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**Work-life balance – the challenge of female
entrepreneurs in Vietnam**

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SUMMARY

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TITLE	Work-life balance – the challenge of female entrepreneurs in Vietnam
PURPOSE	The purpose of the project is to identify how the female owners of small and medium sized businesses deal with the issue of work and family balance in Vietnam – a developing country in Asia.
METHODS	Qualitative research method with interpretative approach. Empirical data collected through telephone interviews.
RESULT	<p>High-growth oriented female owners of SMEs in Vietnam do experience significant work-family conflict. Strong demands of running a high-growth business and the severe family responsibilities of women in an Oriental society adversely influence the wellbeing of the entrepreneurs, and consequently result in poorer venture performance.</p> <p>Heading to the balance of work and family roles, the majority employs role sharing strategy to deal with work-family conflict because it allows them to enjoy the accomplishment of both roles. Role sharing is implemented through harmoniously delegating venture demands and family demands. To delegate family demands, the entrepreneurs outsource the low-priority responsibilities to family. To delegate venture role, they normally employ participative management practices and human resources practices to be able to ensure good venture performance when they must increase family role involvement.</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

In developed countries, the issue of work and family balance of both male and female entrepreneurs has been raised and discussed systematically. Apparently, there are more concerns over work and family balance of women entrepreneurs who experience greater conflicts between work and family roles than men (Noor, Welter, as cited in Shelton, 2006, p. 286).

Such greater conflicts are traditional and rooted from societal norms which still expect men to focus on careers, and women to focus on caring for the family, according to Biggs and Brough, Buttner and Moore (as cited in Walker et al, 2008). Pressures and difficulties caused by conflict between work and family roles then become the primary source of women's disadvantages in the corporate world. This can be justification for the "concentration in low paid, part-time employment and their absence at the most senior levels of management [in business]" (Doherty, 2004, p. 433).

When it comes to the senior levels of management, the biggest challenge to female entrepreneurs is the "commitment" which is commonly perceived as long working hours and "acting in the way that indicates that work is more important than family (Doherty, 2004). This "long working hour culture" or "breadwinner model" may be suitably followed by senior men who hand over family caring responsibilities to their wives but not possibly by women in senior positions. Research by Drew and Murtagh (2005) demonstrated that both genders are well aware of the significance of work/life balance in their careers, but compared to men, women want to seek for more flexible arrangement for work-life balance.

Towards flexible working arrangement, many women pursue self-employment in order to carry out family responsibilities and chase their career goals (Caputo and Dolinsky, Mattis, Bruni et al., as cited in Walker et al, 2008) while others possess and run their own business. In "Women and work-life balance: is home-based business ownership

the solution?” Walker, Wang & Redmond investigated self-employment through home-based business ownership as a potential solution to the work-family conflict.

Following another research path, some researchers argued that the work-family conflict might negatively affect the well-being of female entrepreneurs (Hammer et al., as cited in Shelton, 2006) and sought for “psychological means of coping with emotions resulting from work-family conflict” (Ashforth, Edwards & Rothbard, Greenhouse & Pasuraman, cited in Shelton, 2006). Shelton (2006) went further, featured a frame work of the impact of work-family management strategies on venture performance and then proposed the optimal strategy for female entrepreneurs who target high growth.

Thanks to high awareness of society and broad theoretical base from loads of researches and studies, female entrepreneurs in developed countries have got incremental support from policies, women unions and associations, and from their own employers... In UK, a range of work-family balance policies has been developed by three successive Labour governments since 1997 (Lewis & Campbell, 2007). In Sweden, the project Business Consultants for Women by NUTEK was implemented to supply women entrepreneurs with advice on business issues and wider concerns such as how to combine family life with running a business (Green Paper: Entrepreneurship in Europe, 2003).

Much less fortunate than their counterparts in developed nations, female entrepreneurs in developing countries are facing tough challenges of work-life balance without proper support. In developing countries and particularly in a still being conservative society like Vietnam, although the role and contribution of female entrepreneurs are progressively recognized, the issue is regarded as “solely personal issue” and has been paid little attention.

A number of researches have been carried out to figure out the difficulties of female entrepreneurs and provide propositions for the development of women entrepreneurship in Vietnam. However, they mostly focus on the difficulties in establishment, credit, innovation and technology approach, management skills...In a

large scale quantitative study conducted among 500 larger, formal women-owned businesses across the country in 2006 to identify major barriers to women business owners in Vietnam, the issue of work-family balance has been raised but has not been regarded as a major barrier to women business owners (IFC, GEM, & MPDF, 2006). An important research on women's entrepreneurship development in Vietnam carried out recently by Vietnam Women Entrepreneurs Council with support of International Labour Organization also "tapped" the work-family balance issue, but did not go further (VWEC, 2007). Work-family balance is also referred to in some studies on the issue of gender in businesses in Vietnam, but somewhat vaguely (Greig, 2005). In general, work-life balance as a major challenge to women entrepreneurs has been named, but has not been thoroughly discussed.

Motivated by special interest in work-life balance of female entrepreneurs and the wish to contribute to the understanding and awareness on this issue, as well as to inspire broader and deeper studies in author's home country, this project will investigate the work-life balance issue as a challenge of women who own and manage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Vietnam.

Women play a very important role in the economic development of Vietnam, regardless of constrains of gender values and norms in an Oriental society. It is estimated that 27% of 3 million household businesses are owned by women, and out of 330.000 SMEs in Vietnam there are about 90.000 female-owned enterprises (VWEC, 2007).

However, due to time restraint, the project will be limited to investigation on female owners of SMEs at a fairly small scope.

1.2. Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of the project is to identify how the female owners of small and medium sized businesses deal with the issue of work and family balance in Vietnam - a developing country in Asia. The following question is to be examined:

“How do female owners of small and medium sized businesses in Vietnam deal with the issue of work and family balance?”

And some sub-questions are raised accordingly to describe the research question specifically:

- How do they handle the work and family conflicts?
- How do their work and family balance strategies affect the management practices?
- What are the preferred management strategies for work and family balance issue?

The project is organized as follows: the next chapter presents an overview on the literature to be used and the conceptual framework to be developed; the methodology chapter describes the methods used for data collection and analysis; the findings and analysis chapters states and analyses empirical result of the study process; finally, the concluding chapter answers the research questions and gives some recommendations for further researches.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Core concepts

Work-family balance

The concept of “work-family balance” is traditionally and frequently viewed as the absence of work–family conflict, or the frequency and intensity in which work interferes with family or family interferes with work (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007).

Relating to the absence of work-family conflict, Clark (2000) defines work-family balance as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict”(as cited in Guest, 2002), while Frone (2002) names work-family balance as “the low levels of work-family conflict in combination with high levels of work-family facilitation”.

Relating to the work-family interference, Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) label work-family balance as “the extents to which individuals are equally engaged in and equally satisfied with work and family roles”. Another definition of work-family balance by Voydanoff (2005) is “a global assessment that work resources meet family demands, and family resources meet work demands such that participation is effective in both domains” (as cited in Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007).

Reviewing the previous studies on this field, Grzywacz & Carlson raised a definition of work-family balance focusing entirely on accomplishment of role-related responsibilities, which is different from the ones mentioned above (combining both accomplishment and satisfaction in work and family). Work-family balance, as defined by the two researchers, is the “accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains” (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007)

Different definitions of work–family balance are presented to give onto a wide view of the concept. The research focuses on the role balance; hence the definition by Grzywacz & Carlson best serves the research purpose and will be used onwards.

Work-family conflict

According to Stoner, Hartman, and Arora (as cited in Shelton, 2006, p. 288), work-family conflict is defined as a form of inter-role conflict arising because pressures emanating from one role are incompatible with those from another role.

Adams, King, and King (1996) stated that work-family conflict arises when demands of one domain (e.g., work) are incompatible with demands of the other domain (e.g., family), and this conflict can affect the quality of both work and family life.

O’Neil and Greenberger (1994) demonstrated that individuals who combine work and family roles often feel a high degree of commitment to both roles and, perhaps as a result of this high commitment, may also experience a high degree of work-family conflict.

The descriptions of work family conflict all focuses on the conflict of high demanding dual roles of the bearing subject. In other words, the nature of work family conflict is *role conflict*.

According to Greenhaus and Pasuraman, there are two type of work-family conflict: time-based and strain-based. Time-based conflict arises when time spent on one role (work or family) are obstacles to the completion of responsibility of the other role. Strain-based conflict arises when the strain produced in one role runs over into the other role (Ling & Powell, 2001).

High-growth oriented female business owners

Ambitious/high-growth-oriented female entrepreneurs are defined as women who have the intention and motivation to develop high growth ventures (Morrison, Breen, Ali as cited in Shelton, 2006). In comparison with low-growth-oriented female entrepreneurs, Grundry and Welsch (as cited in Shelton, 2006, p. 288) find that they

“possess stronger commitment to the success of their business and have greater willingness to sacrifice for their ventures”.

2.2. Theoretical base

Work family balance is the state in which work–family conflict is lowest. The nature of work-family conflict is role conflict. Thus, the entrepreneurs make attempts to achieve the state of work family balance by employing their strategies to reduce the role conflict.

2.2.1. Reducing work-family conflict by manipulating roles

Shelton (2006) developed a theoretical framework based on the constructs of role involvement and role conflict to predict the effectiveness of strategies for reducing work-family conflict by manipulating roles.

According to Shelton, work-family conflict lowers the well-being of the entrepreneur, and subsequently lowers the work performance.

Work-family conflict is positively correlated both with venture role demands and family roles demands. Venture roles demands are based on working hours, industry requirements, and the aspirations of the entrepreneur, while family roles demands depend on the number and ages of dependent children, marital status and relative salience of the family.

High levels of work-family conflict are expected for female entrepreneurs who target high growth. Such entrepreneurs cannot reach their objectives for their ventures by reducing their commitment to their businesses, while the entrepreneurs who are less ambitious may reduce or limit the scope of their businesses to reduce work-family conflict. What’s more, female entrepreneurs face up with more challenges in business start-up and operation than their male counterparts, and these results in higher workload and longer working hours, i.e. higher commitments required.

However, the level of work-family conflict can be lowered by work-family management strategies which reduce conflict by altering the level and configuration of the family and/or venture demands that fuel dissonance between works and family roles.

Shelton listed three basic strategies of role manipulation to reduce the role conflict occurring from work-family interference as can be seen in the table below.

STRATEGY	IMPLEMENTATION
(1) Role elimination	No family
(2) Role reduction	Smaller family Defer family
(3) Role sharing	Delegate venture role: Participative management techniques Delegate family role : Outsource family obligations

Table 1: WORK-FAMILY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION (SHELTON, 2006)

These externally based strategies seek to lower the level of conflict at the work-family interface by organizing, sequencing and delegating work and family activities. It is important to note that these strategies are different from internally based strategies which target managing thoughts and emotions.

Targeting high-growth, ambitious female entrepreneurs do not reduce venture roles, instead role elimination (1) and reduction strategies (2) are employed by shrinking family role, while less ambitious entrepreneurs may choose to trim down work commitment.

Role sharing strategies (3) allow women to actively participate in both work and family spheres by delegating duties of family and/or venture roles to other parties. Portions of venture role are delegated by employing participative management techniques and investing in training, competitive compensation, and other progressive human resource practices to empower subordinates and build teams. Likewise, portions of

family role can be delegated by hiring assistance with childcare and household chores or by seeking the help of relatives and friends.

Of the three strategies mentioned above, female entrepreneurs generally base on two key factors to opt for work-family management strategies. These factors are the relative internal salience of family role, and the type and quality of external resources available.

Shelton argued that choosing a work-family management strategy matching the relative internal salience of family role will help the women entrepreneurs experience greater well-being, and consequently higher venture performance than those who do not.

External resources available to the entrepreneurs can be understood as “the range of options that can be pursued”. External resources include spouse support, financial resources, quality and availability of hired and volunteer help, and trustworthy manager and employees.

The most appropriate work-family management strategies should fit both internal family salience and external resources of a particular female entrepreneur. Hence, high growth oriented women entrepreneurs tend to choose their work-family management strategies according to the guidelines showed in the table below.

		Internal Family Salience	
		Low	High
External Resource	High	Delegate Family Role (Role Sharing)	Delegate Venture Role (Role Sharing)
	Low	No Family (Role Elimination)	Smaller Family (Role Reduction)

Table 2: OPTIMAL WORK-FAMILY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES CHOICES (SHELTON, 2006)

Arguing that women experience enhancement by participating in both family and venture roles, the author assumes that role sharing is commonly preferred to either role reduction or role elimination. Role sharing strategy allows women entrepreneurs to be highly committed to both roles.

However, limitations in available external resources can lessen the choices of female entrepreneurs. When a wide range of external resources are available: Women entrepreneurs who achieve high growth and place a high level of salience on the family role will choose a role sharing strategy that delegates the venture roles; Women entrepreneurs who achieve high growth and place a low level of salience on the family role will choose a role sharing strategy that delegates the family role.

The study concludes that, appropriate work-family management strategies will improve venture performance for women-owned businesses. Women who develop high-growth businesses more successfully reduce work-family conflict by choosing strategies better matched with their internal needs and access to external resources than less successful women. Of the work-family management strategies, role-sharing coping mechanisms are preferable because they allow women to maintain proper commitment to both their and family and ventures while reducing the level of inter-role conflict.

The author also emphasizes the strategy of delegating venture roles by participative management techniques and progressive human resources practices for high growth oriented female entrepreneurs who are highly committed to family role. The women entrepreneurs who possess a well-built management and worker teams are capable of remaining or increasing involvement in family role without hindering business operations. The entrepreneurs who do not delegate venture roles, on the contrary, may have to reduce their work involvement to handle family matters, and consequently undergo poorer venture performance.

Overall, the research by Shelton has successfully described the optimal strategy for work-family balance and provided some implications for management practices. However, a limitation of the study is that the author has not thoroughly discussed the

levels and configuration of internal family salience and external resources, the two key factors for work-family conflict coping strategies selection. Also, the research focuses solely on female entrepreneurs who have high growth orientation. The coping mechanisms for work-family conflict for less ambitious women entrepreneurs have not been examined.

2.2.2. A model of work-family conflict process

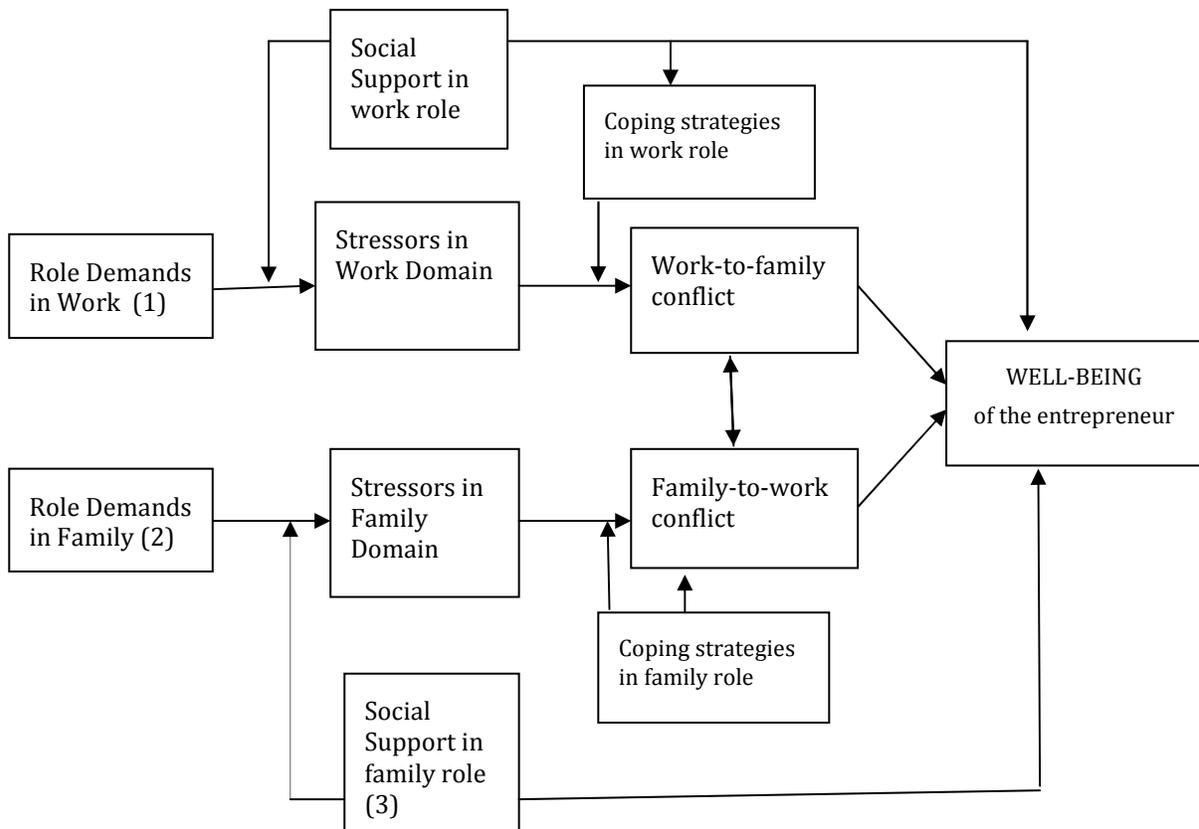
As described above, work-family conflict is correlated both with venture role demands and family role demands. And this conflict has negative impact on the well-being of the entrepreneurs. However, the framework by Shelton did not illustrate the mechanism in which the venture and family role demands directly affect the work-family conflict and indirectly affect the well-being of entrepreneurs. The components of venture role demands and family role demands were also mentioned. Because of the huge difference between western culture and oriental culture, there is a need to reconsider the work and family role demands when the framework is adapted to the context of Vietnam, a developing country in Asian.

This thesis work will partially base on the study by Ling and Powell, in which the authors discuss the issue of work-family conflict in an Oriental society, contemporary China, and then extend an American-based model of work-family conflict to the work and family context in Chinese society (Ling & Powell, 2001). Owing to the similarities in societal and cultural, specifically in family characteristics of the two neighboring countries Vietnam and China, the model by Ling and Powell is expected to be properly applied to the researched objects.

The original model presents work-family conflict process based on researches of American scholars, illustrated in Figure 1. Accordingly, attempts to adequately fulfill both work and family role demands require sufficient amount of time and energy, which may be scarce. Thus simultaneous work and family role demands could lead to work and family stressors, which consecutively act as antecedents of work-family conflict. Stressors in work domain lead to work-to-family conflict, and stressors in family domain lead to family-to-work conflict. The former occurs when work activities

hinder performance of family responsibilities and the latter appears when family responsibilities negatively affect performance in work place.

Work-family conflict in turn negatively influences the well-being of workers. Two other types of factors affecting the dynamics of work-family conflict also included in the model. The first type of factor comprises the coping strategies used in the work and family roles. And the second type of factor comprises the social support received from the work and family roles. The two types of factors may modify and vary the work-family conflict process from one person to another.



- (1) Consists of commitment, productivity, responsibility, reliability
- (2) Consist of earning money, responsibility for children, spouse support and household responsibilities.

FIGURE 1: MODEL OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT - ADAPTED FROM LING & POWELL (2001)

Based on the discussion on the differences in work and family contexts between America and China, Ling and Powell seek to incorporate the factors that have not been fully covered by the American-based model into a new model adjusted to Chinese context. The author will not present the specific model of China but indicate some adaptations that could be well employed in Vietnamese context.

Regarding the role at work, demands of commitment, productivity, responsibility and reliability are assumed to be generally unchanged in cross-cultural contexts. Regarding family role demands, the author find it necessary to point out some noteworthy aspects of Chinese family context which are basically similar to Vietnam's family context.

- Workers receive significant societal assistance in the form of household and childcare service.
- Workers receive considerable household and childcare assistance from their elderly parents.
- Elderly are more likely to live with and be the dependents of workers.
- The culture attaches much importance on interpersonal harmony so the negative effects of conflict with family members are great.

These aspects are derived from the discussion of Chinese family contexts that provides important implications for the extension of the model presented above to the Chinese context. Accordingly, the Role Demands in Family (2) will consist of:

- Earning money
- Responsibility for children
- Spouse support
- Household responsibilities
- Responsibility for elderly parents

Subsequently, the social support in family role received (3) will include the support from spouse, elderly parents and society.

In brief, work and family role demands as well as individual coping strategies and social support should be taken into account when examining the work-family conflict in a specific context, that is, Vietnamese context as being examined in this study.

2.3. Conceptual Framework

The study by Ling and Powell features a work-family conflict process in which role demands in work and in family are the cause of work-family conflict, and this conflict has adverse impact on the well-being of the entrepreneur.

The study by Shelton indicates that the work-family conflict may lower the well-being the entrepreneur, and subsequently lower the venture performance. However an appropriate work-family management strategy chosen can reduce the conflict thus produces good effect on venture performance.

The framework below is developed to demonstrate the relations of role demands and work-family conflict, the impact of work-family management strategy to the well-being of the entrepreneur and venture performance.

Work family conflict arises when role demands at work are incompatible with role demands at family. This conflict negatively influences the wellbeing of the entrepreneurs, and subsequently hinders venture performance.

Accordingly, an effective work family management strategy may help to reduce conflict, and consequently, higher venture performance.

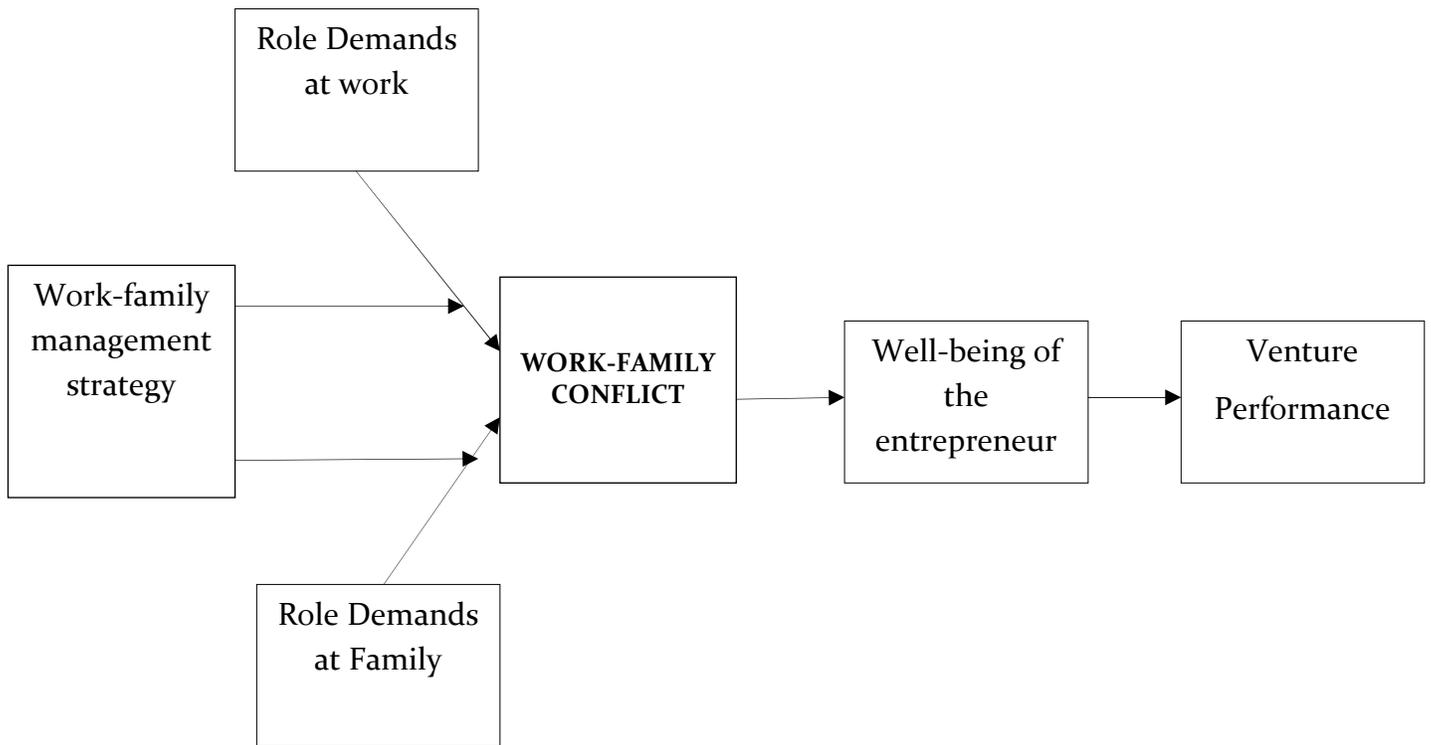


FIGURE 2:IMPACT OF WORK-FAMILY MANAGEMENT TO THE WELL-BEING OF THE ENTREPRENEUR AND VENTURE PERFORMANCE (OWN CREATION).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research method

A qualitative method of study with interpretative approach will be applied to investigate the raised problem. Taking into consideration of the geographical distance, time limit and the anticipated scope of the research, in-depth interview through telephone is the most appropriate method to collect empirical materials for the research work.

3.2. Research process

To build up theoretical base of the thesis work, the author makes advanced search and selection then draws on the literatures on female entrepreneurs, work-family conflict, work-family role management...gotten from articles in books and leading journals. Databases including ABI/Inform, IngentaConnect, ELIN@Mälardalen, SAGE Premier are the main sources of materials collected.

Documents and reports from the sources of some government and non-government organizations are also drawn on to get an overview on the context which the Vietnamese female entrepreneurs are surrounded by.

And as presented above, a number of telephone interviews will be performed to gather empirical data for the research work. The research process will be performed along the four basic steps of any qualitative study: 1) case selection; (2) data collection; (3) data preparation; and (4) data analysis.

Case selection

Small and medium sized enterprises account for 95% of enterprises in Vietnam, and of the total of SMEs, women-owned businesses make up 27% (Vietnam Women Entrepreneurs Council, 2007).

On one hand, the author aims at interviewing *high growth oriented female owners* of small and medium sized businesses. The entrepreneurs who target high growth are supposed not to reduce commitment to their business through reducing or restraining business scale. On the other hand, the author targets the *married* entrepreneurs because they do experience significant conflict between work and home roles. Additionally, the majority of Vietnamese female entrepreneurs are married (80%) (Weeks, 2007) so this criterion helps to attain better sample representativeness.

The author has contacted Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), office in Hanoi, and asked for a list of 20 women-owned, high-growth businesses. The list was sent to author after 5 working days, suggesting 25 women-owned businesses in the fields of restaurants and hotel, food and beverage, clothing retails and cosmetics, construction and real-estate...

The author has sent electronic mails to the suggested entrepreneurs, presenting the purpose of the research work, the reasons why the author has chosen and expected to interview them, and inviting the entrepreneurs for telephone interviews. The author also emphasized the guarantee of confidentiality of the research and the right of the interviewees to review or alter the transcripts of the interview.

Soon after sending the mail, the author made a number of phone calls to the businesses to enhance the chance to get replies and approvals. Six women-owners of four businesses have agreed to be interviewed. Of the businesses, the first is a cosmetics retailing company, the second is an architecture design company, the third is a craft exporting company, and the rest is a company which owns a chain of restaurants, the forth is a real estate company, and the last is a pharmaceutical company.

On the whole, all of the interviewees are female owners of high-growth businesses and are married women. List of respondents can be found in Appendix 2.

Data collection

The interviewees are proposed to have the interviews carried out at the time that fits their schedules, but no more than 3 weeks since they agree to take the interviews.

The interviews through telephone are to be recorded, transferred into text and translated into English. Both Vietnamese and English versions will be sent to the interviewees no more than three days after the interviews. Data and information gotten from the interviews will be processed after the author gets the final consent of the interviewees on content of the transcripts.

Data preparation and analysis

The contents of the interviews are formed by five questions as to be presented in the next section. A full version of the Interview Questions can be found in Appendix 1. Of the five questions:

The first, second and third questions examine the way that women entrepreneurs perceive the issue of work family balance and their tendency in the selection of coping strategies for work family conflict.

The fourth question specifies the coping strategies taken by the entrepreneurs to deal with role demands in family, and the last one identifies their coping strategies to role demands in work.

Empirical results collected from the interviews will be interpreted and analysed under the chosen theoretical perspectives, clinging to the developed conceptual framework.

4. Findings

Question 1: Do you delay childbearing or limit the number of children due to work demands?

Out of the entrepreneurs, only one (Mrs Thu) decided not to have one more child because she wanted to spend time and energy on developing her business. “Architecture design is male dominated. Thus, I had to ‘fight’ to seek for new projects and win them. It is challenging to run a venture of which 90% staff are men as well. I have a passion for the work, I want to develop the brand, and then I decided not to have one more kid as we had planned before. My hubby agreed to my decision”.

Besides, two said that they could delay childbearing due to work demands, but no more than three or four years (Mrs Tam and Mrs Phong). They all want to have two children.

The rest said that they did not want to have less than two children. They did not delay childbearing, but said that it could be considered.

Question 2: Do you normally experience major work family conflict (which can be understood as the state that work schedule conflict with family life, or vice versa)? What are the periods that you suffer from work family conflict most?

All the interviewees acknowledged that their work schedules are often incompatible with family time and these are major conflicts.

Staff and partners meetings, projects to be finished, reports to be dealt with, tight deadlines, unpredictable work demands...are named by entrepreneurs as the causes for working extra time. Business trips, updating information and upgrading knowledge also contribute to squeeze out the time of them. And these consequently cut back on the time spent on family life (time-based conflict). The accomplishment of all the venture demands also affects the mental and physical health of the women (strain-based conflict).

“The most popular word in my business is ‘deadline’. We don’t do our projects in sequence but have several projects at the same time, and usually the deadlines overlap each other. That means we have to stay up until 11 pm at night. When I come back home my daughter is sleeping, and I am too tired to do anything else” (Mrs Thu, who owns an architecture design company).

“Managerial works occupied all of my working time. Meetings with partners sometimes took up my evening time, and business trips abroad might make me absent from home up to a week. It was really hectic to be both good manager and family caretaker. I simply couldn’t find enough time for my family as I wanted” (Mrs Ha, Pharmaceutical Company)

“Four years after opening the first store, I had the second one opened, and decided to set up my home-based business so that I could import some foreign brands directly. I had to travel abroad to search for new brands and suppliers, dealt with bureaucratic procedures of business establishment, recruited more staff...I worked 14 hours a day, dealing with the new established venture and taking care of my one year old son. Felt exhausted” (Mrs Tam, Cosmetics retailing company).

Family responsibilities also have reverse influence on work performance, as experienced by nearly all of the interviewees. And naturally the entrepreneurs experience higher pressure from family demands when their children are small.

“I had to learn everything because it was the first time I had a baby. In addition to bunch of chores, night feeding did stress me out. I had to get up 2 to 3 times a night and found it hard to go back to sleep. Unsurprisingly it is extremely hectic to work during the next day. I had to skip some important plans and delay some crucial decisions because I was not well enough. It is better now because my son is two and my hubby could help me to feed him at night”. (Mrs Tam)

Question 3: Which role is your priority, as a business owner and a mother and/or wife? Do you reduce commitment to either family or business for the

demands of the other role? How do you negotiate the two roles in such situation? Do you head to the balance in work and family roles?

Which role should come first? Nearly all the interviewees emphasized on their family role. However, it is the fact that venture demands tend to run over family time constantly and the entrepreneurs target high growth, therefore the entrepreneurs will set priorities for either work or family in specific situations.

Aiming at balancing work and family roles, all the interviewees said that they manage to develop strategies that allow them to combine their work and family roles in ways that protect their mental and physical wellbeing.

Question 4: How do you deal with your family responsibilities (listed below) while ensuring commitment to your business? What kinds of support do you get for handling such family role demands? (Earning money, responsibility for children, spouse support, household responsibilities, responsibility for elderly parents)

Earning money can be a high pressure on the women entrepreneurs when they start their businesses. However earning money is a shared-responsibility in families, so the women both work harder to develop their businesses and share the financial responsibility to the families.

Out of six respondents, three have live-in helpers to help out with cooking, doing cleaning and laundry, buying food, looking after children and ailing parents when they are not at home.

“I live with my husband’s parents. My children are small; the eldest daughter is 12 and the youngest son 5 years old who is way too active. My husband is devoted to his career and honestly he doesn’t help me much in housework. I cannot live without my Oshin (the word used to describe housekeepers). She cooks for 6 people in my family, goes to the nearby market to buy food every day, brings my son to school and back...I spend my time at home on checking my daughter’s homework, play with my son, talk to hubby and his old parents, visit my parents at weekend. I also cook for my family when

I like, because I am quite good at cooking” (Mrs Hong, owner of a chain of restaurants).

“My husband’s father is living with us. He is diabetic and needs a special diet; he is also downbeat because of his illness and needs someone to talk to. A maid helps me to take care of him. Housework and childrearing are shared between my husband and me” (Mrs Ha).

“My hubby was not so supportive, especially when I came back home too late, or went on business trips although I tried to spend time for him and family, and supported him in his careers. He was brought up in a very traditional way. He doesn’t do housework. But we found the middle ground gradually. He and I shared the child rearing responsibility, and I hired a maid to help me with housework” (Mrs Hoa, owner of a craft exporting company).

The rest seek for support from husbands or elderly parents or their own children.

“My mother in law doesn’t want to have a live-in helper. She wants to take care of my son herself. I am lucky because she likes to help me and has much experience of caring for infant. However, she dislikes the fact that I spend much time on business. She thinks I should do cooking and cleaning. I bought lots of household facilities like washing machine, vacuum cleaner....reschedule the work and do housework, and ask my husband to help when I am too busy” (Mrs Tam).

“I had a maid before. But when my eldest daughter was 16, we didn’t need the maid anymore. My daughter helped me to cook dinner when I was busy, helped her little brother with his home work. She’s quite mature at her age. You know, I started my venture when she was 8. I came back home late constantly, worked at weekends occasionally. I took care of her as much as I could, but she knew that I had my work and I am devoted to it. Sometimes, when I couldn’t be there to help her out with her matters, her father will be with her. But above all, she should learn to take good care of herself. She’s quite independent now and I can rely on her” (Mrs Thu).

Mrs Thu's opinion is shared by Mrs Phong. She said that she encouraged her son to be an independent boy, who can basically take care of himself. The parents support but do not do everything for him. The woman does the same to her husband, takes care and support because she cannot take the role of a traditional wife.

Question 5: How do you deal with venture demands?

"I ask my daughter to be independent because I can't be there all the time to help her to deal with all of her matters. I keep my eyes on her and I will be there when she really needs. I employed the same principle in my venture. It must not be out of track because I don't follow it step-by-step". The view of Mrs Thu is shared among other the respondents.

Mrs Thu encourages self-controlling teams in her businesses. She builds the teams and asks for the cooperation of team members. Each team can be in charge of a part or a whole architecture design project. They are encouraged to discuss the ideas and make decision on how to complete the project. A staff can be promoted to be team leader or department manager if he makes good contribution to the team work in many projects. We have a 3-month training program, in which a newly recruited staff will join a formed working team. He/she will be trained both professional skills and practical teamwork skills by other experienced team members.

As a leader of a pharmaceutical company, Mrs Ha's schedule is filled with the trips abroad to meet with suppliers, lots of industry conferences, meetings with partners when the company grew up...These eat up the time that she could spend on managing her company and she didn't have enough time to make plans, give directives and supervise the work in details as she had done before. Therefore she had to rearrange the work structure, put more responsibilities and pay the staff more at the same time.

Leading a real estate company, Mrs Phong makes the key decisions, sets the goal and time plans, leaves the work to her employees and then checks the results carefully. Being strict and disciplined in work, but Mrs Phong promotes a working environment in which people are supported to take their family care responsibilities. This facilitates

both the entrepreneur and her employees in their family roles. She invests generously in training because she believes that qualified employees require less direction but make better efficiency.

Mrs Tam focuses on the autonomy. She hires the people who are independent and self-disciplined to manage her cosmetics retailing shops. She provides the hired shop-managers with necessary authority and information and let them do their jobs. If the shops make good profit, the profit will be shared with the managers.

Mrs Hong runs a chain of restaurants. She authorizes the managers of the restaurants to employ chefs and servants, build the menu, make period plans, implement the ideas to improve the work. She also creates a mechanism to get regular feedbacks from lower-level staff on the efficiency of the work.

5. Analysis

5.1. Work-family conflict and work-family balance awareness

All the respondents recognized major work-family conflict, and it could be observed as both the unfavorable impact of work demands on the fulfillment of family responsibilities (work-to-family conflict) and family responsibilities negatively affect performance in work place (family-to-work conflict).

According to the respondents, the work-family adverse impact is normally stronger than the family-work impact. However the family-to-work conflict is stronger when their children are small, especially when they are not old enough to go to kindergarten or school.

Nearly all the respondents said that childbearing could be delayed due to work demands but no more than 3 years because they are afraid that they could past childbearing age. Work demands do not influence their decisions on the number of children that they want to have. They all want to have 2 children (a government policy previously permitted families to have no more than two children) and believe that they can afford to satisfy both work and family demands. In other words, reasonable balance of work and family responsibilities while ensuring mental and physical wellbeing is the target of the entrepreneurs.

Refer to the theory by Shelton (Table 1, p.9) it is obvious that the strategy to reduce the role conflict chosen by the majority is role sharing because it allows the entrepreneurs to “enjoy the enhancement of both work and family roles” (Shelton, 2006). Role reduction (smaller family, defer family) is the choice of a small minority to reduce work-home conflict. The selection of role elimination (no family) is not mentioned here because the research targets the married female entrepreneurs as explained above).

The reason why role reduction is the choice of a small minority possibly is, Vietnamese families love to have two children or more, and childbearing is regarded as the vocation, happiness and responsibility of a woman to her husband and her great family. Single life is not encouraged in the society as well. Hence women do not want to defer family or childbearing too long.

5.2. Delegate family role

Earning money is the main motivation of women entrepreneurs when they start working. However when their businesses achieve high growth, the financial responsibility to their families is not a burden to them. Men are still thought of as “breadwinners” in Vietnamese culture, therefore the financial responsibility is shared between spouses.

Child-rearing is the major concern of the mother-entrepreneurs. Because of tight schedule, the entrepreneurs rely on the help from elderly parents (who normally live with them), nannies and kindergarten/school or to do day-care. However, there is the fact that elderly parents and nannies do not have education skills and the quality of child-care service is not so reliable. The women are also aware that there are times when the mother’s role cannot be substituted therefore they try to schedule the work to spend time caring their children. In fact they want to share their child-caring responsibility with their spouses but more than half of the respondents said that they didn’t receive much help from the husbands. The explanation is that the husbands have their own careers and they believe that women should be “the breadbakers” who do household chores and take care of the children.

Outsourcing some family responsibilities are the choice of the majority. Having a housekeeper or a maid is norm and the expenses are relatively low (USD 88-118 per month) (Van, 2009). Hence, it is a good solution for busy women entrepreneurs to do housework, take care of their children and their aging/ailing parents. It is worth noting that, this kind of “social support in the form of household and childcare service” (as mentioned by Ling and Powell) is crucial to the women entrepreneurs.

There is a traditional custom that a woman has to live with her husband's family and take care of all the members in a grand family. A live-in helper could help with some housework but the lack of "caring responsibilities" can be the cause of serious disagreement with the husband and his elderly parents. The fact that the woman is now taking the "breadwinner" role is not regarded as an excuse for her unaccomplishment of traditional wife and daughter-in-law responsibilities. This conflict, described as "interpersonal conflict with family members" (Ling & Powell, 2001), is a big challenge to the entrepreneurs in delegating family demands. The respondents said that they have to overwork or reduce work involvement in many family events but in general they try to arrange work demands so as to take family role.

Delegating venture demands (so that they could prevent poorer venture performance) while remaining high commitment to family role is the common answer of the entrepreneurs to the conflict. This conforms to the conclusion of Shelton that women entrepreneurs who achieve high growth and place a high level of salience on the family role will choose a role sharing strategy that delegates venture role.

According to Shelton, the women entrepreneurs "outsource family obligations" when they count on the help of family members, housekeepers or other services to delegate family role. It is necessary to notice that the respondents just outsource less important obligations, and their decisions regarding outsourcing obligations are affected by the interpersonal conflict with other family members.

5.3. Delegate venture role

The management practices employed by the interviewed women owners can be put in two groups. The first group consists of encouraging autonomy and participation of the staff, fostering teamwork and group work, accommodating the work to empowerment, provide information and support...These practices can be identified as empowerment management practices (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

The second group includes hiring the staff who can work independently, developing teamwork skills, sharing profit and rewarding well, investing in training to reduce their

involvement in direction making, promoting high-qualified staff to management positions, cultivating family-friendly work environment... These practices can be recognized as human resources methods (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

These findings confirm Shelton's conclusion (2006) that the high-growth oriented female entrepreneurs delegate venture roles "through participative management techniques and progressive human resources practices". Participative management practices, as described by Shelton, are "building management and worker teams", "empowering subordinates". These management practices "reduce the level of personal involvement required in the business; therefore, allow the women entrepreneurs to increase the involvement in family role".

In her study, Shelton (2001) came to an important proposition that, in the absence of resource constraints, high-growth oriented women entrepreneurs who place a high level of salience on the family role will choose a role sharing strategy that delegates the venture roles, and women entrepreneurs who place a low level of salience on the family role will choose a role sharing strategy that delegates the family role. This proposition on choosing optimal strategies for the women entrepreneurs is not fully and firmly supported by collected empirical data. However, a common view from the respondents is, the work-family management strategy is the combination of both delegating venture demands and delegating family demands.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Conclusions

From the whole investigation, we can conclude that high-growth oriented female owners of SMEs in Vietnam experience major conflict, both work-to-family and family-to-work.

Venture demands eat up the time and energy of the business owners while the responsibilities to family of women in an Oriental society are hard to complete. These negatively affect the wellbeing of the entrepreneurs, and consequently result in poorer venture performance (as illustrated in the conceptual framework). The entrepreneurs are aware of this fact, and they develop their own coping mechanism to achieve “the accomplishment of role-related expectations” without losing the wellbeing (that is work-family balance, Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007).

To handle work-family conflict, the strategy chosen by the majority is role sharing because it allows women entrepreneurs to “enjoy the enhancement of both work and family roles” (Shelton, 2006). Role reduction (smaller family, defer family) is the choice of a small minority because of traditional customs and norms concerning family and children.

Role sharing strategy is implemented by the delegation of both family and venture role. Family role, which consists of earning money, responsibility for children, spouse support, household responsibilities, and responsibility for elderly parents is delegated through outsourcing the less important of family responsibilities. Assistance of society and family members’ is perceived to be crucial to the accomplishment of family role. The interpersonal conflict with family members also has considerable influence on the outsourcing decisions.

To delegate venture role, the women owners normally employ participative management practices and human resources practices to be able to ensure good venture performance when they must increase their involvement in family role.

As presented above, there is not enough evidence to come to a conclusion on choosing optimal strategies for the women entrepreneurs. However, it can be proposed that the women entrepreneurs attempt on a coping mechanism that harmoniously delegates both venture demands and family demands while heading to work-family balance.

In a few words, role sharing is the preferred management strategy for work and family balance issue of high-growth oriented female owners of SMEs. They outsource the low priorities of family role to delegate family demands, and employ advanced participative management and human resources practices to accomplish venture demands.

6.2. Limitations and further researches recommended

Six respondents were interviewed to collect empirical data for the paper. This rather small scale of the study may result in low population validity. However, the weakness can be limited by well-defined samples. In the study, sample selection was based on two criteria “high-growth oriented” and “married” which presumed to result in the most typical work-family conflicts experienced by the women entrepreneurs. The samples chosen, therefore, are expected to heighten the generalizability of the study.

Another limitation of the study is its concentration on the female owners of small and medium size businesses that are high growth oriented and married. Additional examination should be done on the work-family conflict of less ambitious and unmarried entrepreneurs. Besides, the context-specific role demands at work and social support in work role have not been discussed in this study, therefore, require extra exploration.

For further understanding of this issue, more qualitative and quantitative researches should be done to examine the distinctive features of venture demands and family demands in Vietnamese context. The stressors in work and family domains as antecedents of work-family conflict as well as the social supports that the entrepreneurs receive in both work and home role also call for broader and deeper researches.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. Do you delay child-bearing or limit the number of children due to work demands?
2. Do you normally experience major work family conflict (which can be understood as the state that work schedule conflict with family life, or vice versa)?
3. Which role is your priority, as a business owner and a mother and/or wife? Do you reduce commitment to either family or business for the demands of the other role? Do you head to the balance in work and family roles?
4. How do you deal with your family responsibilities (listed below) while ensuring commitment to your business? What kinds of support do you get for handling such demands?
 - Earning money
 - Responsibility for children
 - Spouse support
 - Household responsibilities
 - Responsibility for elderly parents
5. How do you deal with venture demands?

Appendix 2: List of respondents (Name, Age, Business field)

1. Mrs Tam, 34 years old, owner of a Cosmetics retailing company.
2. Mrs Hong, 38 years old, owner of a Chain of restaurants.
3. Mrs Hoa, 44 years old, owner of a Craft exporting company
4. Mrs Thu, 49 years old, owner of an Architecture design company
5. Mrs Phong, 47 years old, owner of a Real Estate company.
6. Mrs Ha, 57 years old, owner of a Pharmaceutical company.