



EXPLORE SMALLER AND MEDIUM FIRMS TO ABSORB NEW KNOWLEDGE AND MANAGING FOR ADOPTION OF INNOVATION AND GROWTH

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to explore SME capacity to absorb and manage knowledge as a prior condition to the successful adoption of innovations and entrepreneurial growth. Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on the findings from more than 1,500 SME owners across regular quarterly SER Team surveys and from other large scale studies, this article examines the effects of experiential and formal knowledge on the development of SME absorptive capacity. Findings – There were significant age, educational and size effects that influence SME acquisition and assimilation of knowledge. Primarily, it is the small firms of 15 p employees that have the capacity to absorb and use new knowledge – especially those with higher educational levels and clear growth objectives. These firms are not startups but they do tend to be younger firms with younger founders. Practical implications – Given the main policy aim is the development of clusters and of knowledge-based firms, policy makers should focus on SMEs recently started by graduates or people with technical qualifications; educators need to develop technology and innovation management programmers for these firms. Originality/value – This article makes an important contribution to the identification of priorities for public SME development support

Topic Groups: Managerial and organizational cognition and psychology, Gender, diversity and social issues

INTRODUCTION

Previous research has shown that people who give high importance to both work and family domains have been shown to experience the highest levels of work-to-family and family-to-work conflict. Moreover, work-family conflict has been associated with lower satisfaction with family and work life and life in general. Assuming that a high discrepancy between a person's values and the realization of these values can be devastating to life satisfaction, it seems interesting to examine the association of the discrepancy between different types of values and their realization with work-family conflict, work satisfaction, and life satisfaction on a sample of employed men and women.

THEORY

There are numerous variations of the definition of values. Some emphasize that values are the standards based on which we evaluate ourselves and our environment (Šverko, Babarović, and Šverko, 2007). Roe and Ester (1999) define values as latent constructs that relate to the ways in which people evaluate activities and their outcomes. Other definitions emphasize that values guide the behavior of individuals. Šverko and Vizek-Vidović (1995) state that values are specific criteria of priorities that direct human behavior. Most authors believe that values are a manifestation of one's needs. Such a view is advocated by Super (1995), who clearly distinguishes values, interests, and needs, establishing a hierarchical relationship between them. According to his theory both values and interests arise from needs. Values are the goals with which we try to satisfy our needs, while interests are specific activities by which we achieve our goals or values. Thus, it can be said that career satisfaction is largely a matter of an individual comparing his / her career and life expectations with those being offered (Rose et al., 2006). This points out the need of taking the discrepancy between the importance of certain goals and their achievement into account when measuring human satisfaction with different aspects of life or different life roles.

Indeed, people hold various roles in their life, such as, for example, the role of a student, worker, parent, or citizen. Each of these roles include a line of expected behaviors. When formalized, these expected behaviors become norms. Roles can be defined as the sum of behaviors, rights, and obligations that one has to display in a given social situation (Šverko, Babarović, and Šverko, 2007). Individuals generally tend to fulfil expectations and satisfy norms, and therefore play roles. In some stages of life individuals play multiple roles at once, but all these roles are not equally important to them. Usually two or three roles are the most prominent (salient), while others are peripheral. Salient roles represent the essence of a person; they are the basis of personal identity and are essential for life satisfaction (Super, Savickas, and Super, 1996). When they are held simultaneously, different roles interact and affect each other. Roles can support or complement each other, but can also be in mutual conflict and become a source of stress when the role demands are not compatible, or when they exceed the capabilities of an individual. Since two important focal points of adult life are family and work, most research has dealt with the interaction of these two domains. For example, research showed that a happy family life correlates with high levels of job satisfaction and objective career success (Shaffer, 1987; Rose et al. 2006). In cases when the role expectations of these two domains were not compatible, most research has shown that two separate types of conflict can arise (Frone, Russell, and Cooper, 1992): conflict due to the disrupting interference of work to family life (work-to-family conflict) and conflict due

to the disrupting interference of family to work life (family-to-work conflict). These conflicts are related to outcomes such as job dissatisfaction, job burnout, and turnover, as well as to outcomes related to psychological distress, eg. depression and life and marital dissatisfaction (Frone, Yardley, and Markel, 1997; Hill, 2005; Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998).

The importance one gives to various life roles may have implications on the perceived level of work-family conflict. However, there is an insufficient number of research on values or the relative importance of gender roles and their relationships with work-family conflict. Most of these studies showed that the importance of family, measured as the degree of emotional preoccupation with family life, is positively correlated with work-to-family conflict, while the emotional preoccupation with work is positively correlated with family-to-work conflict (eg, Carlson and Kacmar, 2000, Fox and Dwyer, 1999). In other words, the distracting effects of activities such as family and home responsibilities are more pronounced the greater the importance of work is, and the distracting effects of activities that are associated with work commitments are more pronounced the more important the family is. In a research in Croatia, Šverko, Arambašić, and Galešić (2002) found that greater importance of work was associated to a higher perception of work-to-family conflict and lower perception of family-to-work conflict, while a greater importance of family life was only associated to less experienced levels of work-to-family conflict. They also found an average high importance of both family and work, while the levels of work-to-family and family-to-work conflict were relatively low.

Prior research has found that being married leads individuals to give their personal lives priority over their work lives. Similarly, being a parent increases the importance that individuals place on their family role (Rose et al., 2006, Stroh, Brett, and Reilly, 1996). When taking into account different age groups, Super (1980) states that the number of roles and their requirements change during different periods of life and that the importance of each role rises and falls in accordance with these differing developmental tasks. However, as individuals advance in age to the maturity stage of their career, they have been found to place a greater emphasis on a balance between their work and family lives that individuals place on their family roles as they age. The career satisfaction of older individuals is likely to be more negatively affected by work-family conflict than that of younger individuals (Rose et al., 2006). Cinamon and Rich (2002) found that both demographic gender and gender-role values were important to the experience of the work-family interface. Their results indicated that more men than women placed greater value on work than family and more women than men placed greater value on family than work. There were no significant differences for those in the dual category who saw work and family as being equally important. Moreover, women had a higher level and frequency of work-to-family conflict and ascribed more importance to family-to-work conflict than men.

Schwartz (1996) defines values as desirable goals that serve as guiding principles of people's lives. People want to achieve values, as relatively permanent goals, through various life roles. Due to the expectations of fulfilling their own individual values through a variety of roles and the interactions of various life roles, values can influence an individual's professional and family-related decisions. In this sense, values could at least partially determine the interference of work and family (parental, spousal, etc.) roles, while the salience (prominence) of a life role could determine the direction of work-family conflict.

According to all the previously mentioned issues and the results of previous research, the aim of this study was to examine the association of the discrepancy between different types of values and their achievement with work-family conflict, striving for achievement, work satisfaction, and life satisfaction, taking also into account gender, age, and qualification level (educational status).

Hypothesis 1: It can be expected that the two types of work-family conflicts will be increased with the increase of the discrepancy between the estimates of importance and of achievement of individual values.

Hypothesis 2: Due to the salience of roles in the domestic domain, it can be expected that this discrepancy in some, especially in work values, is higher in women than in men. These discrepancies could largely determine the conflicts between work and family roles, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction among women.

METHODS

Participants

The research was conducted on a sample of 176 employed married couples who were between the ages 20 and 64 and had at least one child living with them. The sample was chosen according to the women participants with the criteria that they were at least high-school graduates. Since the educational status of their partners was not controlled for, the average educational status of the sample of women in this study was higher than the average educational status of the male participants. Also, which could have been expected, the average age of the sample of men in this study was higher than the age of their female partners. This study employed the survey method.

Instruments

A set of questions of socio-demographic type where the respondents were asked to answer questions on sex, age, workplace (the type of work), educational status, and years of experience at the present workplace.

The Values-Achievement Scale constructed for the purpose of this study. It contains 15 items referring to specific life goals. Some examples of these items are: 'Being successful in my career', 'Having a happy family life', and 'Being a role-model for others'. The respondents were asked to assess the importance of each of these goals and their achievement on two 5-point scales (1-not important at all/not achieved at all; 5-very important/very high level of achievement).

The Work-Family Conflict Scale developed by Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996) which has been applied in some previous studies in Croatia (eg., Šimunić, 2008). It is composed of 11 items, i.e. two sets of items that differ in the direction of conflict. Therefore, 6 items measure the disruptive impact of work on family life (work-to-family conflict) and 5 items measure a disruptive influence of family on work life (family-to-work conflict), taking into account time demands and fatigue as a cause of conflict. The original scale has 12 items, but one item was excluded from the family-to-work subscale as a result of the exploratory factor analysis we conducted. The reliability of the work-to-family conflict subscale expressed by the coefficient of internal consistency was about 0.81, and of the family-to-work subscale around 0.76. The respondents were asked to express their agreement / disagreement with each item on a 7-point scale (1-strongly disagree; 7-strongly agree).

Scales of job, family, and life satisfaction were three scales on which respondents had to assess the degree of their overall satisfaction with their job, family, and life in general on a 7-point scale (1-very dissatisfied; 7-very satisfied).

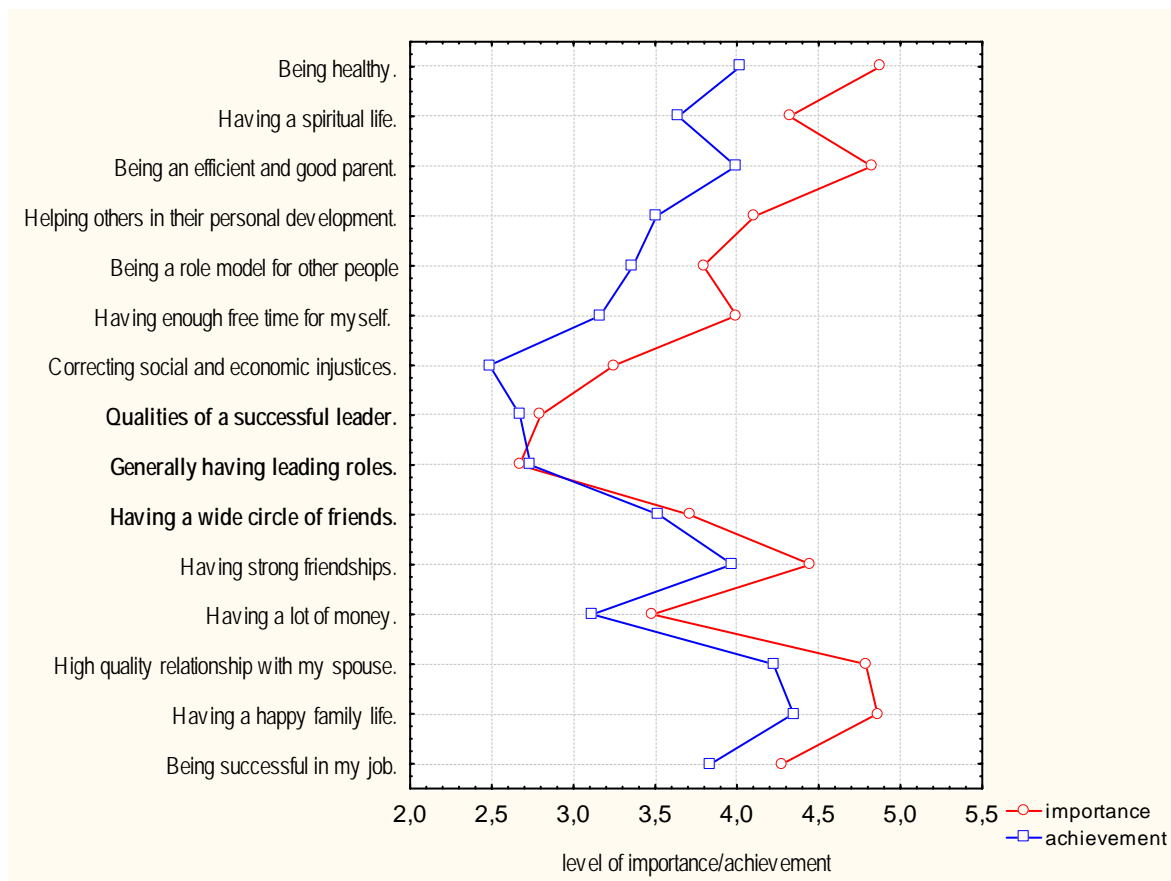
The striving for achievement was measured by a scale developed by O'Neil and his colleagues (1986; Success, Power, Competition). It contains 13 items with a 6-point

response scale (1-'strongly disagree'; 6-'strongly agree'). The content of the items includes the care for personal achievement, career development, orientation towards maintaining authority, domination and influence over others, and competing with others in order to get something or comparing oneself with others to establish superiority in a particular situation. A one-factor structure and satisfactory reliability were obtained (reliability coefficients from 0.86 to 0.89).

FINDINGS

In accordance with the main objective of this research, i.e. the examination of potential associations related to the evaluations of various life values, their achievements and possible repercussions on work-to-family conflict (WFC), family-to-work conflict (FWC), work satisfaction (WS), and life satisfaction (LS), the initial analysis included descriptive statistics of the items of The Values-Achievement Scale. Figure 1 shows the average estimates of the importance and the degree of achievement of the fifteen examined life values for all subjects included in this study.

Figure 1: A graphic profile of the arithmetic means of estimations of the importance and achievement of the examined life values



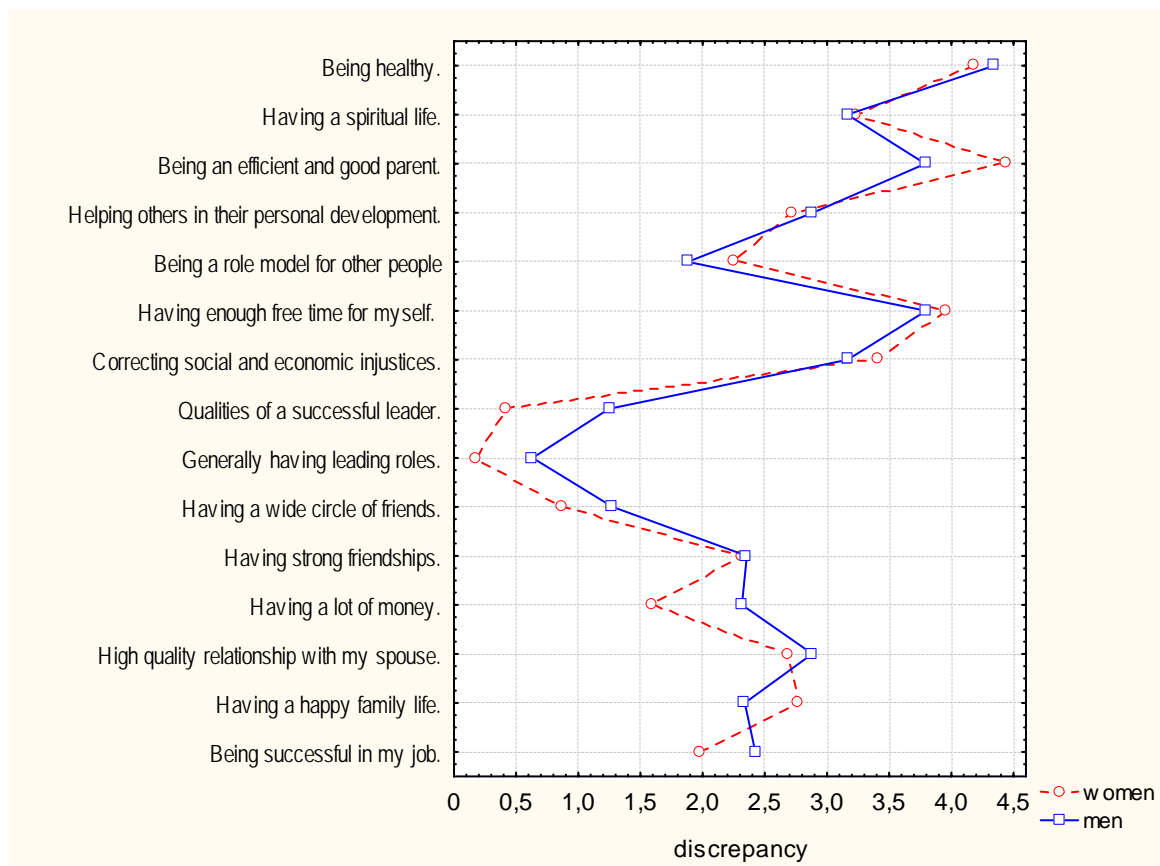
As can be seen from the results, the achievement of the measured values is significantly lower than their importance, except for three values (developing the qualities of a successful leader, having leading roles, and having a wide circle of friends) which also had a relatively low importance for the respondents. The most important and also the most achieved values are those related to health, parenting, marital and family relations, and strong friendships.

Assuming that the strength of motivation for the realization of certain values depends on their importance for the individual and the likelihood of their achievement, so-called discrepancies were calculated as a measure of this motivation strength. To compute the level of discrepancy between the importance and the achievement of different values, the distinction between the level of importance and the level of achievement was multiplied by the importance for each value and respondent. Thus, the lowest result reflected lowest discrepancy and lowest importance, while the highest reflected highest discrepancy and highest importance of the value (Formula 1). The profile of the obtained discrepancies for each value of employed spouses is presented in Figure 2.

Formula 1: $Dv = (Iv - Av)Iv$

Dv – discrepancy of each value (v)
Iv – importance
Av -achievement

Figure 2: A graphic profile of the discrepancies between the importance and achievement of the measured values



The results show that the greatest discrepancies are associated with health, parenting, and the amount of free time, and the lowest with the qualities of a successful leader, the need for leading roles, and a wide circle of friends. Furthermore, the largest differences in the discrepancy levels between spouses were obtained for the values of successful leadership and financial status.

In further analysis, the factor structure of the obtained discrepancies of all the tested values was verified. Exploratory Factor Analyses with a varimax rotation was conducted. The scree plot and the eigenvalue greater than 1.0 criterion suggested two factors. The factors accounted for 32% of the variance of the items. Scales were created as the means of items that had factor loadings greater than .30 for these two factors (Table 1). Two items (3 and 5) that had factor loadings greater than .30 on both factors were included in the computation of both factor scales.

Table 1: Factor analysis of the measured values' discrepancies

| item | Factor loading | | h2 |
|---|----------------|------------|-------|
| | Factor one | Factor two | |
| Being successful in my job. | 0,320 | 0,296 | 0,190 |
| Having a happy family life. | 0,446 | 0,289 | 0,282 |
| Having a high quality relationship with my spouse. | 0,328 | 0,335 | 0,219 |
| Having a lot of money. | 0,198 | 0,618 | 0,422 |
| Having strong friendships. | 0,376 | 0,392 | 0,295 |
| Having a wide circle of friends. | 0,176 | 0,503 | 0,284 |
| Generally having leading roles. | 0,036 | 0,773 | 0,599 |
| Developing the qualities of a successful leader. | 0,093 | 0,725 | 0,534 |
| Participating in correcting social and economic injustices. | 0,488 | -0,025 | 0,238 |
| Having enough free time for myself. | 0,493 | 0,171 | 0,273 |
| Being a role model for other people | 0,473 | 0,245 | 0,284 |
| Helping others in their personal development. | 0,574 | 0,181 | 0,362 |
| Being an efficient and good parent. | 0,450 | 0,090 | 0,210 |
| Having a spiritual life. | 0,623 | 0,109 | 0,400 |
| Being healthy. | 0,474 | 0,158 | 0,250 |
| Expl.Var | 2,480 | 2,363 | |
| Prp.Totl | 0,165 | 0,158 | |

Note. Bolded factor loadings indicate the items used in scale construction.

The first factor, General life value (GLV), is consisted of 11 items reflecting important life values such as success in, for example, work role, marital role, parental role and generally more important values. The internal consistency of the 11 items was satisfactory (Cronbach α coefficient = .78). Corrected item–total correlations were all greater than .30, with a mean corrected item–total correlation of .25. The second factor is consisted of 6 items measuring values related to social status and prestige (SSP) and those values were assessed as less important. The coefficient of the internal consistency of the 6 items was .74 with a mean corrected item–total correlation of .35.

In further analysis, one-way analyses of covariance were conducted to examine differences in the level of the measured variables according to the participants' gender (Table 2). As the sample included employed married couples, it was not possible to equalize the sample by age and qualification level. Namely, the female marital partners were significantly younger and had on average a significantly higher qualification level than their spouses, so these two variables were treated as covariates.

Table 2: The results of analysis of covariance of the examined variables according to the spouses' gender (covariates: age and qualification level)

| | | ANOVA | | | | | ANCOVA | | |
|-----|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| | | Mean | sd | df | F | p | df | F | p |
| GLV | male | 33,03 | 24,37 | 1/352 | 0,127 | 0,722 | 1/349 | 0,183 | 0,669 |
| | female | 33,95 | 24,32 | | | | | | |
| SSP | male | 10,71 | 14,99 | 1/352 | 3,447 | 0,064 | 1/349 | 1,624 | 0,203 |
| | female | 8,07 | 11,52 | | | | | | |
| WFC | male | 3,58 | 1,40 | 1/352 | 0,133 | 0,715 | 1/349 | 0,001 | 0,977 |
| | female | 3,52 | 1,28 | | | | | | |
| FWC | male | 1,97 | 0,99 | 1/352 | 1,328 | 0,250 | 1/349 | 1,420 | 0,234 |
| | female | 2,09 | 1,10 | | | | | | |
| LS | male | 5,58 | 1,00 | 1/352 | 0,154 | 0,695 | 1/349 | 0,001 | 0,971 |
| | female | 5,63 | 1,04 | | | | | | |
| JS | male | 5,08 | 1,24 | 1/352 | 2,111 | 0,147 | 1/349 | 1,057 | 0,305 |
| | female | 4,88 | 1,28 | | | | | | |
| SFA | male | 31,13 | 8,74 | 1/352 | 10,546 | 0,001 | 1/349 | 13,922 | 0,000 |
| | female | 28,30 | 7,64 | | | | | | |

Note: GLV= General Life Values; SSP=Social Status and Prestige; WFC=Work-Family Conflict; FWC=Family-Work Conflict; LS=Life Satisfaction; JS= Job Satisfaction; SFA=Striving for Achievement

As can be seen, spouses differ only in their striving for achievement, i.e., men showed significantly higher levels of striving for achievement than their (female) spouses.

Furthermore, in Table 3. the correlations between the examined potentially relevant variables are shown, separately for the two samples of men and women (spouses).

Table 3: Correlations between the tested variables for the sample of men and women

| Variables | GLV | SSP | WFC | FWC | LS | JS | SFA |
|-----------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| GLV | | 0,58** | 0,20** | 0,01 | -0,06 | -0,12 | 0,22** |
| SSP | 0,60** | | 0,09 | -0,01 | -0,14 | -0,14 | 0,38** |
| WFC | 0,25** | 0,20** | | 0,35** | -0,07 | -0,09 | 0,19* |
| FWC | 0,23** | 0,19* | 0,26** | | -0,13 | -0,06 | 0,26** |
| LS | -0,20** | -0,09 | -0,04 | -0,12 | | 0,47** | -0,14 |
| JS | -0,15* | -0,12 | -0,05 | -0,10 | 0,51** | | -0,06 |
| SFA | 0,07 | 0,16* | 0,05 | 0,29** | 0,10 | 0,14 | |

Note: Correlation coefficients above the diagonal (bolded) - Only male sample (N=172)

Correlation coefficients below diagonal - Only female sample (N=172)

* p <05; ** p <01

The results showed a significant association between GLV and the SSP, which might be expected, since both factors are part of the general value system. Also, WFC and FWC were significantly positively correlated in both samples, which is generally consistent with previous results by other authors (Frone et al., 1992; 1997), but in contrary to the results of a previous research in Croatia on medical nurses (Šimunić, 2008) where there was no significant correlation between these two types of conflict. Job satisfaction and life

satisfaction were positively correlated in both samples, which implies the so-called spillover hypothesis.

Furthermore, in the male sample all the measured variables related to the system of values and work-family conflict are positively correlated with striving for achievement. On the other hand, in the sample of women, work-family conflict variables are generally positively correlated with general life values, but also with LS and JS. Only FWC is associated with striving for achievement.

DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis of the assessments of importance and achievement of the examined life values showed a generally lower level of achievement in comparison to the estimated importance for the majority of the items. However, it is interesting to note the similarity between the profiles of importance and achievement (of mean estimates; $r = 0,94$). This implies that values can also be treated as goals; respectively, the more important the goal is the more the individual invests in achieving it. However, it is possible that some of the common variance of estimates of the importance and achievement of life values can be attributed to so-called self-deception. Self-deception does not imply a deliberate distortion of responses, but implies a testimony of the respondents' own beliefs (Paulhus 1984), and since these are significant lifetime values (parenting, health, harmony in marital relationships, etc.), it is possible that the achievement of certain life values is unintentionally overestimated. This idea could be supported by the extremely low estimates of the importance of values such as the qualities of successful leaders, having a leading role, and having a wide circle of friends, where there were also no significant differences in the assessment of importance and achievement. These items are also saturated with the second discrepancy factor (SSP), and apparently are partially independent dimensions of the examined set of values and are primarily based on utilitarian value orientations.

The computed discrepancies take into account both the importance and achievement of individual values and the profiles of discrepancies are very similar for both spouses ($r = 0.96$). These results were to be expected, primarily because the spouses (respondents) mainly originate from the same social, religious, and cultural background, which indirectly implies a similar value system and a permanent harmonization of values during common life. For both spouses, the most important and simultaneously most accomplished values are those related to health, parenting, marriage and family relations, and strong friendships. At the same time, these values were shown to have the largest discrepancy, along with not having enough free time for oneself.

Regardless of the similarities of spouses and the absence of differences regarding the importance and achievement of certain values, there are significant differences among them in the level of striving for achievement and the correlates of WFC, FWC, JS, and LS. The results of this research showed that the spouses primarily differ in the level of striving for achievement. Besides being significantly higher (which is also shown in the ANCOVA), it is also the major correlate of WFC, FWC, and the examined life values (in terms of the discrepancy) for men. On the other hand, for women general life values are positively associated with the experience of WFC and FWC, but negatively associated with job and life satisfaction. Specifically, among men who have a higher striving for achievement there is a higher level of FWC and WFC, which indicates that generally high expectations from oneself may result in a greater experience of these conflicts. Another reason for this could also be found in the socio-cultural milieu in which men are still perceived as the head of the family and the dominant breadwinners. On the other hand, women's dominant values are regarding

family and marriage, and the discrepancy of these values are an evident correlate of the experience of both conflicts, which results in reduced job and general life satisfaction. For both spouses there was no correlation between the experience of WFC and FWC, and JS and LF. However, although there is a significant positive correlation between JS and LF for both spouses, the difference is that, for women, satisfaction is linked to the value discrepancies. For example, the results show that higher work-to-family conflict was experienced when there was a higher discrepancy between the importance of and actually having enough leisure time, which was one of the most valued and least actualized segments. In fact, it seems that the existence of value discrepancy has a significant impact on the experience of WFC, FWC, JS, and LS in women, although these variables share a very small and insignificant part of the common variance. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that satisfaction with life and work are very complex and multidimensional constructs, while this study covered only a small number of potentially significant correlates.

A possible drawback of this research is related to the size and the method of selection of subjects. Namely, the sample was formed according to the women, and thus there were differences between men and women in some relevant variables. Specifically, the level of education for women in this sample were on average higher than for the men. This reduces the possibility of generalizing these results to all employed married couples. It is recommended that future research make spouses equivalent by as many relevant variables as possible (education level, economic status, etc.). The limitations of the cultural milieu should also be taken into consideration.

CONCLUSIONS

The results showed that spouses generally have a very similar system of life values as well as the achievement of the same values. Also, when it comes to the conflicts of work and family roles for men, they are primarily associated with the level of their striving for achievement, while for women they are primarily associated with their basic life values, or the discrepancy between the importance and achievement of these values. Generally, for women, the most significant correlate of WFC and FWC is the realization of values related to family, marriage, and enough free time, while for men it is the expectation about their own achievements at work, as well as in the family. These results likely imply differences in development and socialization processes (gender roles) between men and women. They did not have larger discrepancies nor a larger level of work-family conflict than men, which diverges from the established beliefs of the society. This was so even when the women had higher educational status and work status positions. It is possible that the respondents did not perceive greater discrepancy due to realistic expectations. The women in this sample still put family and general life values ahead of business accomplishments. The reason may be the acceptance of the norms included in different roles (work, parental, marital, etc.), which are still traditional in our society. Unlike most previous research in this area, whose primary interest was focused on the quantity and intensity of different work and family stressors in the experience of conflict between work and family roles, this study proved an extremely important role of the perceptions of achievement of some important work and life values, or goals.

IMPLICATIONS

The correlates of WFC and FWC in men and women are evidently different, which implies the need for different approaches both in research and in practice. Also, it seems that some individual, relatively stable characteristics (the system of values, attitudes, personality traits)

may contribute to a better explanation of conflicts between work and family roles than more often examined situational variables such as job or family characteristics, the more so as the perception of the levels of WFC and FWC are primarily introspective variables experienced on a subjective, not objective level. This suggests that future research should place emphasis precisely on the aforementioned variables and, if possible, should include a much broader system of general and work values.

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