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**Article**

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Anja Feierabend, Philippe Mahler & Bruno Staffelbach\*

## **Are there Spillover Effects of a Family Supportive Work Environment on Employees without Childcare Responsibilities?\***

This paper focuses on the effects of a family supportive work environment on employees' attitudes and behaviors. We therefore differentiate between employees with childcare responsibilities and those without. As the implementation of family supportive services is financially costly, it is important to know if and how a family-friendly work policy affects the attitudes and behaviors of the entire workforce. Using a survey of results taken from 1260 randomly selected employees in Switzerland, we analyzed whether the perception of a comprehensive family orientation – involving family supportive services as well as family-friendly dialogue and culture – has an effect on employees with responsibility for childcare, for care of the elderly and also, on those without any care responsibilities. Firstly, the results show that family supportive services only have a specifically positive effect on the life satisfaction of employees with childcare responsibilities. More surprisingly, one can see that spillover effects exist for organizational-related outcomes: A family supportive dialogue and culture both reduce the intention to quit and enhance the organizational commitment of the entire workforce – whether or not there is a direct benefit to the employees.

**Key words:** family supportive work environment, spillover effects, care responsibilities (JEL: C35, J12, M12)

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## 1. Introduction

Working conditions aimed at balancing work and family life have gained in importance in western industrialized countries. In the past, work and family were two wholly separate fields. Whereas men were engaged in economic activities outside the home, women took care of their family members, such as children or care-dependent older parents. As a result of this clear distinction between the two domains, there was no need for employers to include family issues in their human resource management policies (Clark, 2001).

Today, the labor market situation in industrialized countries with western values such as Switzerland has changed. The education of women, nowadays equal to that of men, and the lack of highly qualified specialists have both led to an increased demand for female workers. Just as women have better integrated into the professional world whilst maintaining their family responsibilities, men too are becoming more interested in their home and family activities (Thompson et al., 1999). Due to this development, the fields of work and family overlap, leading to a situation that is doubly challenging for today's workers giving rise to the need for family supportive human resource management policies (Schneider et al., 2008). In northern European countries such as Sweden, Norway or Denmark the social-democratic public policy encourages flexible working hours, paid parental leave for mothers and fathers and, shorter weekly working hours in order to meet these challenges and increase women's participation in the labor market. For example, in Sweden, all parents have the legal right to receive child care support (Gauthier, 2002). Also, in the more liberal regime of the UK, employment legislation states that employees with care responsibilities for young or disabled children, or for elderly parents, have the right to request flexible working schedules and that their employers have a duty to consider their requests seriously (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). By contrast, in Switzerland, only a few governmental regulations exist. Until now, only maternity leave and child benefits are regulated by law at a federal level (Seco, 2005). Because Swiss public policy is not a key driver for family support, employees with family responsibilities are mostly dependent on the voluntary support of their companies. Therefore, in Switzerland, voluntary company family support, on which this paper focuses, is especially essential.

For companies, however, the development and implementation of family supportive services are financially costly (Meyer et al., 2001). For this reason, the economic question arises as to whether or not an investment in such services (e.g. childcare centers) pays off. This cost aspect makes providing these services problematic for companies if it is shown that they do not have positive effects on the attitudes and behaviors of the entire workforce (Siegel et al., 2005). Therefore, for companies it is essential to know which effects a family supportive work environment has on different working groups.

The resulting research question for this study is: Does comprehensive family support only have primary effects on employees who directly benefit from it, or are there also spillover effects (a carry-over based on the primary effects) on employees who don't benefit directly?

So far, previous research has shown mixed results. Whereas some US researchers have found that firms' work-family programs are generally positively related to productivity (Konrad & Mangel, 2000) and retention (Grover & Crooker, 1995) in organizations, other scholars have found that services alone have no effect on employees' attitudes or behaviors (e.g. Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999). Different reasons may be the cause of these ambiguous results: Firstly, the reason could be the *sample* choice. Despite the increasing diversity in family structures and employees' personal responsibilities (Rothausen et al., 1998), most research on work-family issues examines married employees with children and ignores other household structures (Casper et al., 2007). The effect of family-oriented support on working groups with or without other care responsibilities (e.g. care of the elderly) – and therefore without any direct profit from family support services – has rarely as of yet been analyzed (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Few scholars have analyzed the effect of work-family-support on non-parents (Brummelhuis & van der Lippe, 2010; Grover & Grooker, 1995), but so far, no study has also focused on employees with elderly care responsibilities. Due to the aging population, care of the elderly is becoming more important. A European study shows that at least one adult in ten provides regular physical care for their parents, whereas three times as many help their parents regularly with the housekeeping (Brandt et al., 2009). We therefore use a diversified sample which includes employees with childcare responsibilities, as well as with elderly care responsibilities or no responsibilities at all.

A second reason for the ambiguous results could be the different *measurements* of family supportive work environments. For a long time researchers usually focused on one dimension of company family support. The majority of studies have examined the effects of services on employee attitudes and behaviors (e.g. Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000); some others have focused on the influence of family-friendly culture (e.g. Thompson et al., 1999). Only a few studies have examined a comprehensive family supportive work environment, which includes tangible support (material family supportive services) as well as intangible support (immaterial family-friendly culture and dialogue) (Schneider et al., 2008; Jahn et al., 2003). Because tangible family support arrangements will never be fully realized unless organizations' cultures support their use (Liff & Cameron, 1997), a multidimensional measurement of family supportive work environment is important. In this study we use a comprehensive measurement of a family supportive work environment, both with tangible and intangible family support.

A third problem may be the different *outcomes* the studies chose in order to analyze the effects of a family supportive work environment. On the one hand psychological studies focus more on individual-related outcomes, such as work-family-conflict, stress or life satisfaction (e.g. Seiger & Wiese, 2009). On the other hand business oriented scholars concentrate more on organizational-related outcomes, such as productivity, retention, commitment or intention to quit (e.g. Konrad & Mangel, 2000). Until now, no study has contrasted the effects of family support on both outcome levels explicitly. Therefore, we compare the effects of family support on individual-related outcomes (by measuring life satisfaction), with organizational-related outcomes (by measuring organizational commitment and intention to quit).

In summary, we seek to fulfill these research gaps by analyzing the effects of a comprehensive family support with respect to different outcome levels, not only on employees with childcare responsibilities, but also on employees with elderly care responsibilities or those without any care responsibilities at all.

## **2. Work-family-situation in Switzerland**

Depending on the care responsibility situation, the labor force in Switzerland can be divided into three employee groups. The first group with care responsibilities often finds itself at the center of lively debate in the business world: working parents with childcare responsibilities. The second less talked about care responsibility group includes employees who have to care for the elderly. Thirdly, there are employees without any care responsibilities at all.

### ***Employees with care responsibilities***

According to the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics, 30% of Swiss employees have care-dependent children younger than 15 years (BfS, 2009). Workers in Switzerland still live in the more traditional rather than modern family relationships (Gerlach et al., 2009): More than half of women (60%) work part-time. Almost 90% of them are working mothers who bear the bulk of the childcare duties. The majority of male employees (87%) works fulltime and continues to be less involved in childcare (BfS, 2009).

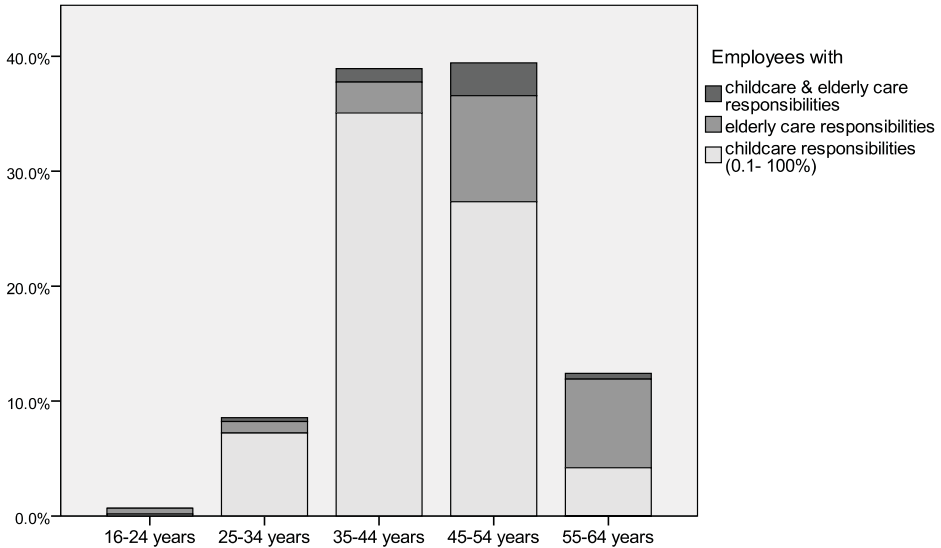
A smaller group of employees, between 10 and 20% in Switzerland, takes care of other family members such as elderly parents (Grote & Staffelbach, 2010). Due to the aging population, care giving for elderly parents is becoming more important – especially because more than 90% of older people wish to die at home (Glass & Nahapetya, 2008). Improved nutrition and medical care are lengthening life spans, but as people age, their physical and mental impairments increase, leading to a growing need for long-term care (Tönz, 2005).

Grown up children, especially when female, are most willing to look after their elderly parents, due to intergenerational reciprocity (Brandt et al., 2009). But today, it falls to adults to look after their elderly parents when these adults are in the middle of their working lives. This responsibility arises earlier than it did 30 years ago because nowadays, parents bear children later. Whereas in 1980 the average age of women having children was 27 years old, today, in Switzerland, a mother is, on average, 32 years old when she gives birth to her first child. Therefore, the age difference between children and parents increases and parents are in need of care at an earlier stage in their children's lifetime (Seco, 2005).

The aging of the population, the shift in the timings of birth and the increase in the number of women in the work force result in an increase in the number of people who must balance both work and elderly care responsibilities (Lee et al., 2001). Care of the elderly is becoming more and more of an issue for middle-aged professionals, in addition to their childcare responsibilities. Figure 1, based on the findings of the Swiss Human-Relations-Barometer 2010 (Grote & Staffelbach, 2010), shows that for employees between 25 and 44 years of age, childcare is the main care responsibility. Between 45 and 54 years of age, elderly care responsibilities increase whereas childcare

responsibilities decrease. In the ten years before retirement, care of the elderly is the main care responsibility.

**Figure 1: Employees with care responsibilities** (Swiss HR-Barometer, 2010)



A comprehensive family-oriented human resource management seems therefore important for people with various family responsibilities. Until now, however, only a few companies include care of the elderly in their family support systems (Brandt et al., 2009).

***Employees without care responsibilities***

Besides increasing family diversity, more and more couples remain childless. In Switzerland, there are, on average, 23% of women in the age group of 35- to 44-years who are childless (Seco, 2000). The highest proportion of childless women lives in cities, with 38% in this age group. Overall, there is an increasing culture of single people and a rise in the number of couples without any care responsibilities. These employees receive no direct benefits from family supportive work environments. Many companies extend family-friendly policies to attract and retain workers with family responsibilities (Casper et al., 2007). Such policies may create family-friendly backlash among single and childless employees (Rothausen et al., 1998). Due to this fact, it is important to differentiate the workforce into beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of family support in order to analyze the different effects.

**3. Work-family-support and its effects**

The work-family-support of companies focuses primarily on the employee group with childcare responsibilities and helps them to reconcile work and family life (Thompson et al., 1999; Allen, 2001). In the first part of this chapter we discuss the concept of a comprehensive family supportive work environment and include different dimensions

of support. Secondly, we analyze the potential effects of these family support dimensions to answer the question as to whether or not family orientation has only a specific effect on employees with childcare responsibilities or if there are also spillover effects on other working groups.

### ***Family supportive work environment***

Primarily, a family supportive work environment includes *tangible* services, voluntarily offered by a company, to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family-life (OECD, 2001). The most common work-family services voluntarily offered by organizations in the US and Europe (Allen, 2001; Galinsky et al., 1991) are the following:

1. *Family leave*: e.g. maternity leave beyond the statutory period or paternity leave,
2. *Family-supportive working arrangements*: e.g. part time, flextime (which allows workers to vary their start and finish times), telework (working from home), job sharing (sharing a full-time job between two employees),
3. *Care services*: e.g. onsite childcare services, elderly care services,
4. *Counseling*: informational assistance with work-family-balance and
5. *Financial assistance*: e.g. with childcare or elderly care services, insurance etc.

According to the OECD definition "...only employees can decide, whether or not any particular service is actually family-friendly" (OECD, 2001, p. 147). This statement is reaffirmed by several studies, which have revealed that the availability of services does not guarantee their actual utilization, because the company culture and, more specifically, managers and colleagues, may not be supportive at all (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999). For example, many fathers do not use the paternity leave or the part time work options offered because they fear a negative impact on their careers (Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003; Liff & Cameron, 1997). As a result, it is not enough to measure the availability of services. Moreover, Allen (2001) provides strong empirical evidence to suggest that the availability of a service has a relatively small effect on an employee's attitude, whereas an employee's perception of *intangible* work-family supportiveness such as family-friendly culture is strongly related to important outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Thompson et al. (1999) have demonstrated that not only the quantity of services offered, but also the perception of the quality of these services by the employees enhances job related attitudes. Based on this research, Schneider et al. (2008) developed a three-dimensional-measurement of a family-supportive work environment (the family-friendly index), which records the employees' perception of:

1. *Services*: This dimension represents the number and perceived quality of existing family-supportive offers in the company such as childcare, extended maternity leave, paternity leave, financial assistance, counseling, etc.
2. *Dialogue*: This dimension represents how well the firms are in touch with the workers and how they request information about the needs of the employees in order to reconcile work and family life.
3. *Culture*: This dimension represents how family-friendly the managers and bosses are and how many managers have family responsibilities themselves.

Whereas services belong to tangible family support, family-friendly dialogue and culture are part of the intangible support which goes towards supporting the use of the services. Tangible and intangible family support depend on each other: The intangible family-friendly dialogue and culture are hardly helpful as a tool for employees to reconcile work- and family-life if no tangible services exist. On the other hand, tangible services are useless, if they don't fit with the employees needs and if the company culture doesn't support their use. The effects of tangible and intangible support will be discussed next.

### ***Effects of tangible and intangible family support***

#### *Effects of tangible support*

Individual differences among workers can moderate the effects of tangible family support. The organization-person-fit theory describes it as a fact that individual differences are key predictors of the services an employee finds attractive in a company (Turban & Keon, 1993). Therefore, it is predicted using this psychological theory that tangible family support will be more useful in satisfying workers on an individual-level if they will benefit directly from the services. This prediction complements the economic incentive-contribution theory for organizational-related outcomes (March et al., 1958). One core statement of this theory is that only those employees who receive incentives, e.g. care services, provide an organizational contribution, such as higher organizational commitment – if the incentives fit the employees' preferences. In conclusion, the person-organization-fit theory, as well as the incentive-contribution theory, postulate specific positive effects for employees who directly profit from the tangible family support offered by the company – either for the individual or on an organizational level. For employees with no direct benefit from family services, these theories make no room for direct effects.

Empirical research supports this theoretical point of view. Kossek and Nichol (1992) examined the impact of an organizational childcare center. The researchers found that users of the childcare center held more positive attitudes towards the company than those employees who were on the waiting list. In another study, Rothausen et al. (1998) found that childcare provision has a significantly higher positive effect on attitudes such as job satisfaction for users of the childcare center, whether, current, past or future, than for employees who do not need to use the service at all.

According to these theoretical and empirical findings, we postulate that the perception of family supportive services only has specifically positive effects on employees with childcare responsibilities. This working group alone benefits directly from tangible family services put in place to reconcile work and private life (Allen, 2001), whereas employees with elderly care responsibilities seldom profit and employees without care responsibilities never profit from company family support (Brandt et al., 2009). We suggest therefore, that only in the group with childcare responsibilities are there positive effects on the individual-related outcome life satisfaction and the organizational-related outcomes organizational commitment and intention to quit. We postulate that there is no impact on life satisfaction, commitment and intention to quit of employees with elderly care responsibilities or those without any



care responsibilities because they can't directly use family-friendly arrangements to balance their work and private lives. This leads us to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Tangible family support has a *positive specific effect* on individual- and organizational-related outcomes of employees with childcare responsibilities.

Hypothesis 1a: Family-friendly services have a positive specific effect on the *life satisfaction* of employees with childcare responsibilities.

Hypothesis 1b: Family-friendly services have a positive specific effect on the *organizational commitment* of employees with childcare responsibilities.

Hypothesis 1c: Family-friendly services have a positive specific effect on the *intention to quit* of employees with childcare responsibilities.

Hypothesis 2: Tangible family support has no effect on individual- and organizational-related outcomes of employees with elderly care responsibilities and those without any care responsibilities.

### *Effects of intangible support*

During the recruitment process, as well as engagement, employees with or without care responsibilities may use the presence of a family supportive work culture and dialogue (which promote the utilization of the services) as a positive signal for work-related support (e.g. fair treatment, understanding supervision) (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). The result could cause positive spillover effects onto the entire workforce. In the economic literature a spillover effect is generally defined as a secondary effect which is based on a primary effect (Görg & Stobl, 2001). In the context of this paper a spillover effect means that intangible family support not only has a primary (specific) effect on those who directly profit from a family supportive work environment, but also a secondary (signal or carry-over) effect on those without any direct benefit. Such spillover effects find theoretical support in the signaling theory. According to this economic theory, people use observable characteristics to make assumptions about unobservable characteristics, if decisions have to be made when in the position of having incomplete information (Spence, 1973). Therefore, the signaling theory supports the view that a family supportive work environment affects employees who benefit from the support as well as those who do not directly benefit – regardless of their care responsibility situation.

Grover and Crooker's (1995) study provides empirical support for spillover effects. This study found that employees were more attached to organizations offering family-friendly policies, regardless of whether they were parents or not. Further support for spillover effects on organizational-related outcomes is provided by Bretz and Judge (1994), who found that levels of work-life conflict among employees do not predict their attraction to companies offering a family-friendly human resource management. Recently Haar and Roche (2010) showed that the perception of a family supportive culture positively influences individual-related outcomes, such as life satisfaction and job burnout, of both parents and non-parents.

According to the theoretical and empirical findings above, family supportive dialogue and culture (understood to be promoters for the use of such services) act as a positive signal for all employees and have potentially positive effects on individual-related outcomes (e.g. life satisfaction) as well as on organizational-related outcomes (e.g. commitment or intention to quit) of employees with and without care responsibilities. This leads us to the following hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis 3: Intangible family support has a *positive spillover effect* on individual- and organizational-related outcomes of the entire workforce.

Hypothesis 3a: Family-friendly dialogue and culture have a positive spillover effect on the *life satisfaction* of the entire workforce.

Hypothesis 3b: Family-friendly dialogue and culture have a positive spillover effect on the *organizational commitment* of the entire workforce.

Hypothesis 3c: Family-friendly dialogue and culture have a positive spillover effect on the *intention to quit* of the entire workforce.

In the next section we describe the method used to test these hypotheses.

## 4. Method

### *Procedure and Sample*

According to the OECD definition, employees alone can decide whether or not a work environment is family supportive (OECD, 2001). In keeping with this view, we used data collected from the employees' perspective. In Switzerland, data on family supportive work environments, psychological attitudes and behavioral intentions are rare and contain only small samples for specific sectors or professions (e.g. Gerlach et al., 2009). As a result of this, we collected the data with the Swiss Human-Relations-Barometer. This is a survey developed by the University of Zurich and the Federal Institute of Technology of Zurich, which annually measures employees' perception of the current work situation in Switzerland.

Data collection took place between March and June 2009 in the German and French speaking part of Switzerland in order to cover the two biggest Swiss language regions. To manage the issue of conducting the survey in two different languages, the two questionnaires were constructed firstly together with language professionals. Secondly, we carried out separate pretests with both questionnaires. Thirdly, we engaged interviewers who were French or German native speakers in order to avoid misunderstandings. The interviewers contacted employees between 16 and 64 years of age by phone at home by using a random sample of all registered telephone numbers in the German and French speaking part of Switzerland. The employees were included in the sample if they had a dependent and paid employment, and were employed at least 40% of the time. To generate a homogenous sample we only included the employees of companies who offered at least one family supportive service. Only 13 employees reported that their company offered no family supportive services.

The sample consisted of 1260 employees in Switzerland. 54% of the respondents were without care responsibilities ( $N = 683$ ), 34% had childcare responsibilities ( $N = 430$ ) and 12% had elderly care responsibilities ( $N = 147$ ). 42% of the employees were female. The average age among the respondents was 46 years ( $SD=11.04$ ), and the average organizational tenure 11 years ( $SD=9.72$ ). 62% worked full-time and 39% had a leadership position. Levels of formal education were as follows: 17% had a master's degree or above, 34% had bachelor's degree or achieved higher vocational education, 44% had completed an apprenticeship or high school, 4% had completed compulsory school only. 14% worked in small companies ( $< 10$  employees), 53% in medium sized firms ( $\geq 10 - 249$  employees) and 33% in large companies ( $\geq 250$  employees).

## **Measurement**

### *Predictors*

*Rating of family supportive work environment:* The evaluation of family support was measured using the three dimensions (2 items per dimension) by Schneider et al. (2008). The respondents rated the family supportive work environment on a scale of 1 to 3 (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = strongly agree). The 6 items as follows:

- Services: “My company offers more family-supportive services compared to other companies” (quantity), “The family-supportive services offered by my company are in accordance with the needs of their employees” (quality). The internal consistency was good (Pearson’s  $r = .81$ ).
- Dialogue: “My company requests information about the needs of their employees in order to help reconcile work and family life” (initiative); “The family-supportive services of my company are easy to access” (accessibility). Pearson’s  $r (= .76)$  indicated good internal consistency.
- Culture: “In my company management is supportive of reconciling work and family life” (management culture); “In my company many managers are hired who have family care responsibilities” (careers). Internal consistency was moderate (Pearson’s  $r = .60$ ). However, because the factor analysis supported the three dimensions of family support, we used culture as a dimension too.

### *Outcomes*

The outcomes of a family supportive work environment on the employees’ attitudes and behavior intentions were measured by using three scales. The individual-related level was measured with life satisfaction and the organizational-related level covered by measuring organizational commitment and intention to quit.

*Life satisfaction:* We assessed satisfaction with work and private life as a whole with one item by Guest and Conway (2004), using a ten-point scale (1 = completely unsatisfied, 10 = completely satisfied). In the psychometrics field single-items are held up as having low reliability (Loo, 2001). Nevertheless, single items are often used to measure life satisfaction, it being a clearly definable construct (Wanous et al., 1997).

*Organizational commitment:* To measure organizational commitment we used a scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). Their three-component-model divides organi-

zational commitment into affective, continual and normative components. We chose the 3-item scale for affective organizational commitment, because we were interested in the affective attachment of the employees to their company. The respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they strongly disagreed (1) or strongly agreed (5). A sample item was “In my company I feel part of a big family”. Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = .87$ ) indicated high internal consistency.

*Intention to quit:* We measured intention to quit with Guest and Conway’s (2004) 2-item scale. Responses to the first item “How likely is it that you will voluntarily leave this organization in the following year?” were measured on a four-point scale (1 = low, 4 = high). For the second item, employees had to choose from one of four statements which applied best to them (e.g. “I am currently in the process of trying to leave this job”). The internal consistency was acceptable (Pearson’s  $r = .69$ ).

### *Control variables*

The personal control variables included gender (1 = male, 0 = female), age in years, employment (1 = full-time, 0 = part-time), position (1 = with leadership position, 0 = without leadership position), organizational tenure in years and months, monthly income, highest educational qualification (measured with 8 dummy variables: compulsory school (= reference group), apprenticeship/ vocational, high school, bachelor, master and above), employability (self-assessment according to Janssens et al. (2003)), desire for children (1 = yes, 0 = no), number of children under 18. The organizational control variables included company size (measured with 3 dummy variables: small (< 10 employees) (= reference group), medium ( $\geq 10 - 249$  employees), large companies ( $\geq 250$  employees)) and sector (measured with 3 dummy variables: primary (= reference group), secondary and tertiary sector).

### ***Regression model***

Multivariate linear regression analyses were used to measure the influence of the extent of a family supportive work environment (services, dialogue and culture) on individual-related outcomes (life satisfaction) and organizational-related outcomes (commitment, intention to quit) of the three samples (employees without care responsibilities, with childcare responsibilities and with elderly care responsibilities). To identify the effect on attitudes and behavior within the three groups, the following regression was established for each group and each outcome:

Employees without care responsibilities:

$$Y_{i,without} = \alpha + \beta_1 S + \beta_2 D + \beta_3 C + \beta_4 X_j + \varepsilon$$

Employees with childcare responsibilities:

$$Y_{i,childcare} = \alpha + \beta_1 S + \beta_2 D + \beta_3 C + \beta_4 X_c + \varepsilon$$

Employees with elderly care responsibilities:

$$Y_{i,elderly\ care} = \alpha + \beta_1 S + \beta_2 D + \beta_3 C + \beta_4 X_j + \varepsilon$$

Whereas  $Y_i$  represents the outcomes of satisfaction, commitment or intention to quit, the regressor  $S$  represents the family supportive services,  $D$  the dialogue and  $C$  the culture.  $X_j$  includes two regressions with the same control variables (gender, age, full/

part-time, position, tenure, wage, education, employability, desire for children, number of children, company size and sector). In the employee group with childcare responsibilities alone, the variable “desire for children” was not included in the controls  $X_i$ , because the group was not asked this question.  $\varepsilon$  represents an independent error term. The regressions were carried out for each group separately because of the differences in the sample size. Using this strategy we avoided the problem of the differences in group size influencing the results of another subsample. Furthermore, the size of each subsample is large enough to allow inference.

## 5. Results

### *Descriptive analyses*

Correlations, means and standard deviations of the variables are reported for the employee group without care responsibilities (table 1), with childcare responsibilities (table 2) and with elderly care responsibilities (table 3). Whereas in the group with childcare responsibilities *family-friendly services* are positively correlated to life satisfaction, in the other two groups only weak correlations could be found, or none at all. For *family-friendly culture* and *dialogue* we found strong correlations with commitment and intention to quit in all three employee groups. Also in all three employee groups, we found strong and highly significant correlations between the three family-friendly dimensions services, culture and dialogue. These results show the strong bond between these three dimensions.

### *Test of hypotheses*

*Effects of tangible family support:* Tangible family support is only supposed to affect employees with childcare responsibilities as predicted by the hypothesis 1. As illustrated in the first row of the tables 4, 5 and 6, in the group of employees with childcare responsibilities the positive evaluation of family supportive services has a statistically high significant effect on their general life satisfaction ( $\beta = .339$ ,  $p < .001$ ). No significant effects could be found for the organizational-related outcomes commitment and intention to quit. Therefore the hypothesis 1a is empirically supported, whereas hypotheses 1b and 1c which also postulate a specific positive effect of services on commitment and intention to quit for employees with childcare have to be rejected. Additionally, we can see that in the group of employees without care responsibilities, as well as in the group with elderly care responsibilities, family supportive services have no impact either on life satisfaction (see first panel in table 4) or on commitment (table 5), or intention to quit (table 6). Therefore hypothesis 2, which postulated no impact on non-beneficiaries finds empirical support.

*Effects of intangible family support:* In line with hypothesis 3, the results show that intangible family support affects all three employee groups. As illustrated in the second and third row of the tables 4, 5 and 6, the results show that in the group of employees with childcare responsibilities, intangible family support has a statistically high significant enhancement effect on the organizational-related outcomes commitment (dialogue:  $\beta = .287$ ,  $p < .001$ ; culture:  $\beta = .275$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (see table 5) and reduces significantly intention to quit (dialogue:  $\beta = -.168$ ,  $p < .1$ ; culture:  $\beta = -.122$ ,  $p < .1$ ) (table 6).

**Table 1: Correlations, means and standard deviations for the group without care responsibilities**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	M	SD	
Without care responsibilities																						
1. Family-friendly services	.595**																				1.90	0.64
2. Family-friendly dialogue	.517**	.614**																			1.90	0.67
3. Family-friendly culture	-.102**	-.135**	-.153**																		2.00	0.68
4. Intention to quit	.184**	.292**	.252**	-.365**																	1.85	0.89
5. Commitment	.053	.065*	.080*	-.163**	.160**																3.61	1.00
6. Life satisfaction	.050	.024	.035	.002	-.008	-.063															8.05	1.22
7. Male	-.060	-.090*	-.031	-.220**	.112**	.008	.020														47.03	11.37
8. Age	.018	-.034	.001	-.003	.019	-.077*	.501**	-.071													0.85	0.47
9. Full-time	-.006	.006	.008	-.077*	.113**	.074	.201**	.127**	.235**												0.37	0.48
10. Leadership position	.043	.016	.095*	-.168**	.211**	.085*	.171**	.522**	.105**	.136**											11.78	10.63
11. Tenure	.069	.056	.043	.045	-.119*	.012	.082*	-.046	.103**	.159**	-.129**										3.58	1.69
12. Education	.057	.027	.064	-.134**	.038	.088*	.399**	.171**	.428**	.331**	.212**	.372**									6266	2800
13. Wage (Swiss francs)	.034	.117**	.081*	.087*	.044	.147**	-.008	-.459**	.019	.031	-.300**	.086*	-.023								3.28	1.09
14. Employability	.031	.061	-.027	.179**	-.111**	-.020	.014	-.695**	.086*	-.091*	-.349**	.028	-.159**	.312**							0.25	0.43
15. Desire to have a child	.044	.016	.082*	-.107**	.017	.006	.036	-.048	.029	.015	-.042	.102**	.143**	.066	-.194**						0.18	0.54
16. Number of children	.160**	.102**	.143**	-.027	-.081*	.018	.133**	-.003	.175**	-.012	.119**	.149**	.278**	-.044	.003	.089*					2.76	1.05
17. Company size	.034	.010	-.017	.027	-.012	.062	.077*	.034	-.016	.004	.065	-.055	-.069	-.005	-.017	-.017	.004				0.15	0.12
18. Primary sector	-.043	-.044	-.076*	-.011	.019	-.051	.228**	-.047	.222**	.014	.031	-.096*	.102**	.031	.035	.071	-.102**	-.057			0.19	0.39
19. Secondary sector	.011	.027	.062	-.013	-.039	.010	-.227**	.041	-.208**	-.040	-.048	.101**	-.090*	-.008	.007	-.056	.102**	-.216**	-.831**		0.749	0.43
20. Tertiary sector																						

Note: n = 683; \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01

**Table 2: Correlations, means and standard deviations for the group with childcare responsibilities**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	M	SD
1. Family-friendly services																				1.80	0.66
2. Family-friendly dialogue	.628**																			1.90	0.72
3. Family-friendly culture	.522**	.636**																		2.00	0.70
4. Intention to quit	-.139**	-.205**	-.214**																	1.76	0.75
5. Commitment	.199**	.314**	.352**	-.359**																3.6	1.02
6. Life satisfaction	.213**	.153**	.098*	-.169**	.290**															8.19	1.172
7. Male	.060	.127**	.119*	.000	.162**	.089														0.60	0.49
8. Age	.034	.021	.015	-.085	.071	-.042	.137**													43.36	6.77
9. Full-time	-.016	.005	.058	-.040	.072	.080	.640**	.113*												0.59	0.49
10. Leadership position	.031	.033	.133**	-.040	.240**	.151**	.348**	.072	.392**											0.44	0.49
11. Tenure	.110*	.080	.094	-.077	.166**	.067	.214**	.415**	.213**	.160**										9.48	7.81
12. Education	.052	.078	.030	.075	.067	.100*	.145**	.032	.082	.282**	.038									3.84	1.73
13. Wage (Swiss francs)	.029	0.45	.058	.031	.141**	.117	.558**	.198*	.559**	.470**	.211**	.454**								6288	2930
14. Employability	.093	.123*	.125**	.027	.233**	.171**	.095*	-.139**	.058	.204**	-.164**	.142**	.185**							3.58	0.95
15. Desire to have a child	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					0	0	0
16. Number of children	-.029	-.009	-.022	-.022	.004	.064	.146**	-.276**	.117*	.123*	-.089	-.010	.095	.042	0					1.74	0.85
17. Company size	.023	.064	.007	.090	-.155**	-.035	.141**	.012	.189**	.084	.126**	.153**	.290**	-.045	0	.011				2.75	1.07
18. Primary sector	.016	.089	.076	-.085	.116*	.082	.067	-.004	.011	.094	.071	.041	.032	-.032	0	.024	-.084			0.01	0.08
19. Secondary sector	-.035	-.089	.011	-.064	.069	-.039	.231**	.040	.276**	.105*	.090	-.139**	.051	-.046	0	.056	-.011	-.041		0.18	0.39
20. Tertiary sector	.013	.082	-.011	.067	-.115*	-.025	-.193**	-.005	-.236**	-.117*	-.085	.071	-.068	.034	0	-.060	.041	-.144**	-.833**	0.75	0.43

Note: n = 430; \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01

**Table 3: Correlations, means and standard deviations for the group with elderly care responsibilities**

With elderly care responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	M	SD
1. Family-friendly services																				2.00	0.68
2. Family-friendly dialogue	.605**																			2.00	0.70
3. Family-friendly culture	.586**	.654**																		2.10	0.70
4. Intention to quit	-.138	-.154	-.215**																	1.83	0.88
5. Commitment	.227**	.252**	.097	-.468**																3.62	1.10
6. Life satisfaction	-.024	.061	.092	-.068	.128															8.03	1.26
7. Male	-.029	-.119	-.050	-.191*	-.083	.014														0.46	0.50
8. Age	.098	.096	.054	-.348**	.315**	.101	-.059													49.41	8.9
9. Full-time	.050	-.096	.024	.046	-.086	.020	.505**	-.070												0.52	0.5
10. Leadership position	-.070	-.005	-.021	.066	-.075	.162*	.256**	.078	.217**											0.37	0.48
11. Tenure	.143	0.19	-.003	-.289**	.322**	.173*	.076	.415**	.155	.127										13.4	9.82
12. Education	.093	.030	.051	.026	-.068	.056	.210*	-.053	.141	.200*	-.015									3.59	1.66
13. Wage (Swiss francs)	.068	.022	.042	.005	-.036	.090	.375**	.169*	.477**	.316**	.127	.406**								6216	3800
14. Employability	.093	.116	.047	.077	.134	.189*	.158	-.254**	.129	.167**	-.196*	.229**	.092							3.18	1.06
15. Desire to have a child	-.004	-.111	-.098	.158	-.141	-.060	.077	-.458**	.114	-.029	-.159	-.107	-.063	.052						0.11	0.32
16. Number of children	-.044	.022	.055	.047	-.061	.106	.232**	-.262**	.134	.163*	.017	.154	.078	.103	-.191*					0.38	0.76
17. Company size	.049	.032	.111	-.065	-.159	.185*	.050	.074	.164*	.017	.166*	.159	.319**	-.027	-.097	-.040				2.76	1.07
18. Primary sector	-.001	.120	.103	-.077	.102	-.003	-.075	.063	-.085	-.063	-.109	.070	.179*	-.044	-.031	-.042	-.138			0.01	0.08
19. Secondary sector	-.080	-.087	-.092	.033	.035	.010	.149	-.077	.155	-.110	.015	-.250**	-.078	-.066	.018	.109	-.068	-.042		0.19	0.40
20. Tertiary sector	.145	.123	.106	-.024	-.008	-.006	-.133	.068	-.156	.089	.042	.252**	.031	.090	-.072	-.085	.143	-.143	-.873**	0.76	0.43

Note: n = 147; \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01



Also in the employee group without any care responsibilities, intangible family support has the same positive effect on the organizational-related outcomes: Family-friendly dialogue ( $\beta = .349$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and culture ( $\beta = .129$ ,  $p < .1$ ) significantly enhance commitment (see table 5) and reduce intention to quit (dialogue:  $\beta = -.134$ ,  $p < .1$ ; culture:  $\beta = -.105$ ,  $p < .1$ ) (table 6). In the group of employees with elderly care responsibilities, family-friendly dialogue has a significant positive effect on commitment ( $\beta = .331$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (table 5), whereas no significant impact of culture could be found. Instead, family-friendly culture significantly reduces intention to quit ( $\beta = -.324$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (table 6), whereas no significant effect of dialogue could be found. Overall, intangible family support has no impact on life satisfaction in all three employee groups (table 4).

**Table 4: Multiple regressions for life satisfaction**

		Life satisfaction		
		Without care responsibilities	With childcare responsibilities	With elderly care responsibilities
Family policies	Family-friendly services	.004 (.092)	.339(.110)***	-.280 (.219)
	Family-friendly dialogue	.078 (.095)	.100 (.114)	.044 (.219)
	Family-friendly culture	.036 (.089)	-.137 (.107)	.260 (.210)
Personal factors	Male	-.230 (.113)*	.001 (.160)	-.233 (.265)
	Age	.000 (.007)	-.013 (.010)	.014 (.018)
	Full-time	-.284 (.122)*	.129 (.163)	-.225(.274)
	Leadership position	.131 (.103)	.200 (.133)	.266 (.241)
	Tenure	.014 (.005)*	.013 (.008)	.029 (.013)**
	Wage	.132 (.046)*	.020 (.0612)	.005 (.097)
	Education (ref: compulsory school)			
	- Apprenticeship / voc.	-.105 (.260)	.585 (.289)*	.401 (.640)
	- High school	-.039 (.320)	.557 (.398)	.167 (.728)
	- Higher voc. educ.	-.017 (.279)	.503 (.312)	.573 (.680)
	- Bachelor	-.155 (.283)	.657 (.319)*	.420 (.700)
	- Master or above	-.215 (.289)	.566 (.317)*	.490 (.700)
	Employability	.201 (.049)*	.160 (.062)**	.277 (.114)**
	Desire to have a child	.029 (.156)		.278 (.399)
	Number of children	-.016 (.095)	.048 (.069)	.164 (.159)
Company factors	Company size (ref: small)			
	- medium	.148 (.142)	-.157 (.166)	.823 (.327)*
	- large	.003 (.159)	-.313 (.181)*	.887 (.357)*
	Sector (ref: primary sector)			
	- Secondary sector	-.414 (.219)*	-.496 (.262)*	-.066 (.564)
- Tertiary sector	-.334 (.195)*	-.394 (.232)*	-.311 (.518)	
N	683	430	147	
adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.054	.080	.071	

Note: standard errors in brackets. Significance is denoted as: \* < .1; \*\* < .01; \*\*\* < .001

**Table 5: Multiple regressions for organizational commitment**

		Organizational commitment		
		Without care responsibilities	With childcare responsibilities	With elderly care responsibilities
Family policies	Family-friendly services	.028 (.070)	-.106 (.086)	.070 (.170)
	Family-friendly dialogue	.349 (.072)***	.287 (.089)***	.331 (.170)**
	Family-friendly culture	.129 (.067)*	.275 (.083)***	-.088 (.163)
Personal factors	Male	-.168 (.086)	.077 (.124)	-.172 (.207)
	Age	.002 (.005)	.000 (.007)	.028 (.014)*
	Full-time	.102 (.005)	-.194 (.127)	-.177 (.213)
	Leadership position	.170 (.078)**	.302 (.104)**	-.379 (.188)*
	Tenure	.017 (.004)***	.021 (.006)***	.038 (.010)***
	Wage	.027 (.035)	.067 (.047)	.041 (.076)
	Education (ref: compulsory school)			
	- Apprenticeship / voc.	-.094 (.196)	.302 (.225)	-.352 (.499)
	- High school	-.181 (.242)	-.087 (.310)	-.860 (.567)
	- Higher voc. educ.	-.078 (.214)	.212 (.248)	-.321 (.531)
	- Bachelor	-.249 (.211)	.220 (.243)	-.305 (.546)
	- Master or above	-.489 (.219)*	.150 (.247)	-.482 (.546)
	Employability	.079 (.032)*	.190 (.048)***	.302 (.089)**
	Desire to have a child	-.107 (.118)		.061 (.311)
	Number of children	.041 (.072)	-.004 (.054)	.000 (.124)
Company factors	Company size (ref: small)			
	- medium	-.241 (.108)*	-.474 (.129)***	-.269 (.255)
	- large	-.397 (.120)**	-.710 (.141)***	-.751 (.278)**
	Sector (ref: primary sector)			
	- Secondary sector	-.070 (.165)	-.116 (.204)*	.189 (.440)
- Tertiary sector	-.093 (.148)	-.309 (.180)*	.018 (.404)	
N	683	430	147	
adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.165	.261	.254	

Note: standard errors in brackets. Significance is denoted as: \* < .1; \*\* < .01; \*\*\* < .001

Therefore hypothesis 3a could not be verified – no spillover effects exist for the individual-related outcome. Hypotheses 3b and 3c which postulate a positive spillover effect of intangible family support on the organizational-related outcomes commitment and intention to quit could be verified.

*Effects of control variables:* From the personal control variables, age has a statistically significant influence on intention to quit in the groups with or without elderly care responsibilities. Leadership position, as well as tenure, has a positive influence on commitment in all three working groups. Employability enhances life satisfaction and commitment in all three employee groups. From the company control variables the company size has a significantly high influence on commitment in all three groups.

**Table 6: Multiple regressions for intention to quit**

		Intention to quit		
		Without care responsibilities	With childcare responsibilities	With elderly care responsibilities
Family policies	Family-friendly services	-.031 (.065)	.006 (.071)	.121 (.143)
	Family-friendly dialogue	-.134 (.067)*	-.168 (.074)*	.026 (.143)
	Family-friendly culture	-.105 (.063)*	-.122 (.069)*	-.324 (.138)**
Personal factors	Male	.132 (.080)	.163 (.104)	.461 (.174)***
	Age	-.014 (.005)**	-.008 (.006)	-.034 (.011)**
	Full-time	.002 (.087)	-.122 (.106)	-.183 (.179)
	Leadership position	-.056 (.073)	-.045 (.087)	.261 (.158)
	Tenure	-.003 (.004)	-.002 (.005)	-.019 (.008)*
	Wage	-.086 (.032)**	-.005 (.039)	.031 (.064)
	Education (ref: compulsory school)			
	- Apprenticeship / voc.	.211 (.184)*	-.269 (.188)	.539 (.420)
	- High school	.549 (.227)	-.419 (.258)	.952 (.477)*
	- Higher voc. educ.	.372 (.197)*	-.050 (.207)	.430 (.446)
	- Bachelor	.235 (.200)*	-.218 (.202)	.357 (.459)
	- Master or above	.372 (.197)*	-.051 (.206)	.180 (.459)
	Employability	.011 (.035)	.027 (.040)	-.082 (.089)
	Desire to have a child	-.020 (.110)		-.141 (.262)
	Number of children	-.159 (.067)*	-.050 (.045)	-.089 (.104)
Company factors	Company size (ref: small)			
	- medium	.043 (.101)	.190 (.108)*	.306 (.214)
	- large	.084 (.113)	.237 (.118)*	.148 (.234)
	Sector (ref: primary sector)			
	- Secondary sector	-.155 (.155)	-.035 (.170)	.222 (.370)
- Tertiary sector	-.149 (.148)	.078 (.150)	.258 (.340)	
N	683	430	147	
adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.094	.070	.185	

Note: standard errors in brackets. Significance is denoted as: \* < .1; \*\* < .01; \*\*\* < .001

## 6. Discussion

A family supportive work environment, involving family supportive services, dialogue and culture, focuses primarily on working parents and helps them to reconcile work and family life (Allen, 2001). From an economic perspective, the investment in expensive family practices is only worthwhile if the investment results in certain expected benefits: dedicated and motivated employees who feel loyal to their company. Because only 30% of the workforce directly benefit from a family supportive work environment (BfS, 2009), the effect on employees with no direct benefit is unclear.

Due to this, this study analyzed the effect of tangible and intangible company family support on different employee groups, not only those with childcare, but also with elderly care responsibilities or with no care responsibilities at all. In line with the organization-person-fit theory, as well as with the incentive-contribution-theory, we argue that tangible family support has a specific effect on employees with childcare responsibilities, because they directly benefit from the support. According to the signaling theory, we argue that intangible family support has spillover effects on the attitudes and behavior intention of the entire workforce, because all employees see a family-supportive culture and dialogue as a sign of a supportive work environment. All in all, our results support our hypotheses and show that spillover effects, as well as specific effects, exist depending on the dimensions of a family supportive work environment, the affected working group and the respective outcomes.

To summarize, our findings close the research gaps in the work-family-research in three ways: Firstly, our results show that it is important to measure the different forms of a comprehensive family supportive work environment. Whereas family supportive services have a specific positive effect on employees with childcare responsibilities, family-friendly culture and dialogue do affect the whole workforce positively.

Secondly, our findings indicate that it is essential to subdivide the employees depending on their care responsibility situation in order to analyze the effects of a family supportive work environment (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Only in the employee group with childcare responsibilities do family-friendly services have a positive impact. Employees with childcare responsibilities are more satisfied with their life if the company offers qualitative worthwhile services; other employee groups are not. This intuitive result is in line with the organization-person-fit theory, which predicts satisfied workers if the company fulfils their needs (Turban & Keon, 1993). In the employee group without care responsibilities, as well as in the group with elderly care responsibilities, no positive effect on the individual-related outcome could be found. That family-friendly services do not affect employees with elderly care issues may be an indication that so far, companies focus only on working parents and not on employees with elderly care responsibilities (Tönz, 2005). Nevertheless, in the employee group with childcare, as well as in the groups with or without elderly care responsibilities, a positive impact of intangible family support was found. The organizational-related outcomes, organizational commitment and intention to quit demonstrate that a family-friendly dialogue, as well as a family-friendly culture, has the same or similar positive impact on the entire workforce. These results support the view of the signaling theory (Spence, 1970); that intangible family support gives positive signals to the entire workforce.

Thirdly, our results indicate that the combination of individual- and organizational-related outcome variables is necessary in order to understand entirely the effects of a family supportive work environment. As a first step, it is important to measure the effect of family support on individual-related outcomes such as life satisfaction. Only if family support affects individual-related outcomes positively, can one see if employees are direct beneficiaries (such as employees with childcare responsibilities) or not (such as the employees with elderly care responsibilities). Therefore, the organizational-related outcomes of family support are influenced in two different ways. Whe-

reas the organizational commitment and intention to quit of employees with childcare responsibilities are primarily affected positively because of the direct benefit of company support, the positive impact on the organizational-related outcomes of the non-beneficiaries works through spillover effects.

### ***Limitations and future research***

As with all *cross-sectional studies*, there is a limitation that needs to be highlighted. Due to the fact that the data collection took place only once, there is no chance of deducing causality with the relationships observed. Therefore, the findings are limited to the cross-sectional nature of the study (Wooldridge, 2002). This could be improved in future work-family research by employing a longitudinal design.

Another limitation of this study may be the *common method bias* (Podsakoff, 1986). Our data is based on self-reports: We only measured the view of the employees. On the one hand, this meant that, advantageously, we could measure the employee's perception of the level of family support and not only the hard facts. On the other hand, we missed hearing the employer's perspective and had therefore only one source of information, which may have given us biased results. To reduce this common method bias and obtain the most honest answers possible, we carefully constructed the survey, used different measurement scales and assured the anonymity of the survey to the participants. However, for future research, it would be interesting to combine data from both sides.

In combination with the data-collection-problems mentioned above, self-selection is a further problem of this study. If family-friendly employees feel themselves more attracted by family-friendly companies than other working groups, there could be a *self-selection effect*, which would influence these results. To minimize this problem we controlled for tenure, number of children and the wish for children. Additionally, the findings of Bretz and Judge (1994) don't support a self-selection effect through family supportive work environments. As mentioned earlier, they found that levels of work-life conflict among employees did not predict their attraction to companies offering a family-friendly human resource management.

We also note that the *cultural context* of the study, including the legal environment, norms and traditions, may make it difficult to generalize the results. For future research, it would be interesting to see if there are international differences concerning the specific and spillover effects. As the study of Lewis and Smithson (2001) shows, employees in Sweden and Norway do not expect a high level of company family support because state support is taken for granted. In contrast, in Britain, Portugal and Ireland, where gender roles are more traditional, employees are more likely to assume individual responsibility and therefore expect more company family support.

### ***Conclusion***

Overall, the results of this study lead us to the following practical implication: If companies invest in a family supportive work environment with family-friendly services, they should also invest in family-friendly dialogue and culture. Only if companies invest in all three dimensions, is there a positive impact on the entire workforce. Whereas the investment in services has a direct and positive effect on employees with

childcare responsibilities, employers who also make an effort to provide a family-friendly dialogue and culture give rise to positive spillover effects for their entire workforce. The promotion of family-friendly intangible factors, such as family supportive managers and the interest in employees' needs to reconcile both work and family enhance organizational commitment and reduce the intention to quit of the entire workforce, without generating large costs. A longitudinal study which collects the employees views as well as those of the employers in different cultural settings could give some further answers with respect to spillover effects of family supportive work environments.

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