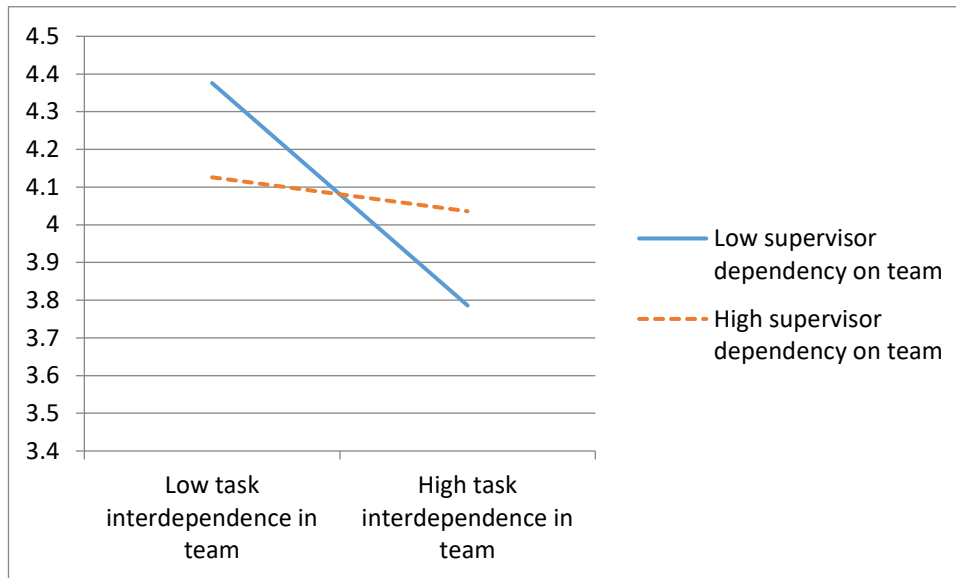
Figure 4. Two-way interaction of supervisor dependency on team members and task interdependence in team on supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework.

Table 8. Test of simple slopes of regression for interaction between team members' task interdependence and the supervisor's dependency on his/her team in predicting the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework.

Level of supervisor dependency on his/her team	Simple slope	SE	t(221)
High	-0.034	0.085	-0.394
Low	-0.246	0.094	-2.575*

Note: High = mean + 1*SD; Low = mean − 1*SD
* $p \leq 0.05$

5. Qualitative study

Through the mixed-method approach we first generated accurate and statistically generalizable quantitative evidence of the relation between supervisors' attitudes and team-related antecedents. To interpret the quantitative findings more in depth, we collected and analyzed complementary qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with supervisors. Semi-structured interviews allow to capture descriptions of supervisors' meaning making processes underlying such relation (cf. Poelmans & Beham, 2008) to gain insight in their rationales of, vision on and attitude towards telework. As qualitative data allows accessing an organizational phenomenon from the specific point of view of the respondents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), it enables capturing additional complexity to more accurately understand the relationship between team characteristics, supervisors' dependency on their team and their vision on and attitude towards telework, leading to a more complete answer to the research question (Cameron & Molina-Azorin, 2011; Kelle, 2006).

5.1. Method

In each organization, we first interviewed the HR manager and collected policy documents and other data about the organization's and employees' profile to prepare the quantitative and qualitative study. The qualitative study is based on 39 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with supervisors in three of the four organizations. We could not collect qualitative data in the public sector organization. Each organization selected a list of potential interviewees and transmitted their name, company e-mail addresses and background information (department, length of service…) to us. From this list, we made a selection of supervisors in such a way that we maximized heterogeneity of department and length of service in the organization and obtained a gender balanced sample. As these factors have been related to supervisors' attitude towards telework, we wanted to avoid skewed samples along them.

The questionnaire included questions on the following topics: the supervisor's background (e.g. 'Could you describe a typical work day?'), team characteristics (e.g. 'How would you describe your team's composition?'), formal work-life policies (e.g. 'Have you been involved in the development of work-life policies in

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your organization? How?'), implementation of work-life practices (e.g. 'Could you describe the procedure through which team members can access work-life arrangements? What is your role in the procedure?'), allowance decisions (e.g. 'Based on which criteria do you decide if a team member is allowed to telework?'), evaluation of work-life policies (e.g. 'How do you evaluate the current work-life policies in your organization?'), and personal experiences as work-life policy user (e.g. 'Do you make use of work-life arrangements yourself? Can you tell more about your use?'). Questions were first formulated in general terms and then more specifically concerning telework and other work-life arrangements offered by the employing organization.

 The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. Each interview was recorded with permission of the interviewee and fully transcribed. This process produced 653 pages of of single-spaced text. In a next step, we identified all excerpts in the text in which supervisors expressed their considerations surrounding work-life arrangements. We first conducted a content analysis coding the excerpts about their vision of telework relative to maintaining productivity, which underlies hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. Doing so, we looked for evidence pointing to team characteristics, and more broadly to additional organizational context-related aspects. Second, we looked for references to work disruption and dependency aspects in their explanations of their attitude towards teleworking. To advance our understanding of how their attitude emerges, we then looked for additional aspects which are not included in disruption or dependency theory.

5.2. Results

Following the structure of our theoretical model, we first examine supervisors' reasoning concerning telework in function of avoiding disruption and preserving team productivity. We specifically analyse their reasoning concerning teams' task interdependence, team members' heterogeneity and substitutability, and effort and past performance. We then analyse how the supervisors' considerations about their dependency on their team additionally intervenes in the formation of their attitude towards telework.

The role of team characteristics on work disruption in supervisors'
attitude towards telework

In their interviews with us, supervisors anticipated the more or less adverse effect of telework on their team's functioning and productivity, taking into consideration the team's task interdependence. The following quotes by supervisors of highly interdependent teams are illustrative:

> 'They are allowed to work from home in some cases. It's not common [in this company] to work at home for a long time. […] I try to avoid that they are absent for a long time, because collaborating in the workplace stimulates creativity. We are looking for a balanced approach [to telework].' (supervisor of a highly interdependent research team)

> 'My personal vision on telework… I think that is OK one day a week, but that should be the maximum. […] Especially when people are part of a team, I find it important to have a swift interaction.' (supervisor of a highly interdependent marketing team)

Many of our respondents stressed the necessity of face-to-face interaction to argue for limiting telework to a small fraction of the total working time, often one day a week. The relevance of the degree of interdependency of work for supervisor's more or less favorable attitude was clear also in the following respondent:

> 'Yes, they work from home. Not systematically, but because PhD students share a landscape office with several persons, where it is always busy. For some activities, such as writing articles, they work from home. Or especially when writing a PhD, which is almost unfeasible in such a big group. [...] It is experimental science and they have to work in the lab. And they have to be available for each other. So that they can ask for help, for input. So that there is enough opportunity for communication'. (supervisor of a highly task interdependent research team)

This fragment shows how supervisors, in forming their attitude, might evaluate the effects of telework on specific tasks (rather than jobs) depending on their

levels of interdependency, adding complexity into their evaluation of potential disruption due to telework.

When talking about the desirability of telework, interviewees further frequently spontaneously referred to technology (e.g. e-mail, office communicator software, mobile telephone, and video conferencing) as reducing work disruption by enabling communication and control over team members' output:

> 'We have some tools we can use. If someone works at home, we can call him [sic], we can e-mail, we can use messenger... So, I believe there's is enough technology.' (supervisor of a highly task interdependent research team)

> 'Yes, for the employees that are homeworking ... When I notice ... when I send them an e-mail when they are homeworking, than I notice rather quickly if they are actually working or not.' (supervisor of a slightly task interdependent legal compliance team)

Taken together, the qualitative data well illustrates the reasoning behind the relationship between teams' task interdependency and supervisors' attitude towards telework. At the same time, they add complexity to that relationship by pointing to the heterogeneity of tasks within jobs and to technology as key organizational context factor affecting, respectively, the degree of team interdependency and of the disruptive effects of telework on teams' work.

The second team characteristic supervisors referred to during the interviews was the internal replaceability of the team members. Despite the distinct nature of the work carried out by the teams in the studied organizations, most supervisors indicated that their team members could not easily (even temporarily) replace each other. They often mentioned that individual team members' tasks required specific knowledge or involved interactions with other parties that rested on long-lasting interpersonal relationships:

> 'In my team, I have two junior account managers, who are responsible for two of each of the segments, so one is responsible for quick service restaurants and catering, and the other for hotels and transport, mainly. And me, I'm responsible for [name of companies]. (supervisor of a slightly task interdependent sales team)

Occasionally, they did point to the (partial) substitutability of team members, anticipating lower disruption on work processes:

'As for the administrative team, since they all have their [homeworking] day, we guarantee a continuous permanence. Because not everyone works at home on the same day. Sometimes they change their homeworking day, for instance in the winter, some team members don't dare to drive when it snows. And suddenly no one is at the office. But then there are also not many sales representatives, so in fact, it doesn't matter very much. But we alway try to guarantee permanence at the office.' (supervisor of a slightly task interdependent marketing team)

Sometimes respondents further referred to work intensity and the team's small size as additional constraints for substitutability. The qualitative data therefore suggests the relevance of members' substitutability for supervisor's attitude towards telework, although this relationship could not be confirmed in a statistically significant way in our quantitative study.

Finally, respondents often referred to their team's effort and performance when talking about the desirability of telework. Most of our respondents were adamant:

'Almost everybody here works like hell. Very few people are working nine to five [...] So I think that, when your people say that they are working from home, they don't have to send me an e-mail to prove that they are actually working. So... I think it's mainly a matter of trust. Also if you stop working earlier, go to the dentist first, it's all possible. Because we know that everybody works very hard.' (supervisor of a highly interdependent supply chain team)

'When a team member is homeworking for instance, I will not necessarily call him. But when I send him an e-mail, he typically answers very quickly … These people are busy, they are working, I'm not worried about that.' (supervisor of a slightly task interdependent legal compliance team)

These fragments suggest that supervisors' supportive attitude towards telework is subject to an important condition: trust in their team. When supervisors trust their team members to put in effort and perform well at home despite the absence of direct surveillance, they are likely to be more in favor of telework. So, though we could not confirm the role of past performance and effort in general in the quantitative study, the qualitative findings show that past performance and effort during telework does affect supervisors' attitude towards teleworking.

The role of supervisors' dependency on their team in their attitude towards telework

During the interviews, many respondents elaborated on their dependency on their teams' performance for achieving their own work goals. They often mentioned how overall unit goals were split up into team goals and individual goals, and how their job was to monitor both in order to achieve their own goals. Analysing the qualitative data through a dependency lens allows to highlight how telework is part of the exchange relation between the supervisor and the team. Whereas supervisors' considerations about disruption focus on the potential impact of telework on work processes and output, considerations about dependency are centred on supervisors' attempts to motivate teams to remain performant in the future:

> 'I think that, if you give your people something ... you will probably get it back partially one way or another. But it cannot be measured.' (supervisor of a slightly task interdependent legal compliance team)

> 'For instance when it has been very busy here, when we have worked here very long hours, then I will also say: 'tomorrow, start a bit later, or work from home.' (supervisor of a slightly task interdependent marketing team)

> 'And that [teleworking] is great, you are at ease and it's really true that you perform better, because of two reasons actually: at home, you're at ease, you're less distracted but you also don't want to lose that benefit, so you do the best you can to do as much as possible. You will prove yourself so that they can't say: "It's not good, we won't allow you to telework any longer".' (supervisor of a slightly task interdependent customer care team)

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Although they stress different aspects, these fragments all show how supervisors consider telework as a currency in the give-and-take relation to their teams, one which they can proactively deploy to steer team's behavior. The reasoning is clearly centred on reciprocity: the team's telework is given in exchange for enhanced performance, in a logic of longer-term mutual gain.

Also in a long-term perspective, yet reflecting on the need to preserve team members as productive human resources, one respondent told us:

> 'I think that [with telework] they want to obtain or should obtain that people do not over-strain themselves on the short- or on the middle-long term. The point is: we are located [...] in the middle of Belgium, that is so difficult to reach [due to traffic jams]. [...] It may help that you don't have to do it every day, that you can skip one day a week.' (supervisor of a slightly task interdependent sales team)

In other cases, supervisors rather talked about telework as a win-win arrangement allowing mutual flexibility, so that both employees' and the organizational needs can be met:

> 'I do [give flexibility] as long as I know that I can count on them. If I see that when I ask them something they do not help out, then I stop, as simple as that. Till now it has been working fine, so I think that I either have been lucky with my team, or it has to do with give and take, that they realize that they also get something in return... (supervisor of a highly interdependent finance team)

These excerpts all point to a mutual dependency and exchange between supervisors and their teams. Respondents stress the positive effects that can be achieved by allowing teams to telework. However, at the same time, they also highlight the boundary conditions for teamwork. For instance, interviewees pointed to the need for telework to be planned in function of the team's joint activities, such as meetings. In order to expend telework in the exchange with their teams, they further stress that they need to retain control over their team's access to it:

'Homeworking, in our department, *that's not a right but a privilege*. A privilege that people get, a reward because they are mature and perform well at the office. [...] The contract doesn't state that people have a right to homeworking'. (supervisor of a slightly task interdependent customer care team)

'I don't want people [with a contractual right to telework] in my team. I can understand that *some can abuse it*. So, new hires in my team do not get structural telework. They can work from home if they ask, I've never said no when somebody asked, so…' (supervisor of a slightly task interdependent human resource team)

Only if telework is a 'privilege', a reward that needs to be deserved, are supervisors in a position to use it to reward (or punish) their team, enhancing their control over their team and diminishing the likelihood of disruption. This suggests that supervisors' attitude towards telework depends on their ability to control its implementation, in line with our conceptualization of dependency as moderating the relation between team's characteristics and anticipated disruption.

6. Discussion and conclusions

This study investigated team antecedents of supervisors' attitude towards telework. Drawing on disruption and dependency theory and relying on a mixed method approach, we investigated supervisors' attitude towards telework in relation to team characteristics and the supervisor's dependency on the team. Our team-centred approach to the antecedents differs from extant studies which conceptualize the relations between supervisors and their team at the inter-individual level and better reflects, we argue, the process of supervisor's attitude formation (Colquitt, 2004; Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Ryan & Kossek, 2008).

As a whole, our study empirically confirmed the centrality of considerations of the impact of telework on teams' work processes and productivity in supervisors' more or less supportive attitude towards telework. Our quantitative findings confirm the hypothesized negative correlation between task interdependence and supervisors' supportive attitude towards telework (hp 1) as

well as the moderating role of supervisor's dependency on his or her team on this relation (hp 4a). That is, we found supervisors of teams with high task interdependence to have a significantly less supportive attitude towards telework, but this negative relationship was less pronounced – and even disappeared – for supervisors who felt highly dependent on their team. This is well illustrated by our qualitative findings which show how supervisors were concerned about the preservation of their team's productivity in terms of avoiding work disruption, yet also evaluated telework in terms of the goodwill it could generate from their team to ensure their future performance. Even supervisors who are opposed to telework due to high team interdependence might be inclined to allow their team to telework in order to retain their precious and scarce employees on whose performance they depend for their own. We interpret this double reasoning as reflecting the double nature of telework. On the one hand, telework is a specific type of work arrangement with potential disruptive effects on highly interdependent work processes. On the other, it represents an element in the exchange relation between supervisors and their teams, who are mutually dependent on each other to achieve work goals (Dambrin, 2004; Valsecchi, 2006). Supervisors are clearly aware of this second dimension and often proactively utilize telework to retain and motivate their personnel and stimulate performance over the longer run, to the benefit of their own work results (Kelly & Kalev, 2006; Reinsch, 2007).

At the same time, our quantitative results could not reveal a statistically significant relation between supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework and the team's heterogeneity (hp 2) and lack of effort and low performance (hp 3), although this finding is nuanced by our qualitative data. In this latter, team members' (lack of) replaceability commonly features in their narratives as a reason justifying their vision towards telework. The discrepancy between quantitative and qualitative results might be due to an inadequate measurement of team members' substitutability through items on team members' heterogeneity in terms of expertise. Indeed, talking to us, respondents did not indicate expertise differences as the cause of low replaceability of team members, but rather the importance of specific relational and/or content knowledge for carrying out specific tasks, knowledge at the core of their job, which individuals build over time and that is thus not shared with other team members. Future research might consider

adopting more accurate measurements of team members' substitutability than heterogeneity in functional expertise. Substitutability should be measured in ways that also capture the role of individuals' unique knowledge on specific tasks and their personal relations with clients which are often necessary to avoid work disruption in real situations.

Although in the quantitative study we found no link between the lack of performance/low effort and supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework, interviewees also often mentioned their team's performance when talking about the desirability of telework. This could be due to the fact that most supervisors perceived their team as very highly performing; so we simply might have too few cases of low performance/effort to discover this effect. This result is not so surprising, as organizations are likely to take action to improve the performance of teams which underperform. Alternatively, it could be that the high productivity of a team has a double, opposite effect on supervisors' attitude towards telework. The hypothesized positive effect based on supervisor's trust in his or her team might be counterbalanced by the perception of the risk that the team's performance might decline due to telework, for instance for reasons that are independent of team members' effort. Our qualitative findings suggest that the impact of team effort and performance on supervisors' attitude might be better conceptualized as one of (mutual) exchange leaning as much towards disruption as towards dependency, and based on (mutual) trust. Indeed, in line with dependency theory, supervisors referred to telework as a reward for the team's *past* effort and performance and to motivate *future* performance beyond immediate productivity considerations.

Finally, our quantitative analyses do not support the moderating role of supervisor's dependency on the team in the relationships between team heterogeneity (hp 4b) and lack of team effort and performance (hp 4c) on supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework. These moderation hypotheses were based on the assumption of a significant direct effect of team heterogeneity and lack of effort and low performance on the supervisor's attitude towards telework. Since no significant direct effect of both variables was found, the absence of a significant moderation effect is not so surprising. This result does, however, stimulate questions as to which extent the moderating role of supervisor's dependency is generalizable to all disruptive team characteristics.

Perhaps, some disruptive characteristics (e.g., extreme lack of team effort) are less prone to mitigation by supervisor's dependency on the team because, for instance, they too fundamentally undermine productivity, the supervisor's primary concern.

6.1. Theoretical contribution to the extant research and implications for further research

Theoretically, our study advances the current literature in a number of ways. First, by showing that dependency and disruption arguments intervene at once in the formation of the supervisor's attitude towards telework. Whereas the extant literature theorizes that disruption and dependency theory differ in terms of their temporal horizon – disruption focusing on short-term productivity and dependency on long-term productivity – (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008), we point to simultaneous dimensions of the relation between supervisors and their teams which are both relevant to understand supervisors' attitudes towards telework. Our argument is rather that disruption theory captures 'structural' aspects of work organization of teams, whereas dependency theory captures the 'political' aspects of the relation between supervisors and their teams. Dependency refers more specifically to the relation of (hierarchical, mutual) dependency within which supervisors conceive telework as a tool to proactively regulate team's work behavior within the broader set of fixed, work arrangements characterizing the employment relation. In this sense, telework, as other work-life balance arrangements, should be understood an additional instrument through which supervisors can, at their own discretion, reward employees (with work flexibility). Indeed, in line with this logic of reciprocity, supervisors stress that telework should not become a right for employees, as losing control over telework allocation would entail the impossibility of expending it in the relationship. These reflections are in line with Kelly and Kalev's (2006) findings that in many companies, work-life balance policies institutionalize managerial discretion rather than creating outright rights for employees. They argue that this discretionality explains the underutilization of work-life policies despite the fact that many companies offer them. The formal existence of policies hides the high levels of discretionality line managers retain in their allocation, explaining employees' widespread underutilization of policies. Future research might benefit from conceptualizing

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and operationalizing access to work-life balance policies as a specific type of reward among a broader variety offered to employees.

Second, by conceptualizing antecedents of supervisors' attitudes towards telework away from supervisors' individual characteristics (Parker & Allen, 2002) or inter-individual relations with team members (Peters et al., 2010), this study pointed to the key role of more structural aspects at the team level in our understanding of supervisors' attitude. Such shift in perspective is important as it highlights how organizations themselves might play a role in shaping supervisors' attitudes through the way they organize the workforce, support work processes, and assess teams' and supervisors' performance. At the same time, the modest R^2 of our model also indicates that other elements than those we measured intervene in shaping the supervisor's attitude towards telework. Future research should explore the impact of other antecedents affecting the supervisor's (lack of) support for telework than the ones included in this study. For instance, the supervisor's experience of his or her own telework as a disruptive work-life arrangement could be included in the model. Also, a longitudinal research design would allow to measure the consistency of supervisors' attitude towards telework across time and teams, to gain a better understanding of the relative effect of a team's characteristics at present time versus the supervisor's past experience of the impact of telework on the functioning of previous teams on the current attitude towards telework. Understanding the role of this antecedent is important for policy, as this might limit organizations' ability to influence supervisors' attitudes towards telework.

Moreover, future research should look at the organizations' role, next to the team's, in shaping supervisors' attitudes towards telework. We found that supervisors working in the local social policy organization and in the research and higher education organization had a significantly less supportive attitude towards teleworking than supervisors in the telecom organization. This may suggest that supervisors in commercial organizations are more supportive towards telework than in public ones. Possibly, private organizations have a less pronounced face time culture, perhaps because they apply other methods to evaluate work performance (e.g., output evaluation) than public organizations do.

Finally, our qualitative findings clearly suggest that (dis)trust possibly mediates the relationship between disruption and the supervisor's attitude

towards telework. The role of trust is as such not new: studies which use disruption or dependency theory to understand supervisors' attitude towards telework often build on the idea of trust to explain how this attitude is formed. Strikingly, however, trust has not yet been measured empirically (e.g. den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008). Given the findings of our qualitative study and the implicit prominence of trust in this literature, researchers should explicitly include this variable in their models, exploring its importance quantitatively.

6.2. Implications for practice

Gaining insight in how team characteristics are related to the supervisor's attitude is further particularly important for policy, as organizations are better placed to remediate aspects at the team level that contribute to supervisors' negative attitude towards telework, rather than those at the inter-individual one (Straub, 2012). Our research indicates that, if organizations want to reap the advantages promised by telework, they should ensure that gatekeepers such as supervisors develop supportive attitudes towards it by creating suitable boundary conditions for its implementation. On the one hand, as suggested by both our quantitative and qualitative data, organizations can carefully examine possible optimal combinations of technology enabling coordination and control and alternative organization of work/tasks which reduce disruption risks to a minimum. This type of interventions ensures the 'objective' conditions for supervisors to develop supportive attitudes towards telework. On the other hand, as suggested by our qualitative data, organization can monitor supervisors' telework allocation decisions, their own as well as their team performance, and other team outcomes (e.g. satisfaction, turnover, etc.) in order to gain insight in how they manage the give-and-take relation with their teams. In this way, organizations can assess the extent to which individual supervisors are able to leverage telework in function of the achievement of organizational goals, reward decisions that are in line with (longer-term) organizational HR policies and intervene when they are in conflict with them.

6.3. Limitations

Our study also presents some limitations. First, the cross-sectional approach of our quantitative study does not allow to draw conclusions in terms of causal

relationships between the examined variables, disruption and dependency elements on the one hand and supervisor's attitude towards telework on the other hand. This implies the possibility that not only disruption and dependency elements influence the supervisor's attitude towards telework, but also that the supervisor's attitude towards telework influences disruption and dependency elements. Still, because of the cross-sectional nature of our data, we were unable to test the direction of this relation. Future research should be based on a longitudinal design to assess causal relationships.

Second, we measured team characteristics at the supervisor level. Nonetheless, certain team characteristics, like task interdependence, may be better measured at the employee level since it concerns these employees' interdependence of each other's. Future research may therefore want to consider multilevel designs.

Third, we refer to limitations of generalizability. The findings cannot incautiously be generalized to other settings and populations. For instance, our sample consisted of 4 rather large organizations, in which work processes and supervisor-team dynamics are deemed to differ from those in smaller organizations. In addition, our study was conducted in Belgium. As there may be cross-national differences in how work-family work arrangement such as telework are implemented in organizations (den Dulk, 2001), our results cannot without caution be extrapolated to other countries. Moreover, as we only interviewed middle managers and front line managers, our findings cannot be generalized to top managers (cf. Gilbert, 2012).

Fourth, we could only gather qualitative material in three of the four organizations for which we have quantitative findings. The organization for which no qualitative results are available is one of the two public sector organizations in our sample. The quantitative analysis revealed that the public sector organization for which no interviews are available does not differ significantly from the other public sector organization in the sample. Based on this finding, and given that the qualitative data is in no sense statistically representative and the adopted level of analysis are individual supervisors, we concluded that the absence of qualitative data from the fourth organization did not represent a fundamental sampling problem.

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CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

In this conclusive chapter, we first discuss how the three empirical studies address the goals of this dissertation (1). In a second part, we further elaborate on the contributions to the literature and how future research can build on this (2). In a third part, we point at the methodological contributions and limitations (3). We conclude by highlighting the contributions of this dissertation to the organization's practices and policies aimed at supporting employees' work-life issues (4).

1. Goals and findings

This dissertation aimed at gaining a thorough insight in the role of supervisor support for the employees' work-life issues, by focusing on the impact of this support on employees' work-to-life conflict on the one hand and on the antecedents of this support on the other hand. Supervisor support is often described as crucial for employees' work-life issues, especially for decreasing their work-to-life conflict (e.g. Hammer et al., 2013; Kossek et al., 2011), yet our knowledge about the role of the supervisor in the employees' work-to-life conflict remains still fragmented in several aspects. More precisely, research disregards the relative impact of supervisor support on work-to-life conflict compared with other antecedents, largely neglects the supervisor's perspective and supervisor support other than emotional support (Hammer et al., 2007; 2009), and does not take into account the team context in which the supervisor's support emerges (Kossek et al., 2010; Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Straub, 2012).

The first goal of our dissertation was to look at the importance of supervisor support in reducing employees' work-to-life conflict, set against other antecedents. To meet this goal, drawing on conflict theory, we studied the relative importance of perceived supervisor support on the work-to-family conflict employees experience, compared to other factors investigated in the literature such as, for instance, co-worker support, job demands and work-family policy use. Meta-analyses found that multiple sources are related to the employees' work-to-life conflict (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011), making it important to look at their relative impact in order to construct a hierarchy of antecedents. To investigate this relative importance empirically, we conducted a first study based on survey

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data among 384 nurses, and analyzed them using hierarchical linear regression. The results confirmed the central role of the supervisor: perceived supervisor support – and also perceived co-worker support – appeared to be negatively related to work-to-family conflict, above and beyond work–family policy use and job demands. This means that employees who perceive their supervisor as supportive experience less work-to-family conflict than employees who do not perceive their supervisor as supportive. The same applies to co-worker support. Even though supervisor support and co-worker support were the most important antecedents, job demands were also found to be related to work-to-family conflict. More precisely, employees experiencing work overload and working overtime experienced more work-to-family conflict than employees who did not. We could not find a significant relationship between employees' use of work-life policies and work-to-family conflict, which was in contrast with our hypothesis.

The second goal of this dissertation was to gain insight in the relationship between different types of supervisor behaviors that are considered in the literature as family supportive and employees' work-to-life conflict. It is important to look at the different behaviors because they provide more detailed information about the role of supervisors and how they are able to influence employees' work-to-life conflict. Drawing on job demands- resources theory, we hypothesized both a positive and negative relationship between specific behaviors and work-to-life conflict, by measuring supervisor support at the supervisor level and then inserting the employees' perceived supervisor support and work overload as mediators of the relationship. We performed a multilevel analysis based on matched data that we collected among 726 employees and their 224 supervisors. The results show that there is a direct and indirect relationship (via increased perceived supervisor support and lowered work overload) between the supervisor's creation of a flexible work time culture and a reduction in employees' work-to-life conflict. The supervisor's personal use of work-life policies, however, was found to increase the employees' work-to-life conflict via lowered perceived supervisor support and increased work overload. This confirms our expectation that not all supervisor behaviors that are assumed to be supportive in fact are so, and indicates that some may even increase the employees' work-to-life conflict. No direct or indirect significant relationship between the supervisors' access allowance to formal work-life policies or the provision of informal flexibility on the

one hand and employees' work-to-life conflict on the other hand was found. Thus, splitting up the different supervisor behaviors allowed us to see that not all of these behaviors are significantly related to work-to-life conflict.

Third, this dissertation aimed at gaining more insight into the antecedents of self-reported supervisor support for work-life issues. In the extant literature, team-level antecedents transcending the level of the individual team members are under-investigated, even though they may play an important role because of the particular position of supervisors in their team. Drawing on work disruption theory (Powell & Mainiero, 1999) and dependency theory (Bartol & Martin, 1988), we investigated the team-level elements that may influence the supervisor's supportive attitude towards teleworking. As disruptive team characteristics, we investigated team member task interdependence, team heterogeneity and lack of effort/low performance. Supervisors' dependency on their team was inserted as a moderator for the relationship between these disruptive team characteristics and the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework. A mixed method approach was used. The data collected among 205 supervisors, analyzed using moderated regression analysis, confirmed the hypothesized negative relationship between task interdependence and supervisors' supportive attitude towards telework, as well as the moderating role of supervisor's dependency on his or her team on this relation. We found supervisors of teams with high task interdependence to be less supportive towards telework, but this negative relationship was less strong and even disappeared for supervisors that felt highly dependent on their team. We found no significant results for team heterogeneity and lack of team effort and low performance. To gain a better understanding of supervisors' reasoning behind their attitude towards telework, we used qualitative data collected through 39 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with supervisors. These data provided insight into how task interdependence, team heterogeneity and lack of team effort and low performance affect it. For instance, the interviews illustrated how the supervisor's dependency is clearly manifested in a reasoning centered on reciprocity: the team's telework is given in exchange for enhanced performance, in a logic of longer term mutual gain. The qualitative data also found evidence for the relevance of team characteristics for which no significant results were found in the quantitative part: for instance, the interviews suggested that team members' substitutability shapes the supervisor's attitude towards telework,

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although this relationship could not be confirmed in a statistically significant way in our quantitative study.

Taken together, these studies advance our current understanding of the supervisor's supportive role related to the employee's work-to-family and work-to-life conflict, and the impact of team-level factors on the supervisor's attitude towards telework. On the one hand, it provides new insights about the impact of supervisor support on work-to-family conflict relative to other sources and demonstrates how some supposedly family supportive behaviors can have an decreasing, but also an increasing impact on work-to-life conflict via the employees' perception of supervisor support and work overload. On the other hand, this dissertation stresses the importance of team-level characteristics for the supervisor's supportive attitude towards telework, moderated by the supervisor's team dependence.

2. Contributions to the literature and suggestions for future research

Our dissertation contributes to the existing field of research on supervisor support for work-life issues in several ways. In this section, we give an overview of these contributions and formulate suggestions for future research. First, our dissertation points to the central role of the supervisor support for work-life issues (2.1). Second, our findings allow a contextualization of the supervisor's support against the background of other relevant (f)actors potentially influencing the employees' work-life issues (2.2).

2.1. The central role of supervisor support for work-life issues

This dissertation stresses the central role of supervisor support for work-life issues, generating some specific contributions to the extant literature. First, it shows the supervisor's complex role in employees' work-life issues, as part of a team. Second, it integrates both the supervisor's and the employee's perspective to clarify the supervisor's role, often lacking in work-life studies on supervisor support. Third, we found new insights by conceptualizing supervisor support in detail. Fourth, we shed light on the development of supervisor support and its perceptions, and on the relationship between this support and work-to-life conflict.

Putting the supervisor in the team's context

The first contribution of our dissertation is that we gained insight in the complex position of the supervisor related to the employees' work-life issues, which we based on the perspective of the supervisors, the employees and the team. Supervisors are the leaders of a team, composed of individual employees who also are co-workers. It is important to take into account their specific position as 'team leaders' to gain an understanding about their role in work-life issues.

In this dissertation, we looked at how the team intervenes in the supervisor's support. Throughout our study, we gained insight in how supervisor support for employees' work-life issues is subject to the specific position supervisors have in their team, on which they mostly depend for attaining productivity goals. Former work-life studies focusing on the supervisor and his/her team mainly looked at the interpersonal relationship between this supervisor and individual team members (e.g. den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008; Peters et al., 2010). We contribute to the literature by focusing on how supervisor support is influenced by the team as a collective entity. This topic is the main focus of chapter 3, based on which we can conclude that the supervisors' position in their team affects their support for work-life issues, for instance taking into account their dependency on team members and the potential disruptiveness of work-life policies. It may be interesting to further investigate the team-level factors possibly impacting on the supervisor's support, such as the number of employees using work-life policies, but also factors at the organizational level, such as the practical assistance supervisors receive for supporting their employees with work-life issues.

We also looked at how the supervisors' position impacts their team members and affects the work processes in which employees function. After all, supervisors are not only dependent on their team members, but team members also depend on their supervisors for attaining these goals. Our dissertation reveals that supervisors – through their support – may cause or help to avoid employees to experience work overload, which was found to be related to the employees' experience of work-to-life conflict (see chapter 1 and 2). Even though the finding that this work overload - and also overtime hours - in chapter 1, is related to an increased work-to-life conflict is not new (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011), the novelty of our dissertation is the focus on the central position of the supervisor in

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these work processes underlying the experience of work-to-life conflict. Future research should further investigate the relationship between supervisor support and the work processes leading to the employees' work-to-life conflict.

Moreover, the findings in chapter 1 suggest that the entire team has a role to play in the employees' work-life issues, as supervisor support as well as co-worker support were found to be important resources for reducing work-to-family conflict. Indeed, our interviews and previous research in that field indicate that co-workers may (not) support work-life issues in general and for work-life policy use in particular. Especially co-workers considering work-life policies as disruptive would be reluctant to support them (Thompson, 2008), suggesting that some of the mechanisms leading to supervisor support may also apply to co-worker support. Further research is needed to clarify the position of the supervisor, employee and co-worker, as we will argue below.

In this dissertation, we used several theories to study the complex position of the supervisor. Conflict theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001) allowed us to look at the effects of the supervisor on the individual employee, while work disruption theory (Powell & Mainiero, 1999) and dependency theory (Bartol & Martin, 1988) gave us the opportunity to focus on the position of the supervisor vis-à-vis the team. Building on these theoretical approaches, we could put the supervisor's role in employees' work-life issues in a broader perspective, stressing the mutual dependence between the supervisors and their employees.

Integrating the supervisor's and the employee's perspectives to show the supervisor's complex role

The work-life literature has increasingly paid attention to the role of supervisor support. The large majority of these studies focuses on supervisor support as it is perceived by the employees, disregarding whether supervisors are actually having a supportive attitude towards the employees' work-life issues. In this dissertation, we integrate the supervisor's perspective, which is important to take into account, since supervisors are able to affect the context in which employees are experiencing work-life issues, both in terms of work processes (e.g. work overload) and in terms of the cultural conditions (e.g. the support they experience) (Allen et al., 2013; Kossek et al., 2011; Raabe, 1998). We put the

supervisor's perspective at the centre of two empirical studies: in chapter 2, we did so by measuring the supervisor's self-reported support, and in chapter 3, by measuring this support and its antecedents.

Another contribution of our dissertation is the simultaneous study of both the supervisor's and the employee's perspective. Indeed, previous research is mostly based on either the supervisor or the employee, looking at the supervisors' role for work-life issues from a one-dimensional perspective. For instance, many studies focused on the employees' perception of supervisor support for work-life issues, neglecting the supervisor's actual role (Byron, 2005; Kossek et al., 2011; Michel et al., 2011). Other studies looked at the supervisors' work-life policy allowance decisions or at the emotional support they provide (Anderson et al., 2002; Behson, 2002; Bond & Wise, 2003; Hill et al., 2016; Parker & Allen, 2001; Powell & Mainiero, 1999), thereby largely ignoring the employee's position. Our dissertation goes further than these studies by taking into account the perspective of the supervisor and the employee to explain the supervisors' role in work-life.

Based on this multidimensional approach, focusing on the supervisor's complex position, our dissertation points at the substantial difference between supervisor supportive behaviors and supervisor support as perceived by the employee. As they do not necessarily coincide, future empirical investigations should distinguish between them. Our dissertation also offers insights into how the supervisors' self-reported support is related to the team they supervise. Future research should further focus on the reasoning underlying the supervisor's self-reported support for work-life issues.

Finding new insights by unpacking supervisor support conceptually

In the work-life literature, the notion of supervisor support is used to refer to many specific types of support, such as perceived emotional support for work-life issues (Anderson et al., 2002; Behson, 2002; Hill et al., 2016) or more in general (Frone et al., 1997), and different family supportive supervisor behaviors, such as role modeling behavior (Hammer et al., 2007; 2009; 2011). Most of the studies only look at one single type of supervisor support (for an exception, see Hammer et al., 2007; 2009; 2011). If more than one type is included, the focus is mostly put on the employees' perceived supervisor support, leaving the supervisor's self-reported support out of consideration. Such a limited view on supervisor support

however downplays the complexity of this concept. The studies in this dissertation fill this gap by integrating the wide array of meanings of supervisors support: in chapter 1, perceived emotional supervisor support in general terms was investigated. In chapter 2, perceived emotional supervisor support for work-life issues as well as family supportive supervisor behaviors were studied. In chapter 3, the supervisor's supportive attitude towards teleworking was the central focus. We carefully selected each specific type of supervisor support, based on the theoretical grounds of each chapter. The differentiation between types of supervisor support allowed us to model different paths between this support and the employees' work-to-life conflict, and the specific impact of each type of support along these paths. Based on this differentiation, we could also identify specific behaviors able to affect the employees' work-to-life conflict. Thus, by clearly defining the different types of supervisor support, we could gain a better view on the exact relationship between different types of supervisor support, their antecedents and the impact on work-to-life conflict. We advise researchers to further investigate different types of supervisor support, from the perspective of the supervisor as well as the employees.

Shedding light on the development of supervisor support and its perceptions, and on the relationship between this support and work-to-life conflict

In chapter 1 and 2, perceived supervisor support was found to be central for diminishing work-to-life conflict. This confirms the findings in numerous prior studies (e.g. Byron, 2005; Frone et al., 1997; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Kelly et al., 2008; Michel et al., 2011; Muse & Pichler, 2011). Because of its link with work-to-life conflict, it is important to look at the elements that may contribute to the development of perceived supervisor support. This information is also crucial for practice, for organizations and supervisors who want to increase the perceived supervisor support among their employees. Yet, research on this topic is currently lacking (Epstein et al., 2015; Straub, 2012). In chapter 2, we filled this gap by examining the relationship between self-reported supervisor support and perceived supervisor support. The findings from this study elucidate how perceived supervisor support develops in various ways. Nonetheless, the results of our studies indicate that additional antecedents may

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be important. Thus, future research should further investigate the relationship between the supervisor and perceived supervisor support, but also look at additional antecedents.

Because of the possible influence on employees, it is also important to look at the antecedents of self-reported supervisor support, so that organizations can promote this behavior, for instance by altering the context in which supervisors operate or by providing supervisor training. Nonetheless, not much is known about these antecedents (Kossek et al., 2010; Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Straub, 2012). Moreover, Straub (2012) specifies that most of the research on the antecedents of supervisor support focuses on the supervisor's work-life policy allowance decisions (e.g. McCarthy et al., 2010; Poelmans & Beham, 2008), and that research on supervisor support more in general remains rare. In chapter 3, we looked at a some team-level antecedents of supervisor support, which allowed us to better understand how these elements impact on the supervisor's support for work-life issues. The findings indicate that additional antecedents may also interfere in the supervisor's supportive behaviors. Thus, we recommend to further investigate the impact of the team and other relevant (f)actors (see 2.2) on the supervisor's support in future research.

Finally, this dissertation sheds light on the relationship between supervisor support and the employee's work-to-life conflict. First, the finding that perceived supervisor support is related to a reduced work-to-life conflict (see chapter 1 and 2), is in line with previous studies (e.g. the meta-review of Michel et al., 2011). Second, we also investigated the relationship between supervisor supportive behaviors – self-reported by the supervisor – and work-to-life conflict, which is currently under-investigated in existing research. We recommend researchers to further look at how self-reported supervisor behaviors and employees' work-to-life conflict are intertwined.

2.2.   *Contextualizing supervisor support for work-life issues*

The emergence of and dealings with work-life issues transcends the individual employee. This dissertation stresses the potential impact of one of the elements transcending the individual employee by focusing on supervisor support for the employee's work-life issues. Nonetheless, also the supervisor does not (re-)act in a vacuum, as we already clarified in the previous point by referring to, for

instance, the team's context. Many other (f)actors are potentially influencing the employee, interacting with the supervisor in a complex constellation. In this section, we discuss these (f)actors and the position of the supervisor vis-à-vis them. We will consecutively elaborate on the individual employee, the employee's co-workers, clients and patients, the organization, job dimensions, employee's work-life policy use and the national (legal) context.

The individual employee

Many studies investigate work-life issues through the lens of the individual (Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004). For instance, research found that employees' personality and their coping mechanisms are related to work-to-life conflict; negative affect and neuroticism increase work-to-life conflict, while internal locus of control (i.e. the extent to which an individual attributes the cause of events to internal factors) and problem focused coping appear to decrease it (Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Michel et al., 2011). Research also repeatedly demonstrated the existence of individual preferences for segmenting or integrating work and non-work roles (Ashfort et al., 2000; Derks et al., 2016; Kreiner et al., 2009; Rothbard et al., 2005). Furthermore, individual differences were found for coping with role conflict, work/family centrality and for work/family interest (Bagger et al., 2014; Hakim, 2006; Michel et al., 2011). Often, these differences are explained by referring to gender, with women being expected to prioritize non-work (more precisely: family) and men work (Michel et al., 2011; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010), leading to different experiences of conflict between the work and the life domain (Blanch & Aluja, 2012; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Michel et al., 2011).

These individual differences should however be placed against the broader context, where the supervisor still plays an important role. Studies integrating both individual-level and supervisor-level elements offer a more complex and complete view. For instance, De Hauw (2014) found that personal coping strategies are important to deal with work-home balance, but that these strategies can be promoted by the supervisor. Research along similar lines suggested that the employees' behaviors to manage the boundary between the work and non-work domain and their preference for boundary management (as separator, integrator or alternating) are influenced by the supervisor and the broader organizational context (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). Individuals' socio-demographic

characteristics are often hypothesized to be important, but evidence is inconclusive (Michel et al., 2011). In our studies too, the employee's gender, age, partnership, care for dependents and having children were not significantly related to work-to-family conflict (chapter 1) and work-to-life conflict (chapter 2), while a significant relationship between perceived supervisor support and work-to-life conflict was found.

The interplay between the supervisor and the individual employee is the central focus of some perspectives that have been applied to the work-life domain. For instance, the person-supervisor fit theory (Kristof, 1996) – as a form of person-environment fit, also applied to work-life issues (e.g. Derks et al., 2015; Kreiner, 2006) – states that the fit between the individual employee and the supervisor (in terms of personal characteristics, values, interests and leadership style) leads to positive outcomes, such as supervisor satisfaction, job satisfaction, supervisor commitment, organizational commitment and performance (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; van Vianen, 2000). Person-supervisor fit was found to be a moderator between individual stress and work-family conflict, able to reduce the impact of stress on this conflict (Chu, 2014). Another interesting perspective to investigate the simultaneous role of the individual and the supervisor is the leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Based on this theory, the quality of the relationship between the supervisor and the employee was found to be related to positive outcomes such as dealing with work-life issues (Major & Morganson, 2011) and a reduced work-to-life conflict (Bernas & Major, 2000; Golden, 2006; Major et al., 2008).

Future research should look more in detail at the relationship between individual characteristics and supervisor support. For instance, it would be interesting to study the dynamics underlying the impact of supervisor support on work-life issues among women and men, and among employees with and without children or other dependents, often hypothesized – but not clearly found – to differ (Drummond et al., 2017; Frye & Breaugh, 2004; Grandey et al., 2005; Hammer et al., 2005; Michel et al., 2011). This hypothesis is based on the finding that women and employees with children are affected more strongly by social support than men and employees without children (Tang et al., 2014), suggesting that gender or having (no) children could function as a moderator between supervisor support and work-life issues (Drummond et al., 2017). It would also be useful to

investigate the supervisor-employee relationship with regards to work-life issues through the lens of person-supervisor fit theory and leader-member exchange theory. Furthermore, job demands-resources theory can be a valuable perspective to clarify why individuals experience job demands related to the supervisor differently, such as a teleworking supervisor. Some might consider the supervisor's teleworking as a hindrance stressor – causing negative effects –, while others experience the same demand as a challenge stressor (e.g. willing to prove themselves) (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011), consequently relating to negative and positive effects in the work-life domain.

Co-workers

In the work-life domain, employees may not only experience (a lack of) supervisor support, but also co-worker support. Similar to supervisor support, co-worker support can take various forms. Many studies focus on co-worker support for work-life policies, revealing that co-workers are able to stimulate employees to actually use work-life policies, or on the contrary, may pressure them to refrain from using them (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Kossek et al., 1999). Perceptions of injustice may lead co-workers to be jealous and therefore unsupportive towards work-life policy users (Golden, 2007). These perceptions of injustice are based on the idea that they do not receive the same benefits as work-life policy users, have to take over work-life policy users' tasks and are more often charged with unpleasant jobs, including business trips and late shifts (Golden, 2007; Grover & Crooker, 1995; Kossek et al., 1999). Especially when flexible work arrangements are mobilized as idiosyncratic deals – i.e. as "special terms of employment negotiated between individual workers and their employers [..] that satisfy both parties' needs" (Rousseau et al., 2006:977) this can lead to resentment of co-workers who are not entitled to these arrangements (Gajendran et al., 2015). In teams where employees are highly interdependent, co-workers may be reluctant to support work-life initiatives such as teleworking, because they fear that such initiatives cause employees to be less available for meetings (Thompson, 2008). Co-workers can also offer emotional support for work-life issues more in general, for instance by showing concern for the employee, or may provide practical support by taking over certain tasks when the employee experiences personal problems (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011). Meta-analyses

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demonstrated that this co-worker support is able to reduce the individual employee's work-to-life conflict (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). This is confirmed by our findings presented in chapter 1, where we found that co-worker support is important for reducing work-to-family conflict, next to supervisor support.

Even though there is ample research demonstrating the important role of co-workers for the individual's experience of work-life issues, their role should be taken into consideration alongside the role of the supervisor. Studies – also ours – demonstrated that the supervisor may intervene in the co-workers' impact on employees. For instance, supervisors can counter the co-workers' negative reactions towards work-life policy use by openly communicating about their allowance decisions, monitoring the impact of work-life policy use on the team's functioning and output, and by setting up a back-up system of available employees (Kossek, 2016). We clearly remember one of the supervisors we interviewed saying that she re-distributed the tasks of employees on parental leave among the other team members, which – undoubtedly – may lead to negative feelings among those other team members. This suggests that supervisors and co-workers should be seen as complementary sources for employees' work-life issues.

Most studies distinguish between the role of the supervisor and that of co-workers for employees' work-life issues. However, it is not always possible to separate them. Next to the formally assigned supervisor, also peer co-workers can exhibit leadership. The concept of shared leadership (Yukl, 1998) – referring to the fact that the team members have some degree of leadership –, as opposed to classical leadership by an individual in a formal position of authority, blurs the strict demarcation between supervisor and co-workers (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Research about the role of shared leadership in the employee's work-life issues is still inconclusive. Some authors state that it must have a beneficial effect, because it gives employees autonomy and allows them to manage their own workload, leading to team effectiveness (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Other research points at the possible negative consequences of shared leadership, due to the peer pressure, expectations of presence and new responsibilities it may imply (Batt & Valcour, 2003). Although further research is needed on this point, a recent study, Sexton and colleagues (2017) found a positive team work climate – with 'team' referring

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to the supervisor as well as the colleagues – to be associated with individual employee's favorable work-life balance behaviors, such as arriving home from work on time.

Even though a team-based view may be useful, we also plead for the use of separate measures for supervisor support and co-worker support in future research – next to global measures – as global measures obscure the potential differences between supervisor support and co-worker support. Indeed, in concrete situations, a supervisor may be supportive, while at least one of the co-workers is not, and vice versa. Also the literature about shared leadership stresses that even when leadership is distributed, there is still a vertical leader involved in the team (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Thus, we advise researchers to further investigate the role of the formally appointed supervisor, also in the case of shared types of leadership.

It is important to mention that some employees may have several supervisors. This is for instance the case in one of the organizations involved in our study, which had a matrix structure. Hospital nurses are also often supervised by multiple 'leaders', such as their superior (e.g. head nurse) and one or more physicians (Varma et al., 2016). The picture becomes even more complex knowing that employees may also consider other persons in the organization as leaders, other than their peer co-workers and (formally) appointed supervisor(s) (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Thus, based on these insights, we suggest future research to look beyond the supervisor-co-worker dyad, to take into consideration different 'levels' of supervision and the interaction between the actors at these levels.

Clients and patients

Even though having contacts with clients and patients may be considered as resources, in the work-life literature, they are often found to be demands, potentially hampering the employees' dealings with work-life issues. For instance, in the health care sector, emotional charge due to patient contact was found to be related to increased work-family conflict (Cortese et al., 2010). Along the same lines, pressure to convey appropriate emotions, negative patients' interactions, potential safety risks due to aggressive patients and dealing with death were identified as demands (Mann, 2004; Varma et al., 2016), potentially relating to poor work-life balance and associated problems. In other sectors, clients may

expect employees to be constantly available, even after the official working hours. This expectation may be very hindering, also because it collides with work-life policies, such as schedule flexibility or part-time work (Blair-Loy, 2009; Evans, 2000). Moreover, because of their contacts with clients and patients, some employees are not allowed to use work-life policies, which may lead to jealousy towards co-workers who do have access (Golden, 2007).

Also here, the supervisor may influence the negative relationship between client and patient contacts and work-life balance, for instance by supporting work-life policy users to block client contacts when they are not officially working or by giving (almost) every employee the opportunity to work at home – even for less obvious occupations, such as reception staff (Blair-Loy, 2009; Evans, 2000). In our dissertation, the role of patient and client contacts was only discussed indirectly. For instance, one of the supervisors we interviewed told us how clients in the food service industry clearly expected employees to be always available, especially for stock replenishment. In this specific case, the supervisor agreed with his clients, for fear of losing customers. It would be interesting to further explore the relationship between (contacts with) clients and patients and work-life issues among employees, and the role of supervisors at this level.

The organization

The organization also has a role to play in the individual employee's dealing with work-life issues. For instance, organizations may offer instrumental support by implementing formal work-life policies, such as flextime. Work-life policies provided by the organization may be considered as "the most visible indicators of a family-responsible workplace" (Poelmans & Beham, 2008:39), but there are also other ways for organizations to appear 'family-friendly', to project a 'work-family culture' or to be perceived by employees as 'supportive' for work-life issues (these concepts appear to be used more or less interchangeably) (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999; Valcour et al., 2011). When employees experience a face time culture, a long hours culture, are expected to be available even after the official working hours, feel forced to put work before family to get promotion and experience negative career consequence for taking up work-life policies (Allard et al., 2011; Allen, 2001; Hyman et al., 2003; Sahibzada et al., 2005; Thompson & Prottas, 2005; Valcour et al., 2011), organizations clearly lack this supportive

culture. Notably a work-family culture and organizational support were found to be related to reduced work-to-family conflict (Michel et al., 2011).

Many studies more or less explicitly consider supervisor support as part of a supportive organizational culture (e.g. Bond & Wise, 2003; Hyman et al., 2003; Sahibzada et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 1999). Even though it is debatable whether supervisor support should be considered as an element of organizational support (see further on), there are good reasons to assume at least a link between both. First, supervisor supportive behaviors towards employees were found to be related to a supportive organizational culture (Capece & Akers, 1995; Casper et al., 2002; Frear et al., 2017; Nord & Littrell, 1990). Specific organizational supportive actions that appeared to be associated with supervisor support, include the organization's openness towards work-life issues and focus on long term goals, instrumental support and an adapted evaluation, assessment and reward system (Lauzun et al., 2010; Straub, 2012). Second, the supervisor is also expected to implement organizational initiatives in his or her team, such as the organization's decisions to introduce teleworking for all employees. Third, employees may perceive their supervisor as a vehicle of the organization culture, in line with the idea of Schein (2010) that leaders – including supervisors – function as embedders and transmitters of the organizational culture. Also organizational support theory states that employees' general perception of the supportiveness of the organization is not only influenced by the organization, but also by the supervisor who is seen by employees as the organization's agent (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This is supported by the finding that organizational support and a family supportive organizational culture on the one hand and supervisor support – as perceived by the employees – on the other hand correlate positively (Foley et al., 2006; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Tuzun & Kalemci, 2012). In our study too, as shown in chapter 3, we found an indication for the existence of a link between the organization and the supervisor. More precisely, the supervisor's attitude towards teleworking appeared to be more positive in commercial organizations (fast moving consumer goods and telecommunication) than in public ones (higher education and public sector). Possibly, the private organizations we included in our study are characterized by a more supportive culture than the public organizations, focusing on autonomy, output evaluation and less bureaucracy –

which is very compatible with teleworking (Felstead et al., 2002) –, facilitating the supervisor to be supportive towards teleworking.

Even though the role of the organization and the supervisor seem to be interrelated when it comes to employees' work-life issues, this does not mean that both coincide. In line with the literature focusing on workplace social support, we argue that supervisor support and organizational support should be considered as two distinct sources of support (Li et al., 2017). After all, the organization's influence on the supervisor does not exclude him or her from being an agent with individual intentions, preferences and responsibilities. An organization will not succeed in successfully implementing a work-life policy, unless the supervisor offers the necessary support (den Dulk & Peper, 2007; Lyness & Kropf, 2005; Warren & Johnson, 1995). Sometimes, employees perceive their supervisor as supportive, while the organization is not perceived as such. The supervisor may even create 'informal' flexible arrangements when the organization does not offer formal options (Anderson et al., 2002; Hammer et al., 2009).

In other terms, organizational support is important for employees' work-life issues, but may be less effective when the supervisor is not supportive. Probably, just like organizational support is not as effective without supervisor support, supervisor support will also not have the desired effect without a supportive organization. Future research on this complex relationship is needed, including – for instance – the organizations' role in shaping supervisors' support for work-life issues.

Job dimensions

Organizations are also important for employees' work-life issues because of the type of jobs they offer (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). Irregular working schedules, working in free time, weekend work, night shifts, long hours, work variability, frequent stress events, intensity of work and work overload were repeatedly found to be job demands related to employees' work-to-life conflict or poor work-life balance (e.g. Beigi et al., 2012; Eurofound, 2017; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; McRea et al., 2001; Michel et al., 2011; Simon et al., 2004). Also having frequent contacts with clients or patients – which we discussed above – is considered as a demanding job dimension (Blair-Loy, 2009). In line with previous research, we found overtime hours (chapter 1) and work overload (chapter 1 and

2) to be related to work-to-family conflict. Based on our findings, we argue that the supervisor also interferes in how job dimensions affect employees' work-life issues. First, the supervisor is able to directly influence some of these job dimensions, such as work overload, for instance because of their (co-) determination of the work design (Bakker et al., 2003). Supervisor support also has a more indirect role to play, as a buffer between job dimensions and work-to-life conflict (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999). Indeed, based on the job demands-resources perspective, supervisor support can be expected to function as resource, able to soften the impact of job demands, such as work overload (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Also in chapter 2 we modeled a more complex relationship between supervisor support, employee's work overload and work-to-life conflict. We found work overload to function as a mediator between specific supposedly family supportive supervisor behaviors and work-to-life conflict. Moreover, in chapter 1, supervisor support appeared be related to the employee's diminished work-to-family conflict, even after controlling for job dimensions, including work overload and overtime hours. This is in line with previous research (e.g. Carlson & Perrewé, 1999) in which job dimensions and supervisor support were found to be independent antecedents of work-family conflict. The employee's job dimensions may also be altered under the influence of the supervisor's work-life policy use. In our study in chapter 2, we found that personal supervisor use of work-life policies was related to an increased work overload, leading to work-to-life conflict among the employees. Maybe this effect may be explained by the incompatibility of this use with the organization of the team's work, or by the lack of approachability of the supervisor. Our data did not allow to gain further insight in the processes underlying this relationship. Future research should look further in to the impact of the supervisors' work-life policy use for the employees working with them. Moreover, researchers should look at the differential effects of specific work-life policies (McCarthy et al., 2013). For instance, when the supervisor is working part-time, this may affect the employees in other way than when he or she is working with a flexible hours regime. More in general, the complex relationship between the role of the supervisor and work dimensions in employees' work-life issues should be further investigated.

Work-life policy use

Organizations can be supportive towards employees via their culture and the jobs they offer, but also by offering work-life policies. The literature often considers the provision of work-life policies as a type of organizational support signaling a supportive work-life culture (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999; Valcour et al., 2011). A clear distinction should be made between the presence of work-life policies and the actual use of these policies. Even though the use of these policies has often been expected to be a panacea to resolve the employee's troubles with combining work and non-work demands (Allen, 2001), findings remain inconclusive (e.g. Michel et al., 2011). Also in this dissertation, in chapter 1, we found no significant relationship between the employee's use of available work-life policies (childcare assistance, schedule flexibility and part-time work), while perceived supervisor support appeared to reduce work-to-family conflict. Possibly, it is not the mere use, but the perceived availability of such work–life policies that represents a resource for employees (Behson, 2005; Jones et al., 2008; Wayne et al., 2006). Also, employees actually using work-life policies may experience negative consequences. For instance, part-time workers often indicate that they have to do the same amount of work in fewer paid hours, leading to perceptions of work intensification (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). This brings us back to the central role of the supervisor, who is often considered as the gatekeeper for these policies (Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Straub, 2012). Our findings in chapter 3 confirm the role of the supervisor as a gatekeeper for telework. By making work-life policies available – for instance by re-organizing the team, re-distributing the individual employee's tasks and alleviating the possible negative (career) consequences associated with work-life policy use –, supervisors may signal to employees that they care about their work-life balance (Budd & Mumford, 2006; Mark et al., 2011; Valcour et al., 2011). Also the concepts of *New Ways of Work* or *New Ways of Working* (Peters et al., 2014; ten Brummelhuis et al., 2012) stress the need to re-organize work (e.g. by offering telework) in order to improve employees' work outcomes, but also the importance of "a shift to trust relationships" (Peters et al., 2014:277) between the employee and the supervisor.

Future research should investigate the function of work-life policies for employees' work-life issues, and their interaction with the supervisor's role, as they are also expected to be an important tool for organizations, enabling them

to express their concern about their employees, in line with the statements of organizational support theory (Baran et al., 2012; Hill, 2005; Leineweber et al., 2014; Michel et al., 2011; Valcour et al., 2011).

Policy at the state level

Many countries try to support employees by legally introducing work-life policies. In Belgium – where the data of this dissertation was collected – the provision of work-life policies at the state level is rather comprehensive. For instance, Belgian legislation provides protection to part-time workers, the right to take up parental and carer's leave (for most employees) and maternity and paternity leave, often inspired on European regulations[11]. Since recently, the so-called 'Peeters Law'[12] allows for occasional teleworking (homeworking) in cases of force majeure. The same law also offers a statutory framework for a flexible hours system in organizations and simplifies the administration for part-time workers. Next to providing and supporting work-life policies, Belgian legislation also protects employees' work-life balance, for instance by prohibiting night work (even though there are exceptions) and by ensuring paid annual leave[13] (De Groof, 2016). It should be noted that legal initiatives aimed at improving the employees' work-life balance also appear to be in contradiction with current trends towards a more flexible deployment of employees, based on the organization's fluctuating needs of work. For instance, the recent 'Peeters Law' incorporates both the employees' (work-life) needs by supporting 'workable work' (*werkbaar werk*) and the employers' need to remain competitive[14] by guaranteeing 'agile work' (*wendbaar*

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[11] See for instance Directive 2010/18/EU; K.B. 29 oktober 1997 tot invoering van een recht op ouderschapsverlof in het kader van de onderbreking van de beroepsloopbaan, *B.S.* 7 november 1997; A.R. du 29 octobre 1997 relatif à l'introduction d'un droit au congé parental dans le cadre d'une interruption de la carrière professionnelle, *M.B.* 7 novembre, 1997; K.B. 10 augustus 1998 tot invoering van een recht op loopbaanonderbreking voor bijstand of verzorging van een zwaar ziek gezins- of familid. *B.S.* 8 september 1998; A.R. du 10 août 1998 instaurant un droit à l'interruption de carrière pour l'assistance ou l'octroi de soins à un membre du ménage ou de la famille gravement malade, *M.B.* 8 septembre, 1998.
[12] Wet 5 maart 2017 betreffende werkbaar en wendbaar werk, *B.S.* 15 maart 2017; Loi du 5 mars 2017 concernant le travail faisable et maniable, *M.B.* 15 mars 2017.
[13] See for instance: Wet 3 juli 1978 betreffende de arbeidsovereenkomsten, *B.S.* 22 augustus; Loi du 3 juillet 1978 relative aux contrats de travail, *M.B.* 22 août 1978.
[14] Wetsontwerp betreffende werkbaar en wendbaar werk, *Parl.St.* Kamer, 2016-17, nr. 2247/001; Projet de loi concernant le travail faisable et maniable, *Doc. parl.* Chambre, 2016-17, n° 2247/001.

werk), for instance by allowing the employer to adjust working time and time tables for organizational reasons.

It is often the supervisor who has to deal with the practical implementation of this legislation. In its recent report, the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (2017) stresses the important role of supervisors for creating workable work and their need to receive support in doing so. For instance, even when an employee works fewer hours (e.g. in case of part-time work or parental leave), the productivity goals remain often unaltered, forcing supervisors to invest in the training of a replacement, re-distribute the work among the employee's co-workers, or increase their personal workload. In the case of teleworking – which basically does not decrease the number of hours worked – the supervisor may fear negative consequences such as work disruption, also because of the lack of control (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008; Dimitrova, 2003; Kossek et al., 2006; Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010). Our findings in chapter 3 confirm that supervisors take into account the disruptive impact of teleworking on the team's work, but we also found dependency arguments to be important, possibly neutralizing the supervisor's negative attitude towards teleworking.

Also, supervisors may experience legislation in the work-life domain as an obstacle, complicating their personal initiative to support employees' work-life balance. The literature demonstrates that supervisors may also support their employees by offering informal and creative work-life solutions (Hammer et al., 2007; 2009). The need to register the employee's working hours (also repeated by the Peeters Law as a necessary condition for the introduction of a flexible hours system) conflicts with the supervisor's creative solutions, such as informal flexible hours or informal teleworking. Still, even when legislation hinders supervisors in taking informal initiatives, they still can call on other types of support (e.g. formal work-life policy allowance and emotional support) to help their employees (Hammer et al., 2007; 2009).

In sum, policies at the state level aimed at improving employees' work-life balance might have negative side-effects without the supervisor's support, but the supervisor also depends on these policies. The finding of Abendroth and den Dulk (2011) that state support for work-life issues is unrelated to the extent of supervisor support in organizations, is illustrative in that regard. Further research

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is needed to elucidate the complex relationship between supervisor support and legislation and other national policy initiatives.

To conclude, in this dissertation, we investigated the role of a considerable number of antecedents of employees' work-to-life conflict, including perceived supervisor support, specific family supportive supervisor behaviors, perceived co-worker support, work overload, overtime hours and other job dimensions and work-life policy use. Taken together, the results point at the central role of supervisor support, but also reveal that we did not include all potentially relevant (f)actors for the employees' work-to-life conflict (see for instance the low ICC(1) value for work-to-life conflict in chapter 2), which is no surprise given the complexity of the phenomenon. Thus, future research should build further on the central role of supervisor support by complementing these (f)actors with other potential antecedents of work-to-life conflict. The (f)actors discussed in this point may be relevant to study in that context, but also other elements we did not consider, such as the influence of the unions in contexts, such as the Belgian one, where they are largely present and play a clear institutional role. For instance, one of the supervisors we interviewed told us how he felt forced to refuse his team members to telework because the union representatives in his organization considered telework as incompatible with work time registration, which they considered a form of protection for employees.

3. Methodological contributions and limitations

The empirical studies of this dissertation are based on different methods of data collection, which yielded survey data and qualitative data gathered by face-to-face interviews. A specific contribution of our dissertation is the collection of matched survey data among supervisors and their employees (chapter 2), analyzed using multilevel analysis, which meets the call of several researchers (e.g. Baran et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2016; Kossek et al., 2011; Li et al., 2017). Studies on the supervisor's role in work–life issues are often one-dimensional, only focusing on the perspective of the employee, leading to an incomplete and

one-sided view. Our dissertation filled this gap by confronting the supervisor's and the employees' perspective. Future research should further use matched data sets to gain an accurate insight in the dynamics between the supervisor and employees in the work-life domain.

Another strength of our study is the use of a mixed-method approach to understand the relationship between the supervisors' support and its antecedents. We first generated quantitative evidence, which we further interpreted more in depth by focusing on the reasoning from the supervisor's perspective. Such an approach is also put forward in the literature (e.g. Poelmans & Beham, 2008), but very often lacking. Because of the more accurate insights to which a mixed method approach can lead (Cameron & Molina-Azorin, 2011; Kelle, 2006), we advise researchers to opt for a similar approach in future studies on the supervisors' support for work-life issues.

Our dissertation also demonstrates the importance of studying the simultaneous impact of different antecedents on work-to-life conflict. For instance, former studies focusing on the impact of work-life policy use on the employees' experience of work-to-life conflict came to inconclusive results, which may be due to the fact that this work-life policy use is looked at as an isolated factor, disregarding the context in which these policies are embedded (Bond et al., 2002; Grzywacz et al., 2008; Hill et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2008; Munir et al., 2012; O'Driscoll et al., 2003). Nonetheless, this claim is mainly a hypothetical one, since empirical research has to date not assessed the relative effect of multiple sources of work-to-life conflict, as it is often limited to one or two types of predicting factors. In chapters 1 and 2, we selected several antecedents, including the allowance and use of work-life policies, but also the employees' job dimensions, and studied its relationship with the employees' work-to-life conflict. We came to the conclusion that informal social support (supervisor and co-worker support) and job dimensions play a more important role than work-life policy use and access. Nonetheless, this is only a first step in modeling more complex relationships between supervisor support and other potential antecedents of employee's work-life issues, as several other (f)actors may interfere in the individual employee's work-life issues, as we discussed in the previous point (see 2.2). Specifically for work-to-life conflict, we therefore recommend to further

investigate the role of several antecedents, adding complexity to the factors relating to this conflict.

We should also acknowledge that the context of Belgium is specific, which impacts the external validity of our data towards other countries characterized by – amongst others – another culture, legislation and relationship between employers and employees (Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004). Vice versa, findings from previous research may not always be applicable to supervisor in the Belgian context. For instance, Peters and den Dulk (2003) argue that the supervisor's attitude towards teleworking may depend on the supervisor's willingness to deal with uncertainty and to delegate power, which they consider as cultural aspects at the national level. The differences between countries – also illustrated by the wide variability in country scores on the work-life balance Index[15] of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – urge work-life researchers to integrate the national context and set up comparative cross-national studies (Poelmans et al., 2003), also when focusing on supervisor support. Ideally, also non-western countries should be included in such studies: while many work-life studies focus on Europe, the UK and the USA, the role of the supervisor may be different in collectivistic societies, where supervisor support is expected to be more important than in more individualistic societies (Drummond et al., 2017).

Another methodological limitation of our study is that we used a cross sectional design, which makes it less evident to draw conclusions on causal relationships. Even though many other studies on similar topics were based on the same design (Epstein et al., 2015; Giallonardo et al., 2010; McCarthy et al., 2013; Simon et al., 2004), future studies could be based on longitudinal designs. For the qualitative part of our study, we only interviewed supervisors in four organizations. It would be interesting to do matching interviews with the employees working with these supervisors, to gain a better insight in the role of team-level elements for supervisor supportive behavior. Moreover, employee interviews would be useful to further explain how perceived supervisor support develops, which we also identified as an important scientific gap.

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[15] See: http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/ (last consulted on 17 April 2018)

4. Contributions to policy and practice

Our study makes several contributions to policy and practice. Because of the specific focus of this dissertation, we mainly propose interventions at the organizational and team-level, focusing on the supervisor. First, based on our findings, organizations should offer interventions enabling supervisors to be supportive and remove barriers for this support (4.1). Next, we advise organizations to involve the supervisor in the design and the implementation of its work-life policy (4.2). Third, it is important that organizations tackle the negative effects of its work-life policy on individual employees, taking into account the team's context (4.3). Fourth, we encourage organizations to carefully consider employees' work overload when tackling work-life issues (4.4). A last area of intervention concerns the promotion of a flexible work time culture (4.5.).

4.1. *Providing tools to supervisors and removing barriers*

The study in chapter 2 stresses the importance of the supervisor's self-reported supportive behaviors, which were found to be related to important employee outcomes, such as work overload, their perception of supervisor support and work-to-life conflict. Based on our findings, we recommend organizations to offer interventions enabling the supervisor to demonstrate supportive behaviors for work-life issues and to remove barriers hindering them from being supportive, which is in line with the advice of other authors (e.g. Kossek et al., 2010; Straub, 2012). Organizational support for the supervisor is especially important, as it was found that supervisors who feel supported and valued by their organization are also perceived as more supportive towards employees, because supervisors would reciprocate the organizational support they experience (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

In chapter 3, we studied some of the factors which organizations can focus on to enable supervisors to be supportive – and more precisely supportive towards teleworking –, and we came to the conclusion that organizations should alleviate the disruptive impact of task interdependence. As a New Way of Work (Peters et al., 2014), telework explicitly needs the organization's support, since it makes many supervisors experience a loss of control, power and status (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). In that line of reasoning, organizations should also be prepared to

adopt other types of leadership, such as shared leadership or less 'classic' vertical types of leadership, such as 'empowering' or 'transformational' leadership, which are believed to reduce the employee's work-to-life conflict (Anderson & Sun, 2017; Munir et al., 2012; Pearce & Sims, 2002). In order to alleviate the disruptive impact of work-life policies (teleworking and others), organizations should coordinate the use of work-life policies. This coordination implies that supervisors are informed about the availability of each employee in their team, that they can rely on a pool of available employees or recruit a replacement, if necessary. The organization should provide the necessary technical infrastructure (e.g. internet connection at home), enabling employees to work efficiently while using work-life policies, but also allowing supervisors to coordinate and control their team's work. Furthermore, organizations may stimulate the supervisors' supportive attitude by pointing at the positive effects of work-life policies, for instance by monitoring the employees' performance and other outcomes, which builds on the dependency approach (see chapter 3), considering work-life policies as tools to retain valuable employees.

More in general, we advise organizations to activate their top managers to support the supervisor: top management should openly reject a face time culture, for instance by making personal use of work-life policies and by implementing evaluation and reward systems based on output instead of presence. Organizations should also be willing to reconsider job designs, sometimes hindering supervisors to be supportive, for instance in the case of a job implying a high supervisor-employee dependency. Furthermore, organizations can assist supervisors with managing their employees' work-life issues through trainings aimed at increasing the supervisor's family supportive behavior (e.g. demonstrating them new ways of evaluating and rewarding, learning them how to deal with work-life policy users), which are effective in diminishing the individual employee's work-to-life conflict (Hammer et al., 2015; Thompson, 2008). By focusing more on supervisor and management skills already in education, this could provide supervisors with a more solid basis when entering the workforce (Social and Economic Council of Flanders, 2017). Finally, we advise the organization to make supervisors personally accountable for supporting their employees by evaluating and rewarding them for their actual work-life support.

4.2.   Involving the supervisor in the design and implementation of an organizational work-life policy

In our dissertation, we found that supervisors function as sources of support for employees' work-life issues. The literature also refers to their key position as 'enablers' (Thompson, 2008) and 'gatekeepers' for work-life policies (Bond & Wise, 2003; Powell & Mainiero, 1999). Even though organizational initiatives will probably not be successful without the support of the supervisor, the supervisor also depends on the organization for supporting employees' work-life issues. This dissertation led to the conclusion that supervisors are embedded in a complex interplay of numerous (f)actors, including the organization, but also – amongst others – individual employees, the team, clients and patients, the national context, the employees' job dimensions and employees' work-life policy use. The organization should take into account the complex position of the supervisor for at least two reasons.

First, the complexity of the supervisor's position may explain why he/she is (not) supportive for work-life issues, since this position also includes potential barriers at that point. For instance, in chapter 3, we found that supervisors may fear that teleworking disrupts the team's work, especially in teams where task interdependence is high. Supervisor support – which this dissertation demonstrated to be important for employee outcomes (see chapter 1 and 2) – potentially increases when these barriers are removed. Thus, involving supervisors in the organization's work-life policy is one of the ways to enable them to be supportive and to remove the barriers they experience (see previous point). Second, supervisors may offer the organization valuable information for the design and implementation of work-life policies, as they are key informants. Their multifaceted view on employees' work-life issues enables them to identify potential risks and success factors for an organizational work-life policy.

In sum, the supervisor can inform the organization about the success factors and pitfalls for him/her personally, and about the complexity an organization's work-life policy is confronted with. Therefore, we advise organizations to keep supervisors closely involved when developing and implementing a work-life policy, and to avoid a top down approach.

***4.3.   Tackling the negative effects of the organization's work-life
policy on individual employees, embedded in a team***

We advise organizations to not only involve supervisors, but also individual employees when developing and implementing organizational work-life policies. Most of the employees in our study are part of a team, which means that they have a supervisor and co-workers. It is important to take into account the embeddedness of the individual employee in such a team, leading to dynamics with important implications for the employees' work-life issues.

First, our study reaffirms the importance of co-worker support for reducing work-to-family conflict (see chapter 1). This co-worker support may not be guaranteed, especially when work-life policies are not carefully implemented in the organization. Work-life policy use is often expected but not consistently found to reduce the employees' work-to-life conflict (see also chapter 1), possibly also because of colleagues reacting negatively. The literature and our study demonstrate that part-time workers – but also employees using other types of work-life policies implying reduced work hours – are often not replaced and that their tasks are thus re-distributed among the other team members (Raabe, 1998). Because of the scale of these re-distributed tasks, but also because of the expertise that some of these tasks require, the colleagues of employees using work-life policies may experience these extra tasks as a burden. Thus, we advise organizations to provide replacement when one of the employees is temporarily 'out of office' or working less hours. Co-workers may also find it difficult to collaborate with work-life policy users (e.g. in the case of teleworking, flexible hours and reduced working hours) because of the lack of face time with them. Therefore, organizations may set core hours and a fixed 'office day' during which all employees are required to be available. We also advise organizations to provide the necessary technical equipment, such as a user-friendly communication system facilitating team members' interactions. The organization's open communication about the possibilities for taking up work-life policies and its consequences may avoid jealousy and misunderstandings among co-workers.

Second, the study presented in chapter 2 also led to the conclusion that the supervisor's personal use of work-life policies decreases the perception of supervisor support among the employees of the team, and increases their work overload. Supervisors should not avoid to personally make use of work-life

policies, but we recommend organizations to carefully reconsider the context wherein supervisors take up these policies. For instance, the use of work-life policies may have negative implications for their employees, who may experience a lack of supervisor support because of the physical absence of their supervisor or may experience work overload, based on the feeling that the supervisor passes work on to them. To avoid these negative side-effects of the supervisor's work-life policy use, organizations can consider re-designing the jobs of supervisors. For instance, by opting for a format of shared leadership, organizations may avoid that supervisors using work-life policies are considered by employees as disruptive for the team's work.

4.4. Guaranteeing a manageable workload for employees

Many studies – including meta-analyses – looked for and found a significant positive relationship between work overload and work-to-life conflict (Boyar et al., 2003; Byron, 2005; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Michel et al., 2011; Yildirim & Aycan, 2008). This dissertation confirmed the increasing impact of work overload on work-to-life conflict, as we discussed in chapters 1 and 2. Thus, organizations should carefully consider actions to keep employees' workload manageable. Monitoring this workload is the first step in tackling it, for instance because it allows to gain insight in the jobs 'at risk'. The Social and Economic Council of Flanders (2017) pleads for financial support from the government in order to allow organizations to launch a workability survey, in which workload may be one of the topics. To reduce the employees' work overload more in general, an adapted work design in which other than core tasks are devolved to personnel with other occupational profiles may be a solution. Even though it may not be suitable for every team or for every employee (Batt & Valcour, 2003), the format of shared leadership and self-managed teams may offer a solution, increasing the employees' autonomy to direct their workload (Pearce & Sims, 2002). We also recommend organizations to intervene in the possible negative consequences of work-life policy use by the supervisor and co-workers (as discussed in the previous point) and to create a flexible work time culture – instead of a face time culture – to guarantee a manageable workload, as will be discussed in the next point.

4.5. *Creating a flexible work time culture*

The findings of this dissertation confirm the importance of perceived supervisor support as a means to diminish employees' work-to-life conflict (see chapters 1 and 2). Especially the presence of a flexible work time culture was proven to be particularly effective in stimulating the employees' perception of supervisor support. We also found that the creation of a flexible work time culture is related to decreased work overload and work-to-life conflict directly (see chapter 2). Thus, we recommend organizations to support supervisors with creating such a flexible work time culture. Organizations can adopt an evaluation and reward system based on output instead of on presence. It may also be useful to reconsider job designs. Special efforts can be made to inform supervisors reluctant to give up control about the positive outcomes of a flexible work time culture. By integrating the focus on employees' work-life balance in the organization's mission, its importance may trickle down into all layers of the organizations, including the supervisors. Finally, top managers should set an example by explicitly supporting a flexible work time culture, but also by demonstrating supportive behaviors and by rejecting a face time culture.

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ANNEX
Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Work-to-life conflict – of de moeilijkheden die het werk met zich meebrengt voor het privéleven van een individu – is een hardnekkig probleem dat tal van werknemers treft. Het is gelieerd aan negatieve uitkomsten, zoals burn-out, stress, depressie, verminderde prestaties op het werk en een lagere jobtevredenheid. Omwille van de gevolgen die *work-to-life* conflict kan teweegbrengen, trachten organisaties hierop in te grijpen, bijvoorbeeld door werk-privé maatregelen aan te bieden (zoals telewerk en flexibele uren). Nochtans blijkt het aanbieden van werk-privé maatregelen alleen niet te volstaan. In onderzoek wordt dan ook gekeken naar de mogelijke rol van sociale steun op het vlak van *work-to-life conflict*. In het bijzonder de sociale steun van de leidinggevende is een populair studieonderwerp.

Ondanks de toenemende wetenschappelijke aandacht voor het thema, bestaan nog tal van onduidelijkheden omtrent de rol van de leidinggevende op het vlak van *work-to-life* conflict bij werknemers. Bestaand onderzoek vertoont in het bijzonder volgende leemtes: 1) de rol van de leidinggevende, ten opzichte van deze van andere factoren, is onduidelijk; 2) er wordt vooral ingegaan op de emotionele component van de steun van de leidinggevende, waardoor andere vormen van steun onderbelicht blijven; 3) de nadruk ligt op steun van de leidinggevende zoals werknemers deze percipiëren, en niet op de feitelijke gedragingen van de leidinggevende en 4) er is weinig geweten over de antecedenten van deze steun.

In dit onderzoek willen we aan deze leemtes tegemoet komen op basis van drie empirische studies, die enerzijds focussen op de steun die de leidinggevende kan bieden om *work-to-life* conflict te reduceren en anderzijds op de antecedenten van deze steun. In een **eerste studie** wordt een vergelijking gemaakt tussen de gepercipieerde steun van de leidinggevende en andere antecedenten, als mogelijke bronnen om *work-to-family* conflict (als een subvorm van *work-to-life* conflict) bij werknemers te reduceren. Deze andere antecedenten zijn het gebruik van werk-privé maatregelen door de werknemer, jobdimensies en de gepercipieerde steun vanwege collega's. We voerden een hiërarchische lineaire regressieanalyse uit, gebaseerd op een online enquête bij 384

ziekenhuisverpleegkundigen. De analyse toont aan dat de steun van de leidinggevende inderdaad samenhangt met een verminderde *work-to-family* conflict bij werknemers. Dit geldt ook voor de steun van de collega's. Beide aspecten blijken bovendien zelfs na controle voor het gebruik van werk-privé maatregelen en job dimensies negatief te relateren aan *work-to-family* conflict. Beide vormen van steun mogen dan wel de belangrijkste antecedenten zijn, toch zijn ook bepaalde jobdimensies gerelateerd aan *work-to-family* conflict. Meer in het bijzonder stellen we vast dat werknemers die werkoverbelasting ondervinden en overuren presteren, meer *work-to-family* conflict ervaren dan werknemers die hier niet mee te maken krijgen.

In een **tweede studie** focussen we op de steun die de leidinggevende biedt aan werknemers, als een bron die *work-to-life* conflict kan verminderen, maar ook kan doen toenemen. Geïnspireerd op het *job demands-resources* model bestuderen we de relatie tussen vier types van ondersteunende gedragingen en *work-to-life* conflict bij werknemers, via twee mediatoren: steun van de leidinggevende, gepercipieerd door werknemers (het 'gepercieerde steun pad') en werkoverbelasting, gepercipieerd door werknemers (het 'werkoverbelasting pad'). Op basis van een multilevelanalyse op gematchte datasets van 726 werknemers en hun 224 leidinggevenden vinden we gedeeltelijk bevestiging voor zowel het 'gepercipieerde steun pad' als het 'werkoverlast pad'. In de eerste plaats blijkt een cultuur waarin flexibel wordt omgegaan met werktijd, gecreëerd door de leidinggevende, samen te hangen met een verminderd *work-to-life* conflict bij werknemers. Deze relatie is direct en indirect, via een toename in de perceptie dat de leidinggevende steun biedt en een afname in de ervaren werkoverbelasting. In de tweede plaats blijkt het persoonlijke gebruik dat de leidinggevende maakt van werk-privé initiatieven, samen te hangen met een toename in *work-to-life* conflict bij werknemers. Deze relatie is eveneens direct en indirect, via een afname in de perceptie dat de leidinggevende steun biedt en een toename in de werkoverbelasting. Dit bevestigt onze hypothese dat niet alle gedragingen van de leidinggevende die verwacht worden ondersteunend te zijn, dit ook effectief zijn; sommige kunnen zelfs zorgen voor een toename in *work-to-life* conflict.

In een **derde studie** onderzoeken we de factoren op teamniveau die de houding van leidinggevenden ten aanzien van telewerk beïnvloeden. Op basis van *dependency* theorie en *work disruption* theorie onderzoeken we hoe deze attitude

gelinkt is aan, enerzijds, de potentiële onderbreking die telewerk inhoudt voor de organisatie van het werk en, anderzijds, de mate waarin leidinggevenden afhankelijk zijn van hun team om de vooropgestelde doelstellingen te bereiken. In deze studie hanteren we een *mixed method* benadering bestaande uit een kwantitatief en kwalitatief luik. Het kwantitatieve deel is gebaseerd op een hiërarchische regressieanalyse, uitgevoerd op de enquêtedata van 205 leidinggevenden uit vier Belgische organisaties. Deze analyse bevestigt de hypothese dat onderlinge taakafhankelijkheid samenhangt met een negatieve houding tegenover telewerk. De mate van afhankelijkheid van de leidinggevende van zijn of haar team speelt een modererende rol in deze relatie. Immers, leidinggevenden in teams met een hoge onderlinge taakafhankelijkheid zijn minder voorstander van telewerk, maar deze negatieve relatie is zwakker en verdwijnt zelfs als leidinggevenden zich sterk afhankelijk voelen van hun team. Om een beter zicht te krijgen op de manier waarop de attitude van de leidinggevende ten aanzien van telewerk vormt krijgt, verzamelden we kwalitatieve data aan de hand van semigestructureerde face-to-face interviews met 39 leidinggevenden. De interviews wijzen onder meer uit dat de leidinggevende redeneert in termen van wederkerigheid: het team mag gebruik maken van telewerk, op voorwaarde dat het goed presteert en blijft presteren in de toekomst. Ook blijkt dat de leidinggevende zich laat beïnvloeden door de mate waarin teamleden vervangbaar zijn, wat niet uit de statistische analyses naar voor kwam.

In de conclusie bespreken we de wetenschappelijke bijdrage van ons onderzoek. Het benadrukt het belang van de leidinggevende, als een bron van steun voor werknemers, en laat toe om deze steun in de context van andere relevante bronnen te bekijken. We formuleren eveneens aanbevelingen voor het beleid dat organisaties kunnen voeren. Zo adviseren we organisaties om leidinggevenden de nodige middelen te geven om hun werknemers te ondersteunen en om hen te betrekken bij het ontwerp en de implementatie van het werk-privé beleid op organisatieniveau. We raden organisaties ook aan om de negatieve effecten te ondervangen die werknemers kunnen ondervinden ten gevolge van het werk-privé beleid en om de nodige aandacht te hebben voor de werkdruk die ze ervaren. Tot slot adviseren we organisaties om een cultuur te promoten waarin flexibel wordt omgegaan met werktijd.