

Work-Family Balance and Organizational Support for Fathers: An Analysis of Obstacles and Levers in Québec (Canada)

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Abstract

Work-family measures exhibit considerable variation across nations, often intended to foster gender equality. However, a notable research gap emerges, as there is greater emphasis placed on women's access to work-family balance initiatives, while the situation of men and fathers remains relatively understudied. Given Quebec's implementation of paternity leave in 2006, our focus shifts toward comprehending measures geared towards aiding fathers in achieving work-family balance. Through an extensive survey involving 1000 fathers, our research question aims to uncover the obstacles hindering fathers' participation in work-family reconciliation initiatives. Furthermore, it seeks to pinpoint effective strategies and mechanisms for enhancing work-family reconciliation for fathers. Our findings reveal that alleviating or eradicating the adverse effects on fathers' careers, coupled with improved dissemination of information concerning available work-family measures, would significantly help fathers in fulfilling their family responsibilities. This research thus offers insights into vital pathways to both diminish challenges and increase prospects for fathers in their pursuit of work-family balance.

Keywords

Work-Family, Work-Life, Work-Family Reconciliation, Work-Family Balance, Fathers, Paternity, Parental Rights

1. Introduction

The quest for achieving a more balanced work-family dynamic has emerged as a significant challenge in recent decades. Various stakeholders, including governments, employers, communities, and researchers, have grappled with shaping rights and responsibilities in this arena. The entry of women into the workforce

exposed gender disparities in work-family obligations, particularly concerning the unequal distribution of domestic and family tasks and responsibilities within households.

In response, initiatives supporting women, especially mothers with young children, in the workforce have been developed to foster the harmonization of their professional and personal lives. These measures encompass flexible work schedules, family leave policies, childcare provisions, and more. Governments have implemented policies such as maternity and paternity leaves and established daycare services, while companies have been encouraged to offer flexible arrangements and family-friendly policies. The province of Québec has developed specific policies, different from those in the rest of Canada (Doucet et al., 2020, 2021; Tremblay, 2014).

While these efforts vary across countries and organizations, there has been a tendency to overlook the situation of men or fathers in the work-family equation, even as the goal of achieving gender equality is often proclaimed. Initially, studies focused primarily on women's work-family balance, but the evolving societal role of women as both professionals and mothers has triggered a redefinition of men's roles as well. In some regions, such as Quebec, this transformation has been pronounced, possibly due to the introduction of paternity leave, prompting fathers to place greater importance on their paternal roles (Tremblay & Dodeler, 2015).

Quebec, with its social democratic orientation, serves as an illuminating case study for advancing work-family balance measures, especially in male-dominated sectors. Like other developed nations, including Nordic countries, Quebec has witnessed women's increasing participation in the workforce. Measures initially aimed at promoting gender equality, such as affordable childcare services, have led to higher female workforce representation. The establishment of the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) in 2006, offering generous and flexible leave options for parents, further supports work-family integration.

Capitalizing on this momentum, the Quebec government took proactive steps. It established an economical network of early childhood and school childcare services, effectively bolstering women's participation in the labor force (Tremblay & Mathieu, 2021; Mathieu & Tremblay, 2022a, 2022b; Mathieu et al., 2023). Additionally, a transformative initiative known as the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) was introduced in 2006. This comprehensive program accommodates self-employed parents and those seeking adoption, offering a choice between extended leaves with a slightly reduced salary percentage or shorter leaves at 75% of salary. The maternity leave spans 15 to 18 weeks, while paternity leave extends from 3 to 5 weeks (non-transferable to mothers). Furthermore, parental leave ranges from 25 to 32 weeks, while adoption leave encompasses 28 to 38 weeks (Doucet et al., 2020, 2021; Tremblay, 2019b).

Furthermore, the shifting role of working adults extends to supporting family members with disabilities, special needs, or elderly care. A quarter of Quebec's working population now finds themselves in caregiving roles, adding to their

personal responsibilities. Government strategies, action plans, and forums have emerged to aid Quebec's workforce in managing family and professional commitments. Recognizing the importance of equitable family responsibilities, the government's focus on addressing invisible work and encouraging male involvement has contributed to workplaces trying to adapt to work-family balance needs.

To improve work-family balance in predominantly male environments, early engagement of fathers in childcare and family responsibilities proves to be a pivotal lever (Pfitzner et al., 2018; O'Brien & Twamley, 2017). Such involvement can shape paternal commitment and subsequently influence attitudes within male-dominated spheres. This proactive participation might lead to increased requests for work-family reconciliation from male employees, prompting employers to adapt policies and services accordingly.

This article centers on a pivotal research question: how can we comprehend the hurdles faced in achieving work-family balance and identify potential solutions, in particular for men? Our focus is specifically aimed at gaining insights from fathers about their roles, evaluating the employer-provided support, and comprehending the factors that hinder or encourage their participation in work-family balance initiatives.

In the subsequent sections of this article, we will delineate our chosen methodology, provide a concise overview of the current body of literature, present the outcomes of our research, engage in a comprehensive discussion, and ultimately draw our conclusions from this in-depth exploration.

2. Methodology

This article is the result of a research initiative conducted in collaboration with a community group which tries to assist companies in formulating effective work-family balance measures for fathers. Our research is based on an online survey conducted in January 2022, supported by a comprehensive literature review¹ that informed the development of our questionnaire. This research aimed to grasp the current landscape of work-family balance within predominantly male workplaces.

In devising the keywords for our literature review, we pinpointed the core concepts central to our research. We began by enumerating potential work-family practices and policies, employing the six categories outlined in the work-family balance tool presented by the Quebec Ministry of the Family. These categories include: 1) work-family management, 2) work organization adaptability, 3) working time arrangements, 4) leaves and vacations, 5) workplace flexibility, and 6) workplace-provided services or amenities.

Our review was centered on the exploration of factors and policies that facilitate or impede work-family reconciliation, particularly concerning men and predominantly male environments. Beyond the macro level policies, we delved into

¹I want to thank Mélanie Bélanger for the literature review.

the micro level, which encompasses individual characteristics, perceptions of parenthood, work and profession, and the significance attributed to both professional and personal identities, including parental roles, as all these elements can have an impact on take-up of work-family practices.

Our chosen keywords are aligned with the research's overarching objective: to identify obstacles and catalysts affecting the utilization of family-work balance measures among men, especially within predominantly male workplaces. We opted for prominent databases in the realms of social sciences and management, namely: CAIRN, ProQuest, JSTOR, Google Scholar, Erudit, Emerald Management Xtra, and Sage Premier Collection. The selected keywords include: work-family balance, work-family, caregiver, male sector, male-dominated sector, and paternity.

Our review underscored a scarcity of studies concerning work-family measures in predominantly male settings. We prioritized studies addressing work-family reconciliation measures, the factors impeding or facilitating such measures for men, and comparisons between men and women in navigating these measures. Additionally, we considered articles addressing work-family measures at macro or meso levels, such as parental or paternity leave, while excluding those focusing solely on a psychological approach to individual identity (parental and professional).

This iterative selection process culminated in a final pool of 269 pertinent documents, distilled from an initial 537. Our analysis unfolded in two iterative stages. Firstly, all gathered documents were imported into qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti 9, to facilitate coding in alignment with the predetermined themes of measures, obstacles, catalysts, and recommendations. Supplementary information such as individual attributes (gender, education, social class), workplace context (e.g., construction, IT, professional offices, and other male-dominated domains), and geographical location was also integrated. Each document was annotated to maintain a concise summary and record of preliminary analysis. Secondly, a thematic analysis was undertaken, facilitating the synthesis of results.

In addition to the literature review, we conducted an online survey with a thousand Quebec-based fathers as respondents. Our questionnaire was designed based on insights from the literature review. The survey firm we hired reached out to participants, and the data collected were weighted to ensure a representative sample of Quebec fathers, taking into account various demographic factors including age.

3. Literature Review: Decoding the Work-Family Balance Landscape

In this section, we delve into a comprehensive synthesis drawn from an in-depth analysis of 269 documents. Our exploration navigates through four dimensions: 1) work-family measures, with a predominant focus on fathers; 2) identifying obstacles; 3) determining the levers that shape the utilization of these practices; and 4) crafting insightful recommendations and potential avenues for resolution.

Initially, it's crucial to note that the exploration of work-family balance has

primarily revolved around theories concerning work-family conflict. These theories encompass conflicts related to the allocation of time among different activities and responsibilities, as well as conflicts arising from the interplay between distinct roles, such as parental and professional roles. Once the sources of conflict or obstacles were identified, researchers directed their attention towards identifying potential strategies to mitigate these conflicts or obstacles. In this vein of research, our focus lies on obstacles on the one hand, and on strategies or measures that can alleviate these obstacles (Tremblay, 2019b).

Furthermore, it's important to acknowledge the existence of support mechanisms at multiple levels. The government plays a pivotal role in providing policies that facilitate work-family balance (parental, maternity and paternity leave for example), while businesses themselves can also contribute by offering their own forms of support. In the realm of day-to-day existence, the latter gains heightened importance, as companies have the capacity to provide an array of direct support mechanisms (Tremblay, 2014).

3.1. Work-Family Balance Measures: Charting the Landscape

The realm of work-family balance policies and practices unfolds across a multifaceted spectrum, involving a matrix of stakeholders. Of paramount significance are the roles played by governments and states, which wield a defining influence by setting the legislative frameworks governing these measures. At a higher echelon, the supranational stage witnesses the presence of mechanisms designed to uphold standards. Notably, the International Labor Organization (ILO) encompasses four pivotal instruments that impact parental leave and family obligations worldwide: The Maternity Protection Convention, The Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities, and their associated recommendations. These instruments, while not legally binding, serve as guiding beacons for governments to navigate the intricate terrain of work-family balance. However, their scope remains confined, and they grapple with the challenge of bridging gender disparities, particularly in terms of promoting paid paternity leave and comprehensive gender balance (Porter, 2015; Brandth & Kvande, 2019).

Turning to the European Union, its quest for work-family reconciliation within Member States traces back to the early 1990s, with seminal milestones in 1993, 1996, and 2000. The Working Time Directive of 1993 established the 48-hour workweek limit, while the 1996 Parental Leave Directive championed a minimum of three months of non-transferable parental leave for both genders, aiming to galvanize gender equality. The year 2000 witnessed a European Council resolution heralding balanced participation of men and women in both professional and family spheres (Gregory, 2015).

Nationally, work-family balance practices often coalesce as public policies, with a pronounced emphasis on maternity, paternity, and parental leave (parental leave can usually be shared between both parents). An array of countries offer varied durations of maternity leave, spanning 6 to 16 weeks, accompanied by or

devoid of financial provisions. Similarly, paternity leave assumes diverse dimensions, ranging from a few days to several weeks, contingent upon individual nations and their policies. Yet, the global landscape remains uneven, with a mere fraction of nations offering paternity leave (time reserved for the father, and not transferable to mothers), and only 16 out of 67 surveyed countries exceeding 16 days (Behson & Robbins, 2016). Noteworthy exceptions lie in the Nordic nations, where parental and childbirth leave extend to both parents. While some countries embrace shared parental leave options, financial support remains a challenge in numerous instances. Our comprehensive review traverses the intricate topography of organizational measures and parental leave policies, with a focus on unraveling barriers and potential remedies.

3.2. Unraveling Obstacles: Navigating the Terrain

Unveiling the path towards effective work-family balance practices unveils a tapestry of obstacles that span multiple strata. Central among these challenges is the issue of social acceptability, as public policies often come under scrutiny for perpetuating gender-specific roles and inadequately addressing the needs of diverse family structures. These leaves, notably maternity and paternity, face critique for insufficiencies in supporting the concept of interchangeable parental roles, thus hampering gender-neutral participation (Ranson, 2010). Remarkably, the tide is shifting, with recent years witnessing changes aimed at rectifying these shortcomings, as observed in Quebec and Canada, following the example of Nordic countries.

Financial compensation also emerges as a critical challenge, with some policies falling short of expectations (Wood & Marynissen, 2019). Countries grappling with inadequate provisions, notably short paternity leave periods in certain Central European nations and the absence of paternity leave and a universal program of maternity leave in the United States, are faced with questions of equity (Behson & Robbins, 2016; Dobrotić & Stropnik, 2020). The vexing issue of paternity leave durations falling below those of maternity leave reverberates as a significant concern, sending a discordant message about shared parental responsibilities (Couillard, 2021). Intriguingly, an observable trend emerges: a positive correlation between extended leave periods reserved for fathers and their heightened participation in family responsibilities and tasks (Tremblay, 2019a, 2019b).

The backdrop of these challenges is an enduring societal bias, interwoven with stereotypes surrounding the roles of fathers in childcare and men in domestic responsibilities. This bias casts a shadow across diverse realms—national policies, workplaces, and personal lives—resulting in pronounced impediments to work-family balance (Borgkvist, 2020). Fear of judgment and discrimination hampers men from accessing parental leave or work-hour adjustments, a challenge notably faced by managers across public and private sectors (Borgkvist et al., 2021; Almer, Cohen, & Single, 2003). The tension between the traditional ‘ideal worker’ image and evolving concepts of masculinity adds further complexity (Dallos & Kovács, 2021; Coltrane et al., 2013). The need for men to reconcile

professional and caregiving identities emerges as a pivotal concern, particularly as these intersect with broader masculine identities (Borgkvist, 2020; Cooper, 2002; Barbeta-Viñas & Muntanyola-Saura, 2020).

Furthermore, the intricate fabric of challenges extends to the professional ethos, as showed in works by Tremblay and Mascova (2015), and Karu and Tremblay (2018). Within the workplace, a dense thicket of obstacles materializes. Foremost among them is the lack of support from immediate supervisors and co-workers, an impediment consistently cited across various studies (Baral & Bhargava, 2011; Bradley et al., 2010; Choroszewicz & Tremblay, 2018; Haas & Hwang, 2019; Tremblay & Dodeler, 2015). The challenges intensify when negotiating parental leave with supervisors, particularly when this time-off is perceived as akin to vacation (Harvey, 2020; Pettigrew & Duncan, 2020), or when supervisors expect work tasks to be executed during leave, such as responding to emails (Duvander, Haas, & Thalberg, 2017; Harvey & Tremblay, 2020).

Delving into personal obstacles to achieving work-family balance, it is noteworthy that the propensity for men to strongly identify with their professions often intertwines with the perception that their spouses adeptly manage familial responsibilities (Eerola et al., 2019). This dynamic presents a pivotal quandary, as professional and familial circles may preemptively assume men's disinterest in availing themselves of available leave, a phenomenon particularly pronounced in certain contexts such as Spain (Bueno & Grau-Grau, 2021). An added layer of complexity arises from imbalances in parental roles within couples, wherein women's intense involvement in motherhood complicates negotiations for paternal leave, a situation observed in the United States and Italy amongst other countries (Behson & Robbins, 2016; Cannito, 2020).

Finally, a compelling narrative emerges concerning perceived inequalities in accessible family services and related resources (Bailey, 2015; Cunningham-Parmer, 2012; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Léger & Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité (RVP), 2017). Notably, men also highlight the dearth of networks catering to fathers, encompassing parent-child activities during regular working hours and platforms for dialogues and exchanges focused on the experiences of fathers on parental leave (Fox, 2019; Duvander, Haas, & Thalberg, 2017; Gíslason, 2017; Harvey, 2020; Nakazato et al., 2020; O'Brien & Twamley, 2017; Tremblay & Dodeler, 2017), thus diluting the rewarding aspect of their journey as fathers on parental leave.

The underpinning force behind these obstacles seems intricately linked to a broader societal devaluation of parenthood and limited avenues for comprehensive assistance. Notably, a robust social dimension emerges in the context of levers facilitating work-family balance, particularly within predominantly male-dominated environments (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Bocchichio, 2006; Lewis & Humbert, 2010).

3.3. Levers Enabling the Utilization of Work-Family Practices

Within this intricate landscape, writings underscore the introduction of paterni-

ty and parental leave measures, geared toward fostering increased father engagement, gender parity, and more effective work-family balance for men. The effectiveness of these measures hinges upon their duration and financial provisions. It emerges that optimal financial compensation, coupled with non-transferability (Aunkofer, Meuser, & Neuman, 2018; Bartova & Keizer, 2020; Brandth & Kvande, 2009; Bünning, 2015; Duvander, Haas, & Thalberg, 2017; Escobedo, Flaquer, & Navarro-Varas, 2012; Haas & Hwang, 2019), alongside the “take it or lose it” principle (Possinger, 2017; Porter, 2015), constitute formidable levers that amplify men’s utilization of these measures.

Zooming in on the work environment, paramount among the determinants are the support of superiors, colleagues, and the overall attitude of the work team (Baral & Bhargava, 2011; Behson & Robbins, 2016; Borgkvist, 2020). Evidently, these levers pivot around the social sphere, molding perceptions and mindsets concerning work-family practices, not only for the individuals but also encompassing colleagues and superiors (Brill, 2007). The literature underscores the pivotal role of education and training of employers in shaping these dynamics (Bradley et al., 2010). Additionally, the significance of role models and pioneers in advocating for the use of work-family practices within the workplace emerges prominently (Kvande & Brandth, 2017; Behson & Robbins, 2016; Neumann & Meuser, 2017; Lewis, 2010b).

Among the desired employer practices identified by employees, the latitude to exercise flexibility in holidays and working hours (Lewis, 2010b), embracing part-time work and telecommuting (Connell, 2005), emerge as key enablers. Furthermore, organizational solutions and peer support within predominantly male work environments function as critical levers, transforming these practices into positive and accepted norms (Choroszewicz & Tremblay, 2018). The prospect of sustaining a connection between the workplace and personal life during leave gains traction as a lever to enhance acceptability, bolstering the continuity of employment relations while ensuring the employee’s sense of security (Duvander, Haas, & Thalberg, 2017).

At the family level, the atypical schedules of some mothers propel fathers into the sphere of commitment, filling crucial voids (Boyer & Fagnani, 2008). By elevating the agency of fathers, particularly within perinatal contexts and birth-related services, men are positioned on equal footing with mothers, fostering confidence in their caregiving abilities (O’Brien & Twamley, 2017; Escot, Fernández-cornejo, & Poza, 2014). Moreover, the pivotal influence of spouses on paternal involvement is unveiled, underlining the profound role that couples play in establishing daily work-family equilibrium (Bataille & McGill-Carlison, 2017; Boyer, 2017; Cannito, 2020; Ross-Plourde, Pierce, & Montigny, 2017). By influencing paternal values and expectations, women play a pivotal role in accompanying men along the path of fatherhood (Ross-Plourde, Pierce, & Montigny, 2017). Employers, in turn, bear the responsibility of not stifling these aspirations by imposing rigid standards (Dodeler & Tremblay, 2014; Tremblay & Dodeler, 2015).

3.4. Potential Solutions

In unraveling this intricate labyrinth, our journey traverses the realm of recommendations offered by a diverse array of authors. These insights have been meticulously documented, paving the way for a holistic synthesis that links these recommendations with the outcomes of our parallel online survey. Through this convergence, we aim to identify plausible solutions and forge a pathway toward more equitable and balanced work-family arrangements. We will return to this aspect in the discussion and conclusion, with some recommendations as to what firms can do to facilitate a more active participation of fathers in work-family practices and family responsibilities and tasks.

4. Results

We now move on to the results of our survey conducted with fathers, in January 2022, which we will supplement with a few elements from another survey, which we conducted with employers (some 300 respondents), in order to identify the work-family balance measures they offer; this survey was with another research partner (Concilivi, 2021).

A few elements of methodology specific to the survey. The original data was collected in January 2022, in cooperation with a survey firm that ensured the representativity of the results for the Québec population. The questionnaire was developed by the author, based on the literature review presented above. It focuses on fathers' perceptions of the importance of reconciliation, their employer's attitude, the offer and use of measures, as well as the obstacles to the take-up of measures and the levers that could encourage fathers to use work-family measures more.

In the first part of the results of this survey of fathers, we deal with:

- The importance of family-work balance for fathers.
- Family-work balance in the workplace.
- Difficulties surrounding family-work balance.
- The effects of family-work balance.
- The use of paternity leave and parental leave.

4.1. Fathers' Views

First, with regard to perceptions relating to family-work balance, in terms of the importance of balance for fathers: 94% of them consider that it is very important or extremely important for them to manage to reconcile family and work and 95% think that it is important for their spouse as well.

Importance of Work-Family Balance

Some previous research indicated that work-family practices or measures may be more available in women's workplaces (Tremblay, 2019b). We therefore asked the fathers about their perceptions and 48% of the fathers who responded think that the measures are available to both fathers and mothers, while 39% think they are more available to mothers in their workplace.

Over the years, research on work-family balance has first tried to identify the sources of difficulties, then the practices put in place in organizations, and then it has been found that people do not always use the measures offered to them, sometimes hesitating to identify themselves as in need of reconciliation measures. So we asked this question about whether fathers feel comfortable talking about this topic in their workplace.

Our results show that nearly eight out of ten fathers (79%) can easily express their issues related to family-work balance in their workplace. When it comes to obtaining arrangements to facilitate family-work balance, three-quarters of fathers (74%) claim to be able to obtain them easily. It should be noted that university graduates are more likely, in proportion, to be able to obtain arrangements of this type (80% answer completely or somewhat). On the contrary, respondents who have no diploma or high school level are proportionally more likely to be unable to obtain them easily (38% say not at all or not really). There is therefore a link with the diploma and no doubt with the profession.

A large majority of fathers (88%) believe that the implementation of family-work balance practices has or would have a completely or somewhat positive effect on their satisfaction as an employee. Again, it should be noted that university graduates (92%) are proportionally more likely to share this opinion, so there seems to be a difference based on level of education.

However, only 50% of companies thought that these measures would have an effect on satisfaction and retention, which is surprising as in a context of labor shortage, it is a competitive advantage that companies could take advantage of, since the majority of fathers tell us that this would have a positive effect on their satisfaction.

Slightly more than one in ten fathers (12%) think on the contrary that the implementation of such measures would have little or no positive effect on their satisfaction as an employee. Respondents with no diploma or at best a high school (18%) are more likely, in proportion, to express this opinion.

It is sometimes questioned whether work-family balance practices are important enough for fathers to change jobs in order to benefit from them. Our results show that more than three out of five fathers (62%) would be willing to change jobs to obtain better family-work balance measures. Also, university graduates (70%), respondents aged 35 to 44 (69%) show higher rates and would be more willing to change jobs to obtain work-family balance measures, highlighting again here a difference based on level of education.

Our survey results allow indicate that 87% of fathers say their employer agrees with them taking paternity leave; 87% also think that this leave encourages them to become more involved in the family and with their children; 85% indicate that their employer agrees that they take part of the parental leave, which they can share with the mother. On the other hand, 51% indicate that the employer encourages fathers to take the leave at a time that best suits the organization and 42% encourage fathers to take the shortest possible leave.

There is therefore still some reluctance to see fathers taking longer leave and

at a time that suits them as fathers.

In part 2 of our results, we deal with the following: Family-work balance measures offered by the employer; Use of measures offered by the employer.

4.2. Offer of Work-Family Measures

As for the measures offered, more than three-quarters (76%) of fathers surveyed said that their employer offers work-family balance measures that concern work schedules or hours, while two-thirds (66%) refer to measures related to leave or vacation. Nearly two out of five fathers (39%) indicate that telework (from home) is offered, but the percentages were lower before the pandemic and might reduce somewhat as employers call workers back to offices. Also, 25% of fathers indicate that they can take advantage of compressed weeks. In addition, on average, 3 measures are offered to the fathers questioned. However, less than one in ten fathers (7%) say that no family-work balance measure is offered by their employer.

In terms of the use of measures, flexibility of schedules or vacation choices and teleworking are the practices found most frequently in organizations that offer these measures. Rates are very high (94%) when these practices are available. On the other hand, the practices which lead to a reduction in income are less used, with proportions below 50%, i.e., 48% for the reduction in the number of hours worked with a reduction in salary and 41% for unpaid leave for family responsibilities beyond the 10 days provided for in the law.

Fathers whose employer offers at least one family-work balance measure are almost half (48%) to say that men and women use the measures equally in their workplace. Almost four out of ten of these fathers (38%) say, on the other hand, that it is mainly women who use these measures and a minority (3%) affirms that it is mainly men who use them.

In part 3, we deal with the obstacles and incentives to the use of family-work balance measures.

4.3. Obstacles and Incentives

Among fathers whose employer offers family-work balance measures, nearly three in ten (29%) have no hesitation in using them. The fact that some measures lead to a reduction in income is however the main obstacle to the use of the measures; this is the case for 42% of the fathers who responded.

It should be noted, however, that almost a quarter of the respondents concerned here (23%) mention the fear of judgment from their supervisor or the importance of work standards and expectations in their workplace (also for 23%).

Lack of support from superiors (17%) and colleagues (for 15%) are also mentioned.

Finally, the lack of appreciation of the role of men with regard to family responsibilities and the fear of experiencing discrimination in the workplace are

also mentioned by 13% of respondents in each case. We also asked what are the barriers to use for their colleagues; we get similar answers, although the percentages vary a little.

4.4. Incentives

The survey also looked at the levers or incentives that could encourage greater use of measures by fathers, as the latter is the objective of the research. As expected, better financial compensation for holidays or reduced working hours is the most frequently mentioned incentive for the use of work-family balance measures; this is the case for half of the fathers. Secondly, 35%, or more than a third of fathers whose employer offers such measures indicate that better communication about the measures currently offered would encourage them to start using them or to do so more.

Among the other incentives or levers favoring the use of measures, nearly four out of ten fathers (38%) among those whose employer offers at least one measure consider that changes in promotion and career advancement mechanisms and criteria could encourage their use of these practices in their workplace.

They also mention the promotion of positive male role models, the implementation of training and awareness activities, the addition of a section specifically for fathers in the welcome kits for new employees. On the other hand, nearly three out of ten fathers (27%) believe that none of the solutions proposed could favor the use of work-family measures.

The survey asked fathers which measures would be the most important to promote paternal involvement and work-family balance. Access to flexible working hours and valuing the father's role are the two measures that most often emerge as the most important to put in place to promote paternal commitment and family-work balance for fathers.

5. The Employers' Point of View

As mentioned above, another survey was conducted with employers (Concilivi, 2020)². According to them, the main obstacles to the use of family-work balance measures by male employees are fear of judgment (23%), lack of valorization of the father's role in terms of responsibilities and family life (22%) and the lack of financial compensation (19%). However, 39% of respondents don't see any obstacles.

The main levers that would promote work-family balance for men, among those that were proposed to employers, are education and training on the subject, in order to improve understanding and acceptance of work-family balance measures (for 38% of respondents), followed by better financial compensation (for 32%), and family leave exclusively reserved for fathers (27%). Some 28% of respondents consider there are no levers that could change the situation.

²We want to thank Concilivi, an initiative which lobbies for work-family measures and policies in Québec and with whom we have a research partnership.

Finally, still on the side of employers, the main solutions that would promote work-family balance for men among those mentioned are the promotion of positive male role models, who are successful in both their careers and their work-family balance (46%), followed by the implementation of training and awareness-raising activities concerning family-work balance and men (39%), and finally the revision of promotion and career advancement mechanisms so that participation in measures, taking leave or working time arrangements are not considered an obstacle to career advancement.

6. Synthesis and Possible Solutions

In summary, our data shows that the vast majority of fathers surveyed believe that it is extremely important or very important for them to achieve a good balance between family and work. Also, almost nine out of ten fathers say that the implementation of measures of this type has or would have a positive effect on their satisfaction as an employee and 62% of them would be ready to change jobs to obtain better measures. The implementation of this type of practice could also have an impact on employee retention, since nearly nine out of ten fathers say that it would encourage them to stay with the same employer. Work-family measures are therefore excellent strategies for attracting and retaining employees.

The reduction in income caused by some of the work-family balance measures is the obstacle most often mentioned by fathers. Also, the fear of judgment on the part of the supervisor and the importance of the standards and expectations of the workplace (for example billable hours in law and accounting firms) are major obstacles. It is nonetheless positive to note that three out of ten fathers have no hesitation in using the practices proposed by their employer.

When the employer offers measures such as flexibility in the choice of holidays or teleworking, 94% of fathers (for each of these practices) use them or have already used them. In the same spirit, flexible working hours, a bank of hours or accumulated time and paid leave for family responsibilities are the other practices most popular with fathers who have access to them.

The most important incentive for the use of work-family balance measures identified is obtaining better financial compensation for holidays or reduced working hours. If this is not always possible, a second interesting practice is an improvement in the communication and information given on the measures currently offered, a relatively simple practice to put in place.

Moreover, the solution most frequently identified by these fathers in order to encourage recourse to work-family measures is the revision of the promotion and career advancement mechanisms, which also indirectly concerns income, but could be implemented fairly easily in organizations.

Finally, we can conclude that work-family balance is an important issue for both fathers and mothers, that it has really become a major organizational and societal issue but still, much needs to be done to favor fathers' use of these measures and better work-family balance for men and women. Within organizations, it appears important to try to remove or reduce the impact of the take-up

of measures on fathers' careers as well as to develop a better communication on the measures that are available and how to access and use them.

7. Discussion

Even if Quebec fathers have increased their use of work-family measures since the creation of the new paternity leave, a survey reports factors contributing to making these measures less accessible, namely being a man and lower levels of education (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2015). Among the other obstacles to the measures identified in the literature on Quebec, the lack of valorization of the role of father is also mentioned. According to some studies, fathers are confined to the role of financial support even though they often want to do more; this situation in prenatal and perinatal services is perpetuated and tends to invalidate or disengage fathers (Couillard, 2021; Dubeau & Turcotte, 2014).

Here, it is interesting to recall the results of another recent survey (Léger & Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité (RVP), 2017).

First, according to this survey, Quebec fathers said they want to assume their role as fathers, which they see more as a role of role model, provider of care and affection, educator (this is the case for 37% of fathers in Quebec and 16% for those in the rest of Canada). Also Quebec fathers see themselves less as providers (only 12% see themselves as such), whereas this is still the case for fathers in the rest of Canada (43%). It is very interesting to see this image of paternity which has evolved differently in Quebec compared to Canada, possibly, among other things, because of the paternity leave introduced in 2006, which would make Quebec fathers attach more importance to their role as fathers and want their employers to recognize it. Our more recent survey results presented here allow us to confirm and clarify these previous observations. As mentioned above, 87% of fathers say their employer agrees with them taking paternity leave; 87% also think that this leave encourages them to become more involved in the family and with their children; however, 51% indicate that the employer encourages fathers to take the leave at a time that best suits the organization and 42% encourage fathers to take the shortest possible leave, which indicates a lower level of support.

Since 2006, Quebec has implemented a new parental leave regime and, above all, paternity leave (up to 5 weeks) that is not transferable to the mother. If the father does not take the leave, the weeks are lost for the mother. In qualitative research conducted through interviews a few years ago, several fathers said that their employer was in agreement with them taking paternity leave (3 or 5 weeks), but a little less so with the idea of them taking parental leave and thus extending their leave beyond 5 weeks. Above all, they indicated that the employer sometimes wanted to reduce the duration of the leave or influence the moment of taking the leave (Tremblay & Dodeler, 2015). While paternity and parental leave is a public policy, one can imagine employers may be even less supportive of work-family measures within their organization.

A second obstacle in predominantly male environments is the message con-

veyed by the imbalance between the duration of paternity leave and that of maternity leave, which contributes to maintaining the bias that women take more care of children by nature than men. The lack of social acceptability in the use of measures by men also constitutes another obstacle (Couillard, 2021; Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité (RVP), 2020a, 2020b; Léger & Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité (RVP), 2017). Much remains to be done to make the workplace more open to work-family measures for men, as we saw above. Finally, the lack of a support network for fathers and the lack of knowledge of the needs of fathers in terms of work-family balance constitute obstacles, not to mention the lack of knowledge, sensitization and training regarding work-family balance (Valarino & Gauthier, 2016; Whitehouse et al., 2020; Dubeau & Turcotte, 2014).

So how can work-family measures be improved in predominantly male Quebec workplaces? As indicated in the literature on measures around the world, involving fathers very early in child care and in family tasks and responsibilities is a lever of paternal commitment (Couillard, 2021; Duvander & Lofgren, 2020; Garcia, 2012) that can have repercussions on the attitude in male-dominated workplaces, both as concerns of superiors and colleagues. This early involvement could also lead to an increase in requests for work-family measures by men from their employers or, at the very least, an adaptation of the measures and services available according to the needs of these fathers (Dubeau & Chénier, 2021; Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité (RVP), 2020a).

The enhancement of fatherhood and the role of men in family life, as well as the promotion of the equitable sharing of tasks and the change of the paternal image must also be done through communication campaigns and the promotion of services related to the family (Lavallée, 2017; Couillard, 2021), something confirmed in our survey. This involves changing the titles of publications and programs, to include fathers. In addition, by ensuring that information on parental roles is not stereotyped, the parental involvement of men and women can be facilitated if it is no longer based on gender identity (Secrétariat à la Condition Féminine (Secretariat for Women), 2017; Lewis, 2010a, 2010b; Kitterød & Lappegård, 2012).

At the employer level, training and raising awareness in the workplace are also important levers for improving work-family balance in predominantly male sectors. Research informs us that a double standard system persists, consisting in granting work-family measures more easily to a female employee than to a male employee (Secrétariat à la Condition Féminine (Secretariat for Women), 2017). Communicating and facilitating awareness on these issues could reduce these potential biases and reinforce the social acceptability of work-family balance for men (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Larsson & Björk, 2017). Another lever consists of formalizing work-family measures in organizations, so as to make them explicit and establish a common basis, regardless of gender, and thus support men (Alvarez, 2003) as well as carers (Nogues & Tremblay, 2016). Incentives could accelerate the implementation, improvement and formalization of meas-

ures in firms, for example a formal recognition for firms' actions, which might make them more attractive to employees.

8. Conclusion

In light of our literature review, it seems that work-family measures are widely perceived as dependent on the national level, as concerns parental leave schemes, but they also need to be supported by practices at the organizational level. Also, work-family balance is rooted in a much deeper debate, namely parenthood and the place of each parent in the care of children and family tasks and responsibilities. If the starting point of this debate is generally the arrival of women and especially mothers in employment and their right to equality in employment, it is now necessary to reflect on the need for support for fathers considering our results and other data available (Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité (RVP), 2020a, 2020b; Kitterød & Lappegård, 2012).

A change in the image and representation of fatherhood and the role of men in caring for children is necessary to make it possible for fathers to use measures. There is also a need to raise awareness of the gap between fathers' new desire for investment/engagement in family life and workplace measures and practices (and the demands of the job and the ideal of a good employee). In addition, an awareness-raising effort is essential in the workplaces so that everyone's needs in terms of work-family balance are recognized.

As with any research, this one has its limits. The research was conducted with Quebec fathers but we cannot differentiate views from immigrant fathers, different linguistic groups, or other specific groups of fathers. We would need more respondents for this, and we will try to do this in future research. We would also eventually like to analyze the differences between same-sex couples, but this would also require more respondents, or might be better addressed with qualitative methods such as interviews. This is another limit, the fact that we only have quantitative data here, while qualitative data and interviews could complete the information here. All these limits open the door for future research.

As for recommendations, as far as the workplace is concerned, parity between men and women is on the agenda (Alvarez, 2020; Concilivi, 2020). Behson and Robbins (2016) call for greater use of telecommuting and scheduling flexibility as well as a change in organizational culture and managerial attitudes in order to reduce the discrimination experienced by men who want to take up their role as a father. Brumley (2018) even goes so far as to suggest that the organizational culture should support work-family balance by abolishing the penalties that are often associated with it (e.g. loss of promotion or impediment to career advancement, particularly supervisory positions), and our data showed these obstacles are important. These elements could contribute to reducing the potential threats to the renewed male identity (Ewald, Gilbert, & Huppertz, 2020).

All of these elements aim to make work-family balance possible for everyone, regardless of gender or workplace. By focusing on these structural, cultural and

practical changes, work-family balance could eventually become possible for all. The research has identified the barriers or obstacles to fathers' rights and participation in work-family balance measures. It also shows the levers and strategies that could improve work-family reconciliation for fathers. The research results show that the reduction or elimination of negative impacts on fathers' career and raising awareness about available work-family measures would help fathers in assuming their family responsibilities.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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