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# Work Organizations and Fathers' Lifestyles: Constraints and Capabilities

*Annette von Alemann, Sandra Beaufaÿs and Mechtild Oechsle*

## 1. Introduction

Research tells us that in Germany, as well as in many other countries, many fathers want to take a more active part in family life and childcare (Oechsle, Müller and Hess 2012). This runs counter to reports and assertions suggesting that gendered time use and a gendered division of paid and unpaid work are still prevalent. Research on fatherhood and fathers in late modernity indicates, on the one hand, that fathers today are experiencing a stronger desire to be involved in their children's upbringing and to take a more active part in family life. On the other hand, however, they still tend to maintain their role as breadwinners, and when children arrive, mechanisms of re-traditionalization begin to influence the division of labor between fathers and mothers (Schulz and Blossfeld 2006; Grunow 2014).

In our paper, we present findings from our research project "Work Organizations and Life Conduct of Fathers". The project was conducted from 2011 to 2015 at Bielefeld University, Germany, as part of the Collaborative Research Center 882 "From Heterogeneities to Inequalities" (funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft/German Research Foundation, DFG). In this project, we ask which factors lead to differences in capabilities (chances) between fathers in order to better understand what they perceive as an equal (or good) work-family balance (WFB). Thus, we focus not on gender inequalities but on differences between men. Contrary to classical inequality research, we pursue the holistic capability approach (Sen 1992, 1993), not considering earning capacities or career opportunities as primary but instead, the chances for achieving life goals.

In this paper, we will first outline our theoretical approach and the state of current research (section 2) as well as our methods and data (section 3). We will then present empirical insights about organizational constraints and capabilities and the impact of lifestyle on fathers' involvement in the family (section 4). In the conclusion (section 5), based on our results, we will discuss the impact of organizations on fathers' involvement in the family and the rel-

evance of cultural models, self-concepts, and bargaining processes within the family. It is the interrelationships of structures, cultures, and actors that function as constraints or capabilities unequally allowing or preventing fathers in achieving their life goals.

## 2. Organizations and fathers' lifestyles: state of the art and theoretical framework

### *2.1. The capability approach*

Following Sen's (1992, 1993) capability approach, we assume that individuals have different capabilities at their disposal to achieve what they consider a good life. Capabilities are "alternative combinations of functionings" (or goals) a person can achieve in life and "the ability to get access to these functionings" (1993: 31; cf. Zimmermann 2006). Capabilities denote a person's opportunity and ability to generate valuable outcomes, taking into account relevant personal characteristics and external factors. We understand social inequality, then, as unequal chances to achieve relevant life goals (Sen 1992, 1993). Following the approach of Hobson (2014: 14) who applied Sen's capability approach to the achievement of work-family balance, we analyze different factors that are influential for social inequalities among fathers. Hobson (Hobson 2014; Hobson and Fahlén 2009) proposes a multilevel approach with the levels (1) individual (e.g. resources, abilities, qualifications; social structures such as gender, class, age, etc.; private lifestyle; and individual preferences), (2) institution (with the levels welfare state, work organization, and working time regime), and (3) social and/or cultural factors (such as norms, social movements, politics, public discourses, etc.). In this paper, we will analyze the individual and the organizational side, a variety of cultural factors, and the mutual interplay of factors on all three of the aforementioned levels.

We are looking at the capability approach from a pragmatist perspective. That is, we understand what individuals do as a process of action shaped by values and environment as well as habits and multiple preferences (Oechsle and Reimer 2016). Following Zimmermann (2006), we combine a pragmatist perspective with configurational material and immaterial elements: objects, tools, and equipment, but also time and temporalities (2006: 479). Thus, Sen's capability approach as developed by Zimmermann (2006) and Hobson (2014) for the analysis of action (Zimmermann) and work-family balance (Hobson) sheds a new light on active involvement in the family as a life goal. Valuable concepts for our study on fathers and their capabilities are fathers' agency and

their "sense of entitlement" (Lewis and Smithson 2001; Hobson et al. 2014), which refers to the demands fathers believe they can make because they are "entitled to" them legitimately.

## *2.2 Constraints and capabilities within organizations*

In contemporary societies, reconciling family and working life is becoming increasingly important for men (Oechsle, Müller and Hess 2012; Possinger 2013). But for fathers, the desire to spend time and engage with children during the working week is still often outweighed by their role as the main breadwinner in the family (Grunow 2007). Hence, their time use is structured primarily by workplace requirements. Work organizations are therefore important agents in processes of traditionalization in family constellations (Klenner and Pfahl 2008; Possinger 2013) and may therefore contribute to persistent gender inequalities.

Work organizations are characterized by very specific constellations of factors within organizations that interact either to create constraints on fathers or to foster their ability to conduct their everyday lives in line with their own desires and priorities. Following Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey and Shaggs (2010), we assume that there are generic organizational mechanisms which generate inequalities in access to respect, resources, and rewards. Organizational processes are influenced by inertial tendencies of organizational structure, logic, and practice, the relative power of actors within the organization and the specific contexts, i.e. cultural models and discourses, politics, social movements, and organizational fields.

Structural changes in the organization of work over the last few decades have significantly altered relationships between work organizations and their employees. Employers now offer employees more autonomy and broader scheduling options (Kossek and Lambert 2005), yet they also expect more in terms of employee availability and are increasingly becoming "greedy organizations" (Kvande 2009; Hearn and Pringle 2006). Neo-institutionalist scholars have interpreted the increased focus on family-friendly policies in companies' promotional statements and their implementation of family-friendly programs in the workplace as reactions to a changing environment (Müller 2010; Scott 1995). In Germany as well as in other OECD countries, the topic of a family-friendly workplace has become a subject of public discourse. As a family-friendly work environment is seen by employers as an important means of attracting qualified employees, companies try to meet such expectations by releasing mission statements that emphasize their family-friendly policies, and by making considerable efforts to present themselves as family-friendly employers. However, many studies have identified problems in the uptake of

family-friendly programs (Kodz, Harper and Dench 2002); here it is evident that fathers often do not even attempt to make use of existing programs out of fear of negative reactions (OECD 2016; Possinger 2013). The neo-institutional approach describes the widespread underuse of the family-friendly programs (Müller 2010) that are offered in many workplaces as "decoupling" (i.e. the separation of talk and action, cf. Meyer and Rowan 1992). From a neo-institutional perspective, expectations in the institutional environment often contravene intra-organizational necessities, strategies, and practices.

The concept of organizational culture (Alvesson 2013; Haas and Hwang 2007; Kvande 2007; Smircich 1983; Schein 1990) is useful in understanding decoupling processes as well as the gap between formal family-friendly policies and the limited use thereof. Organizational culture plays a significant role in how an organization deals with employees' problems and desires for compatibility between work and family life (Hochschild 1997; Haas and Hwang 2007). According to Schreyögg (1999: 438), organizational culture can be seen as a collective phenomenon based on tacit values and assumptions representing the conceptual world of the organization.[1]

Organizational cultures contain assumptions about the relationship between the organization and private life, and about how (and to whom) responsibility is assigned for achieving work-life balance. Thus, they create implicit standards for employees' behavior. As research on gender and organization has shown, social norms about working hours and employee availability have gender connotations, and they are interwoven with constructions of masculinity (Meuser and Scholz 2012; Collinson and Hearn 2004; Hofbauer 2006; Halrynjo 2009).

Such constructions may be linked to "hidden rules" (Payne 2005) in organizations. Hidden rules are based on organizationally established assumptions about the employees' behavior, suggesting how to behave or not to behave and legitimizing the behavior deemed appropriate (Oechsle and Beaufaÿs 2016). Thus, they may contradict values espoused by the organization, such as the value of work-life balance as a source of productivity and official programs of family-friendliness. Whenever they are in direct contrast to an organization's official statements and programs, they are able to prevent the use of family-friendly programs and state-sanctioned rights and thus reduce fathers' "sense of entitlement" (Lewis and Smithson 2001; Hobson 2014).

1 See also Schein's (1990) model of organizational culture, which distinguishes between visible and less visible facets of organizational culture, as well as between more and less conscious aspects. Schein (1990) differentiates three levels: artifacts, expressed values, and basic assumptions, most of the latter being unconscious and ineffable.

Organizational cultures are not always consistent (Alvesson 2013) and thus may not only produce ambivalence and fear but also provide windows of opportunity for resourceful actors who use them to pursue their goals. This perspective leads us to take into account micro-political negotiation processes that people use to achieve their aspired level of work-family compatibility. Studies show that, in these negotiation processes, direct supervisors have an important gatekeeper function (Hochschild 1997). Sensitivity towards needs and specific problems of fathers and families plays a key role in the working group context (Jurczyk and Lange 2010; Possinger 2013).

## *2.3 Constraints and capabilities within lifestyle and everyday life*

Fathers' capabilities to take on an active role in family life are not only shaped by organizations and their structures and cultures, they are also influenced by patterns of lifestyle and different employment constellations (e.g. labor market chances).

When analyzing fathers' lifestyle, we use the concept of everyday life conduct[2] as a form of individual attainment (Jurczyk, Lange and Thiessen 2014; Jurczyk, Voß and Weihrich 2015; Weihrich and Voß 2002). This concept is founded on the idea that the complex effort required to mediate between different life areas and to balance the specific demands arising from each is "a performance of the individual[s]" (Voß 1991). Its focus on everyday practical activity also implies an inequality perspective (Jürgens 2002). Different patterns of lifestyle and the respective risks they entail can be interpreted as expressions of structurally determined inequalities in living situations, but they can also be understood as a means of overcoming social inequality and as resources for achieving life goals.

How fathers conduct their lives is shaped by complex constellations of factors such as fathers' work contexts, their partners' work and personal situations (e.g. occupation, employment, cultural models), children (number and age, availability of childcare), financial situation (family income, property, mortgages), geographic location (e.g. local surroundings, distance to workplace and childcare), and social and regional backgrounds (Alemann and Beaufaÿs 2015). Furthermore, it is influenced by fathers' cultural models, i.e. social assumptions of normality, which express socially accepted ideals and

2 In this paper, we prefer the term "lifestyle" because it is more common in the English speaking world (and allows highlighting the difference between our theoretical perspective and the philosophical meaning of "conduct of life" as proposed by Emerson 1860). We understand "lifestyle" in the sense of "conduct of life" referring to the term as it has been developed in the research group around Voß (1991). Thus, lifestyle does not only refer to an expressive or aesthetic style of life but designates the individual's active, integrative part in constructing one's own way of living within specific social conditions.

life goals (Alemann and Beaufaÿs 2015; Possinger 2013). Cultural models can be seen as a link between institutions and individual action, and individuals have to select and adopt them in an active way (Oechsle 1998). Models of fatherhood and fatherliness play an important role in the fathers' lifestyle, and they interact with their partners' models of motherhood and motherliness and with both partners' cultural models of partnership and family life (Schneider et al. 2015). Cultural models operate on the level of cultural representations, as institutional models for welfare state institutions, as social discourses, and as individual orientations and attitudes. Between the various levels, asynchronies can be found (Oechsle et al. 2006; Oechsle and Reimer 2016; Oechsle and Beaufaÿs 2016). Everyday life is the place where fathers experience ambivalent or contradictory cultural models of family, gender, and work commitment, and the place where they have to cope with these contradictions.

## 3. Methods and Data

For our study, we recruited a sample of seven companies, both public and private, of different sizes and sectors (insurance, financial services, retail trade, high technology, telecommunication, and logistics), located throughout Germany. Most of them are certified as family-friendly. We gathered data on their organizational contexts by analyzing company homepages and documents and conducted expert interviews with heads of human resources, gender affairs, and diversity managers, as well as staff council and executive board members. The data consist of 110 problem-centered interviews (Witzel 2000) with fathers at different levels and in various areas of each organization. The fathers had to have at least one child under the age of six in the household. Additionally, we conducted 16 problem-centered interviews with selected partners of the interviewed fathers.

The respondents' ages are between 26 and 52 years (ø 39 years of age). The large majority were born between 1965 and 1976, 83% in western Germany, 14% in eastern Germany, and 2.7% outside Germany. The number of children varies between one and five (ø 1.8 children). Most of the fathers (almost 80%) are employed full-time which means, in Germany, that approximately 40 hours per week are contractually agreed. However, 57% of the fathers work between 41 and 60 hours per week. Qualified professionals in leadership positions are overrepresented in our sample. Fathers who took significantly more than two months of parental leave are an exception. The

partner's working hours range between 0 and 60 per week, with very few of these women working full-time or more.

The empirical material was analyzed in three steps on three levels: organization, lifestyle, and interdependencies between organizations and lifestyle. In order to examine the organizational level, we used a range of data from different sources to reconstruct both the corporate image and the internal perspective. The corporate image was studied on the basis of the companies' homepages, while organizational beliefs and values were analyzed through expert interviews and the company culture as seen by the interviewed staff members. For the analysis of the level of paternal lifestyle, we coded the interviews with fathers and mothers according to a deductively-inductively developed categorical scheme using the qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA. For each father interviewed, we created a brief structured portrait. Based on the interviews with selected fathers and their partners, we then created structured portraits of couples, which were analyzed comparatively. Based on Zimmermann's concept of configurational approaches (Zimmermann 2006), we analyzed, in a third step, typical configurations of organizational contexts and fathers' lifestyles from a comparative perspective. The result is a typology of concepts of fatherhood and their chances of realization.

## 4. Empirical Findings

In the following sections, we present the cases of two fathers who work in different organizations. Their cases are exemplary for contrasting configurations of constraints and capabilities for fathers who want to be involved in family life.

Mr. Smith is thirty-four years old and has a two-year-old son. He works about 50 hours per week, and his wife works part-time. He holds a position as a senior consultant at "Consumer Goods", an international retail company in the private sector. The company has more than 100,000 employees worldwide, including more than 2,000 in Germany. 82% of the employees are female, but only 20% of the women hold leadership positions. Working time arrangements are flextime, trusted flextime, part-time, jobsharing, and home office. The company is certified as a family-friendly employer.

Mr. Roberts is thirty-nine years old and has two children aged four and seven. He works 30 hours per week, as does his wife. Mr. Roberts holds a position as a senior expert at "Communication Systems", an international telecommunications company in the private sector. The company has more than100,000 employees worldwide, including more than 60,000 in Germany.

30% of the employees are female, and about 20% of the women obtain leadership positions. Working time arrangements are flextime, trusted flextime, part time, shift work, jobsharing, and home office. The company is also certified as a family-friendly employer.

Mr. Smith and Mr. Roberts appear to share many close similarities in terms of their overall situation. They differ slightly in age, but both hold senior positions in their companies, and their family incomes are equal. Both men have a wife who is equally highly qualified, and both work at the level of their qualifications. But the men differ substantially as fathers in their working and childcare practices. Whereas Mr. Roberts works part-time and took several parental leave months for his two children, Mr. Smith tends to work overtime, has never taken leave, and does not plan to do so – despite claiming not to be career-oriented. In the interview, Mr. Smith and Mr. Roberts both profess their willingness and desire to be involved in family life. But Mr. Smith indicates that he feels unable to achieve his goal, whereas Mr. Roberts reports to be fully satisfied with his situation. We want to know, then, which factors discourage Mr. Smith and encourage Mr. Roberts to be involved in their children's upbringing. To answer this question, in the following we look at the organizations where they work. Each of the organizations involved in our study is shaped by structural and cultural factors and constellations of organizational actors. The interrelations among these factors lead to a set of constraints and capabilities.

## *4.1 The impact of work organizations*

"Consumer Goods", Mr. Smith's organization, sells interchangeable products in a highly competitive market. Therefore, the organizational structure is subject to constant change, job insecurity, and a constant scarcity of staff. As part of the German private sector, working conditions are, to a certain extent, subject to individual negotiations between employee and employer or direct supervisor. The organizational culture is highly competitive. It is common to work long hours and to hide family commitments from superiors. The culture is characterized by presenteeism and hidden rules. These hidden rules prevent the use of the manifold family-friendly programs and of state-sanctioned rights such as parental leave, and they are in direct contrast to the organization's family-friendly self-presentation. Examples of such hidden rules are: "Family-friendliness is an issue (mostly) affecting women"; "Be grateful for any goodwill shown by supervisors and the company in general"; "You are responsible for making enough family time and for your performance as a father. Don't blame your employer". Although the organization offers time flexibility for employees on all company levels, this has more to do with the demands of

the market than with the demands of the fathers. Mr. Smith describes how he sees the chances of his CEO understanding his situation:

> *I don't expect too much understanding for my urge to get home in the evening, or for me arriving late because I had to drop off my child at daycare or something like that. I don't mention these things in that context. I try to avoid that, since I don't want him [the CEO] to view me as unsuitable, because I have a strong hunch he won't agree and he won't understand.*

In this organization, the supervisors have significant power as gatekeepers. Just as supervisors are expected to show total commitment and availability to the company, they expect the same from their subordinates. The HR department, which considers itself an agent of family-friendliness, has relatively low bargaining power in the organizational setting.

Among the fathers in this organization, we observe processes of self-exclusion. They anticipate implicit expectations of availability and behave accordingly: either they adapt to these anticipated expectations, renouncing their desires for active fatherhood, or they self-exclude from career positions. This is due to the fathers' relatively weak bargaining power. Mr. Smith is especially dependent on his organization because of his weak position in the labor market. As a social scientist, his chances to earn a good income outside this organization are relatively low. However, Mr. Smith is not the only father whose sense of entitlement is reduced by the organizational culture. It is the totality of all of the working conditions in the organization that leads to a low sense of entitlement in employees who want to reconcile work and family life.

"Communication Systems", Mr. Roberts' employer, is a market leader in telecommunication systems. Parts of the organizational structure are highly regulated, stemming from a history as public-service organization, and there are varied family-friendly programs. The job security is quite high.

The culture is characterized by a high level of co-operation and output orientation with a low level of social control among employees. Talking about family commitments is widely accepted within the organization. Especially in positions for highly qualified staff at company headquarters, a flexible schedule is possible, and using it for family matters is accepted within the organizational culture. Mr. Roberts feels accepted and supported by his supervisor in his way of life.

> *I can imagine that he [my supervisor] wasn't happy when I came to him with my request to take leave. But he didn't let me sense that, for example, when I returned to work part-time. (…) Or in matters of career development, I don't feel overlooked, although I have taken a lot of liberties, so to speak, for the sake of my family.*

Mr. Roberts envisions himself as a pioneer in the use of flexible working time arrangements, and as an agent of change, and he hopes to function as a model for other fathers.[3] Within his organization, Mr. Roberts has significant bargaining power because, as an engineer, his chances on the labor market are quite high. In addition, the employees' sense of entitlement in the company is high.

## *4.2 The impact of lifestyle*

It is not only the organizational setting and the chances on the labor market that influence fathers' capabilities to achieve the level of fatherly involvement they aspire to. Fathers' lifestyle also entails both chances and obstacles for active fatherhood. Mr. Smith and Mr. Roberts both present themselves as fathers who would like to be active fathers and to be involved in their children's lives. But whereas Mr. Roberts actually does feel involved and openly displays his involvement in the work context, Mr. Smith expresses fears of losing contact with his child and still keeps up with the expectations imposed on him in his workplace. How can we explain the difference between them in their everyday practices apart from organizational preconditions? When asking the two fathers how their individual living arrangements evolved, we learn a great deal about Mr. Smith's and Mr. Roberts' general orientations in life.

Mr. Smith recalls the family situation when his son was born:

> *Some things were just set. So it was clear that I'd work more (…) I mean, that I'd have to continue working 100%. And otherwise, I tried to meet her expectations as far as possible. (…) But somehow there are no traditional reasons for our arrangement. We just decided on the basis of what each of us felt comfortable with – as well as the facts.*

Mr. Roberts tells a quite different story:

> *My initial goal, or our goal, was to have an equal relationship with each of us bearing 50% of the workload, including gainful work and housework. And on the whole – from my perspective – things have worked out pretty well. And in that sense, we have stuck with our plan. The only thing is that it's more work than I expected.*

Mr. Smith's orientation is clearly geared toward the things that were set and given, as he sees it. In particular, his full-time job cannot be called into question. Otherwise, he tries to meet his wife's expectations. Although this attitude

3 In other organizations, we observed powerful actors such as CEOs changing organizational cultures into more family-friendly cultures for fathers because they believed this would be a "win-win" situation for both the fathers and the company.

may not be rooted in traditional values, it is still embedded in traditional practices. Mr. Smith sees his impact as small.

In contrast, Mr. Roberts interprets his arrangement as based on practices that were consciously established from the very beginning. He, too, refers to his partner when expressing the couple's shared values regarding equality. "Doing family" this way means following a schedule. It is exhausting, but it works. Judging from his point of view, things seem to be quite simple. His message is: just do it.

As we analyze the interactions between organizations (structures, cultures and policies), and fathers' lifestyles (their personal ideals and self-concepts of fatherhood as well as their everyday fathering practices), we observe in particular that the negotiation processes between couples concerning the division of labor play an important role. Besides the organizational impact, there are barriers due to the couple and their images of family life and childhood. There are expectations on the mothers' side that the fathers would like to meet. To understand the degree of the fathers' involvement, we have to consider the perspective of their partners as well.

Mrs. Smith recalls her early career orientation and life plans:

> *Well, actually I always had been toying with the idea of working half-days by the time I had kids. Back then, I thought that dentistry would be very convenient for that because you earn quite a bit. So I had the attitude that if I study dentistry and then work half-days, I'll earn as much as a teacher.*

Mrs. Roberts had very different plans for her life:

> *To stay home three years with your child and then have the right to return to your job – this is how I interpret it – that's something I cannot imagine for my own life. You know, I never planned on staying home for the kids until they're allowed to go to kindergarten, and then probably only work from 8 to 12, which is still common in rural areas.*

In the paradigmatic cases of Mr. Roberts and Mr. Smith, we find typical constellations and living arrangements that lead to either more or less involvement in family life. In the case of Mr. Smith, both parents favor a lifestyle as homeowners in the suburbs, implying a commuting working father and a mother managing the household. Mr. Smith's parents lived according to this same model. He grew up in a small town in western Germany, and his mother stayed home to take care of the children. Mr. and Mrs. Smith's self-concepts reflect this cultural model. Although both of them are highly qualified, Mr. Smith sees himself as the (main) breadwinner, and Mrs. Smith pictures herself mainly as a mother. Fathering in this family is practiced mainly as support to the mother. The father puts his own desires for a close relationship to his child on hold, looking forward to spending more time with his child when the child is older.

The Roberts follow the cultural model of total equality and self-realization in the job and in the family. This is also rooted in Mr. and Mrs. Robert's social background: Both were born in eastern Germany. Mr. Robert's parents are highly qualified and both still work. They, too, support the idea of equal opportunities in the family. The Roberts picture themselves as a caring father and a working mother. This is reflected in their family practices: The father takes the opportunity to be actively involved in his children's upbringing, and he is doing more than just supporting the mother.

So, although both fathers vary little in the facts of their respective situations (especially regarding qualifications, position, and income) and although they both wish to be active fathers, Mr. Smith and Mr. Roberts lead completely different lives. This may partly derive from their own and their partners' heritage, but that is not the point we want to make here. Rather, we would like to stress that, in any case, practices evolve into obstacles or capabilities and can reinforce constraints or capabilities at the workplace.

### *4.3 Configurations of constraints and capabilities*

In our study, we have found that father's cultural models and self-concepts, plus those of their partners, shape their practices of involvement. We reconstructed three types of fatherly self-conceptions: the *(main) breadwinner* (inclusion in family activities mostly on weekends: leisure activities, play, sports, and fun); the *companion* (inclusion in family activities during the week as well: getting the children off to bed, bathing, taking children to daycare; but main responsibility for care rests with the mother); and the *caring father* (inclusion in family activities since early childhood, participation in care on a regular basis from the very beginning, egalitarian division of labor). Two thirds of the fathers interviewed live (more or less) according to one of these self-conceptions as fathers, and, all in all, they feel satisfied with their lives as fathers. One third are struggling with their own ideals of being a good father but cannot realize them in everyday life. These fathers feel uncomfortable with their situation: The breadwinner feels marginalized in the family; the father who wants to spend more time with his children as they are growing up is more a "would-be companion" and has limited capabilities to fulfill this self-conception, and the caring father experiences conflicts with his wife as well as with supervisors or colleagues. Furthermore, it is important to see the differences behind similar wishes of fathers to be involved in their children's lives. The wish to be an active father does not necessarily mean seeking or striving for an egalitarian division of labor. We therefore differentiate between the caring father and the father as companion.

Mr. Smith is a very good example for the *would-be companion* father. Analyzing the case of Mr. Smith and his wife, we can see that the couple's cultural model, self-conceptions, and practices increase the implicit expectations of the organization. The organizational conditions of Mr. Smith and the couple's way of "doing family" mutually compound each other. In the interview, we hear Mr. Smith very clearly expressing his aspirations: He rejects the idea of being a weekend father and says he does not want to put his career first – and still we find him struggling with his situation because this is exactly what he is doing. If he does not pursue his career in his competitive working environment, he is putting his job at risk, and to prevent this, he has to give in to the presenteeism culture of his company.

Mr. Roberts is an example of the *caring father* who is able to realize his self-conception of being a good father. Here we have all the conditions that lead to equal involvement in the family – not only on the side of the organization, but also on that of lifestyle. These two aspects work together to enhance his involvement in his family. In the interview, Mr. Roberts says that he has postponed his career aspirations for a certain time. This is acceptable to his supervisor.

Mr. Smith's and Mr. Roberts' cases are extreme examples within a wider range of configurations. The family arrangements they have developed together with their partners are examples of very different configurations of constraints and capabilities. Mr. Smith represents a configuration of multiple constraints on being an involved father, both at work and within the family. These barriers mutually reinforce each other and they have led to an arrangement Mr. Smith never wanted to accept, even unintentionally, and as a father he feels quite uncomfortable with this situation. The case of Mr. Roberts shows a set of capabilities for active and involved fatherhood in the organizational context as well as in his family. These capabilities also reinforce each other. Mr. Roberts is quite satisfied with his life and the situation at work and within his family, and he is convinced that he is leading a life according to his values and preferred goals.

## 5. Conclusions

We chose the two cases presented here to show the impact of different configurations of constraints and capabilities for fathers' involvement in the family. Our sample includes other types of configurations of constraints and capabilities that work in other directions. For example, organizational constraints on involved fatherhood can be moderated by strong capabilities in the fathers'

lifestyle, and vice versa. Yet these two to some extent polarized examples display the impact of organizational parameters as well as the influence of fathers' conduct of life on achieving involved fatherhood. In this last section, we refer back to our theoretical concepts to analyze constraints and capabilities for fathers' involvement more generally.

Beginning with the influence of organizational structure and culture, we can see some highly important parameters that make a difference for fathers who want to be involved in their children's lives. Of course, the sector and the market position of the company as well as the organization of work and the working conditions play a crucial role in fathers' capabilities. We can see great differences in the regulation of working conditions and time arrangements. Organizations that occupy a role as a market leader and/or are subject to a stronger regulation of working conditions allow fathers to develop a set of capabilities for fatherhood, whereas organizations in a competitive market position, and with low regulation of working conditions, build up a set of constraints for fathers who are trying to achieve involved fatherhood. In sum, the structure of an organization has an important impact on fathers' capabilities, and our data show a clear profile of corresponding features.

But the impact of organizational culture should not be underestimated. In our study, we found strong evidence that cultural factors have a great impact on fathers' capabilities, too. Even though six out of seven companies in our sample are certificated as family-friendly and offer programs to promote work-family balance, the use of such programs is often restricted by hidden rules.[4] We reconstructed these hidden rules in our interviews with fathers when they told us their stories about their decisions to take parental leave, or about their trying to use flextime for family needs (Oechsle and Beaufaÿs 2016). The narratives and reflections of the interviewed fathers show clearly the decoupling of "talk" and "action" in some companies as described by the neo-institutional approach. An important part of these hidden rules is the issue of responsibility for work-family compatibility: It is often seen more as an individual responsibility of the employee than as a responsibility of the employer.

The attribution of responsibility (e.g. for the reconciliation of work and family life) is part of the construction of normality in organizations: what is taken for granted and seen as normal, and what is contested in the organization when dealing with issues of work-family compatibility for fathers. For many fathers, minimizing the visibility of involved fatherhood and preventing themselves from being assigned a status as "tokens" are crucial problems.

4 One company in our sample had neither formal certifications nor family-friendly programs. However, we identified numerous practices there that support fathers' wishes to be more actively involved in everyday family life.

Young fathers with career aspirations in particular tend to take less parental leave, take leave in smaller chunks, or even not take any leave at all due to concerns about how this will affect their career, their supervisors, or their colleagues. Other fathers who do not want to offer the level of availability they think is expected of them tacitly reduce their career aspirations in advance. We can analyze this as a kind of self-exclusion, which makes the conflicts fathers face in trying to achieve work-family balance invisible as well. The decision to work overtime versus part-time or full-time can also be seen as an important aspect of practices that make involved fatherhood more or less visible. The underlying perception is that care and career are mutually exclusive. This is usually directed mainly at women, but it also applies to men if they are care-oriented in practice. Thus, we are dealing with a mechanism of social inequality that is linked to care rather than to gender.

Among the fathers interviewed, most have a limited sense of entitlement (cf. Lewis and Smithson 2001) and conceive of the use of family-friendly programs not as a right but as a "give-and-take"-reciprocity. In the interviews, they express feelings of gratitude and loyalty towards their employer for allowing them to take their legally guaranteed rights (such as taking fatherhood leave). All in all, the fathers' sense of entitlement is moderated by (different) layers of social comparison with other welfare states, other generations, and other gender norms. As, in general, family-friendliness is seen more as an issue for mothers than for fathers, the fathers' sense of entitlement to work-family compatibility is very weak, and it is also limited by gender norms. However, we observe a desire among fathers to increase the normality of paternal care beyond traditional gender norms (Oechsle and Beaufaÿs 2016).

Constructions of normality are not stable; they are changing over time. Powerful actors in organizations can promote cultural change or they can set barriers for it. Our analysis shows the crucial role of supervisors as gatekeepers and role models, and also the important role of other organizational actors who push forward issues of work-life balance on behalf of fathers (owner-managers, works council members, human resources departments, etc.).

However, organizational structure and culture are not the only factors that affect fathers' capabilities to be involved in family life. Fathers' self-conceptions and cultural models, as well as those of their partners, are important impact factors as well. It is important to keep in mind that organizational settings are interpreted by individuals, and they matter to different degrees for different fathers according to their individual configurations of constraints and capabilities. As we have seen in the cases of Mr. Smith and Mr. Roberts presented here, implicit cultural models and social backgrounds have an impact on fathers' capabilities. For Mr. Roberts, being an involved father necessarily implies an egalitarian gender arrangement and an equal division of labor in

the couple, and this is also true for his wife. In the case of Mr. Smith, we can see ambivalences and asynchronicities in cultural models and self-conceptions. Throughout the entire interview, Mr. Smith never makes reference to traditional gender roles to explain the gender arrangement in his family. But we can see that he and his wife do refer in a certain way to traditional models of family and childhood that are, in fact, strongly gendered.

It is interesting that most of the *caring fathers* in our sample have been able to realize their self-concept, whereas the majority of fathers who see themselves as *companions* fail to achieve their ideal of being good fathers. On the other hand, most fathers with a self-conception as the *(main) breadwinner* are able to realize their ideals of being good fathers and husbands. These differences indicate the impact of cultural models and the relevance of institutions for everyday life. The male breadwinner model, especially in more rural areas, has strong support from local institutions and prevailing values. As a result, the majority of the interviewed fathers who see themselves as *breadwinners* are living in line with their self-concept. *Caring fathers,* on the other hand, regard themselves as pioneers: They know that they have to actively develop a new type of lifestyle and everyday practices that are partially in opposition to institutional settings and cultural expectations. Mr. Roberts is a good example of this configuration. Fathers who want to be *companions* of their children primarily experience ambivalences in their everyday lives. Caught between traditional and modernized images of fatherhood, between the demands of greedy work organizations and their own desires to be involved fathers, they often fail to develop new and resilient practices in their everyday conduct of life (see Oechsle and Reimer 2016). Mr. Smith is a paradigmatic example of this configuration.

Fathers' self-conceptions and the underlying cultural models play an important role. Still, as we have shown in the examples of Mr. Smith and Mr. Roberts, organizations and lifestyles work together to create sets of constraints and capabilities for fathers' involvement. Organizational factors – structures, cultures, and constellations of actors – lower or enhance fathers' sense of entitlement. Patterns of lifestyle, as results of biographical choices as well as of contingent constellations, also have a great impact on fathers' capabilities for involvement. Thus, organizational factors and aspects of everyday conduct of life mutually reinforce each other's discouraging and encouraging effects.

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