

*Cooperatives : The Power to Act*

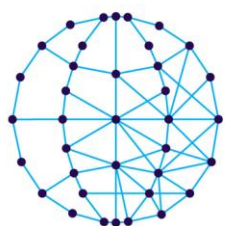
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## **WORK-FAMILY ARTICULATION OVER THE LIFECOURSE:**

## **DOES DEMOCRATIC OR PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

## **THE CASE OF COOPS AND SOCIAL ECONOMY IN QUEBEC**

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## Abstract

Our research seeks to determine if specific forms of management are more favorable to work-life articulation over the lifecourse, in coops and in the social economy sector in general. It thus questions the “ways to manage” and “ways to innovate” in the coop and social economy sector. Our research compares perceived organizational support to work-life articulation measures and policies in the coops and social economy sector with various work environments in order to determine whether a democratic management environment may be more favorable to work life balance, and therefore offer a more sustainable form of employment. It does appear that the social mission and its impact on the organizational context can be more supportive of its workers in a perspective of work-life balance. More specifically, our paper asks the question whether the coop and social economy sector, with its explicit mission and management approach (participative decision-making process) might have an influence on organizational support to work-life balance (WLB) and thus reduce the perception of WLB-related difficulties over the life course. We studied the coops and social economy sector in Québec (Canada) and compared findings with three other sectors but not the same management mode or philosophy: a metropolitan police service, social work and nursing, all in the same city. Our research identifies many significant differences between the four sectors, apparently owing to the characteristics of the coops and social economy sector. In addition to our quantitative research (about 800 respondents in all, 400 in the coops and social economy sector), we conducted interviews (36) in the social economy sector and results confirm that the specificity of this sector, i.e., mission, philosophy and management mode, appear to explain the overriding concern for WLB in this sector. Although more research would need to be done in other firms with various forms of democratic management, this is a first contribution to the issue on the “ways to manage” and “ways to innovate” in the coop and social economy sector.

**Keywords:** organization of daily life, management modes, innovation, organisational support, work-family conflict, worklife balance, social economy sector.

## Résumé

Notre recherche cherche à déterminer si certaines formes de gestion particulières sont plus favorables à la conciliation emploi-famille tout au long de la vie dans les coopératives et le secteur de l'économie sociale en général. Elle interroge donc les « façons de gérer » et « façons d'innover » dans le secteur des coopératives et de l'économie sociale. Notre recherche compare les mesures et politiques visant le soutien organisationnel perçu à la conciliation travail-famille dans les coopératives et le secteur de l'économie sociale en fonction de milieux de travail variés afin de déterminer si une gestion démocratique s'avère plus favorable à l'équilibre travail-famille, et si par conséquent elle offre une forme d'emploi plus durable. Il semble que la mission sociale et ses effets sur le cadre organisationnel puissent s'avérer plus soutenant pour les employés dans une perspective d'équilibre travail-famille. En particulier, notre papier cherche à savoir si le secteur des coopératives et de l'économie sociale, par sa mission et sa démarche managériale explicites (processus de prise de décision participatif), pourrait influencer sur le soutien organisationnel à l'équilibre travail-famille (ÉTV, ou WLB en anglais dans le texte) et ainsi réduire la perception des difficultés liées à cet équilibre tout au long de la vie. Nous avons étudié les coopératives et le secteur de l'économie sociale du Québec (Canada) et avons comparé les données à trois autres secteurs, ne partageant pas le même mode de gestion ni la même philosophie : service policier en région métropolitaine, travail social et soins infirmiers, tous situés dans la même ville. Notre recherche souligne plusieurs différences notables entre les quatre secteurs, découlant vraisemblablement des caractéristiques propres aux coopératives et au secteur de l'économie

sociale. En plus de notre recherche quantitative (800 répondants environ au total, soit 400 dans les coopératives et le secteur de l'économie sociale), nous avons réalisé des interviews (36) dans le secteur de l'économie sociale. Les résultats viennent confirmer que la spécificité de ce secteur, c.-à-d. la mission, la philosophie et le mode de gestion, semble expliquer la principale préoccupation du secteur de l'économie sociale pour l'ÉTV. Bien qu'il soit requis d'approfondir cette recherche dans d'autres entreprises dotées de diverses formes de gestion démocratique, cette démarche est une première contribution à cet enjeu sur la question des « façons de gérer » et des « façons d'innover » dans les coopératives et le secteur de l'économie sociale.

## Resumen

Nuestra investigación busca determinar si ciertas formas de gestión son más favorables para la articulación de la vida laboral con la familiar a lo largo del ciclo de vida en el sector de las cooperativas y de la economía social en general. Por lo tanto cuestiona las «formas de gestionar» y las «formas de innovar» en el sector de las cooperativas y de la economía social. Nuestra investigación compara la percepción de las medidas y políticas de apoyo organizacional a la articulación de la vida laboral con la familiar en el sector de las cooperativas y de la economía social con diversos entornos laborales para determinar si un ambiente de gestión democrática puede ser más favorable para el equilibrio entre la vida laboral y familiar y, por lo tanto, brindar una forma más sustentable de empleo. Parece ser que la misión social y su impacto en el contexto organizacional pueden ser más propicios para una perspectiva de equilibrio entre la vida laboral y la familiar de sus trabajadores. Más específicamente, nuestro trabajo plantea la pregunta de si el sector de las cooperativas y de la economía social, con su misión explícita y enfoque de gestión (proceso participativo en la toma de decisiones) podría tener una influencia en el apoyo organizacional al equilibrio entre la vida laboral y la vida familiar (WLB, por sus siglas en inglés) y, por lo tanto, reducir la percepción de las dificultades relacionadas con el WLB durante el ciclo de vida. Estudiamos el sector de las cooperativas y de la economía social en Quebec (Canadá) y comparamos los hallazgos con tres otros sectores, pero que no tienen la misma forma ni la misma filosofía de gestión: un servicio de policía metropolitano y servicios de trabajo social y de enfermería, todos en la misma ciudad. Nuestra investigación identifica muchas diferencias significativas entre los cuatro sectores, aparentemente debidas a las características del sector de las cooperativas y de la economía social. Además de nuestra investigación cuantitativa (aproximadamente 800 encuestados en total, con 400 en el sector de las cooperativas y de la economía social), realizamos entrevistas (36) en el sector de la economía social y los resultados confirman que las características de este sector, es decir, su misión, filosofía y modo de gestión, parecen explicar la preocupación fundamental del sector de la economía social por el WLB. A pesar de que se requeriría realizar más investigaciones en otras firmas con diversas formas de gestión democrática, esta es una primera contribución al tema acerca de las «formas de gestionar» y las «formas de innovar» en el sector de las cooperativas y de la economía social.

## Introduction

Work-family conflict and work-life balance have been high on the agenda for some time now. In the 90's, research on work-life balance focused mainly on the difficulties faced by parents of young children (Guérin et al., 1997), while more recently the interest has turned to measures and policies developed by organisations to support work-family articulation (Duxbury and Higgins, 2003; Fusulier et al., 2006). Some studies (Guérin et al., 1994, Haas et al., 2002, Lewis, 2001, Frone et al., 1992)

also shed light on the importance of organisational culture and of the attitudes and behaviours of colleagues and managers as key determinants of work-life balance.

However, it is only recently that the public sector has been the object of research (Secret and Swanberg, 2008), often highlighting best practices; indeed, most research has been concentrated on private firms. Some research has highlighted the fact that large firms and public organizations might be more favourable to work-life balance, and Guerin et al. (1997) observed that organisational culture does influence the degree of work-family conflict. From an organisational standpoint, it seems that organisations can play a favorable or unfavorable mediating role in the development and implementation of family-friendly practices and policies (Fusulier et al., 2008; Fusulier et al., 2006). However, while some comparisons have been done between organisations, we have seen no attempt to test the idea that more participatory and democratic mission-derived management style (particularly in the coop and social economy sectors) may have an influence on the way the issue of work-family reconciliation is managed. We therefore decided to look into the matter. Our research thus seeks to determine if specific forms of management are more favorable to work-life articulation over the life course, in coops and in the social economy sector in general. It thus questions the “ways to manage” and “ways to innovate” in the coop and social economy sector

We thus wanted to investigate the incidence of organisational culture on the perceptions of work-life balance in different sectors, some more masculine (police) and some more feminine (nursing, social work) and another, mixed but with a more democratic management and different mission, i.e., the coops and the social economy sector, which we want to concentrate on here, while comparing with the other sectors to get a better understanding of the situation of coops and social economy. We decided to study the coop and social economy sector in Québec to see if this factor, the mission and culture, has an influence on the organisational support and the perceptions related to work-family balance. It seemed that human resources managers of social economy organisations were likely to pay more attention to work-life balance issue, given their “social” mission. This is what we set out to study. First, we outline the research methodology and a brief literature review on organisational support and work-life balance.

## Work-life balance and organizational support

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) define work-family conflict as the incompatibility between the demands of work and the demands of family, so that the implication in one role makes the implication in the other role difficult. The conflict appears when individuals perceive the demands of their family are incompatible with the demands of their job, and vice versa (Frone and Rice, 1987). Work-life balance measures, sometimes called family-friendly policies, generally aim at reducing this conflict and at facilitating the organisation of times and responsibilities of employees.

Research has identified various factors associated with work environment, which influence the degree of work-family conflict. Family-friendly practices, but also the support of colleagues and management, have been found to have a significant impact to reduce work-family conflict (Conference Board of Canada, 1994; Duxbury and Higgins, 2003; Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Rothbard et al., 2005).

A certain number of studies report the lack of time expressed by parents of young children, mainly of children under 6 years old, but also sometimes of teenagers (Conference Board of Canada, 1994; Galinsky et al., 2001; Frederick, 1995; Tremblay, 2008), as well as the work-family conflict they experience (Stephens and Sommer, 1996).

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Several researchers stress the importance of the organisational culture and of the attitudes and behaviours of colleagues and managers in the analysis of work-family conflict (Haas et al., 2002; Lewis, 2001). In addition, an American survey carried out by the Families and Work Institute (1998) showed that occupying a demanding employment added to the lack of organisational support, tend to make employees more stressed, less apt to face difficulties, ill-tempered and less energetic after work, which can reduce personal and family wellbeing. This situation can generate the transfer of family problems to work, which would reduce employees' performance. Organisational support to work-family balance thus appears as a key element to increase both organisational performance and employees' wellbeing. That is the reason why we focused on this question in this research.

The survey of the Families and Work Institute (1998) indicates that the most important determinants of the presence of programs, policies but also organisational support to work-family balance are, by order of importance: the sector, the size of the organisation and the proportion of women occupying executive positions. This led us to pay particular attention to the sector and to retain masculine (police) and feminine (nursing, social work and social economy) sectors, since the proportion of women in the workforce and the proportion of women in the management are generally linked.

The sector and the professional category thus appear to be variables that can influence work-family conflict, but research has not yet, to our knowledge, differentiated organisations according to their management mode, i.e. comparing for example participative or more democratic organisations, vs traditional hierarchical organisations, which we will do here looking at coops and social economy organisations vs large public organisations. We will now present the social economy sector.

### **The social economy sector (including coops)**

The coops and social economy sector is a substantial provider of jobs in Québec (Canada). According to data from the Chantier de l'économie sociale (Social Economy Forum), that sector includes 6,254 businesses comprised of 2,313 cooperatives and 3,941 non-profit organizations; together, they provide over 65,000 jobs.

According to a CSMO-ESACi survey conducted in 2000, the social economy sector's workforce is predominantly feminine: 76% work in non-profit organizations and 44% in cooperatives. In these businesses overall, women held 63% of the management jobs. In 2005, another study carried out by the Centre de formation populaire (CFP) and Relais-femmes, women held 80% of all the jobs in community-based agencies and organisations. Coops and social economy enterprises display unique characteristics. Originally created to cater to the needs of individual employees and local communities, social economy organizations in general are involved in economic development based on human values. In these businesses, rules and operational processes are designed to recognize and take into account the social dimension that should permeate economic development.

Coops and social economy firms are therefore a sector in which social values are strongly conveyed within the mission statement and objectives. They account for a large proportion of women in management functions and even more so in the early childcare sector. We identified the social economy sector for investigation in order to determine whether a more democratically managed work environment is more receptive or adaptive to work-family issues and concerns.

The other sectors to which we will compare the social economy are not described here since most readers are familiar with them; suffice it to say that all three (social work, police service and nursing) belong to the public sector and are large, top-heavy organisations.

## Methodology

Our investigation of the social economy sector was done with mixed methodologies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006; Patton, 1990); we combined qualitative and quantitative methods. We first conducted a quantitative survey where participants were invited to answer an online questionnaire; this was followed by a qualitative investigation using semi structured interviews.ii

The online questionnaire was made of questions on existing measures or policies within the organisation and on measures that respondents expected from the organisation. We wanted to capture the respondents' perception of the support available from both management and colleagues in the workplace regarding family responsibilities. Participants were also polled on different aspects of leave for family reasons and on parental leave. Finally, we managed to assess whether our respondents were satisfied with the way they could balance their professional and their family responsibilities.

The design of the online questionnaire and interview chart was inspired by several prior studies, namely those dealing with WLB (work-life balance) measures most appreciated by working parents (Caussignac, 2000; Guérin et al., 1997). Further, studies by Chevenier, (1996), Behson (2005), by the Families and Work Institute (1998) also included questions on the support available to parents from both management and colleagues as a crucial factor in taking up the leave measures.

The same questions were administered to the four sectors. In the police sector, we surveyed a metropolitan police service. For nurses, the entry point was their professional corporation (FIQ), and social workers were also contacted through their professional corporation (OPTSQ). For the coops social economy sector, however, we called upon the support of different regional or provincial organisations whose members are coops or active in social economy enterprises. This approach but does not allow to assess a response rate with precision. We nevertheless received hundreds of questionnaires which allowed us to proceed to statistical analyses and contact participants for interviews.

## Respondents' profile

To qualify as respondents in our survey, participants had to be paid employees and be in charge of at least one child under the age of 18. In the police sector, we processed 164 forms, 418 forms in the social work sector, and 144 in nursing (those respondents had filled a hard copy questionnaire, not an online survey).

In the coops and social economy sector, 423 persons completed the survey—28 men and 395 women. Among them, 70% are employees while 30% perform management functions. More than 92% of respondents hold a regular job. Further, 80% of our respondents are under the age of 45 and 37.5% have at least one child under the age of 6. Most employees enjoy some seniority with their current employer: 26% have more than 10 years in length of service, 30% have between 6 and 10 years, and 43% have 5 years or less. Among the respondents, 84% live with a spouse and this is where professional and family concerns and issues are relevant to WLB measures.

## Results

### Work-family balance difficulties

We first asked respondents if they had the feeling they could easily manage conflicts between their professional life and their family life and it appears there are some significant differences; the analysis particularly highlights significant differences between the coops and social economy sector and the police sector as well as with the social work sector, although the size effect is small in the statistical differences ( $p < 0.05$  and small effect size  $r^2 = 0.050$ ). Nevertheless, the descriptive data do show some differences as can be seen in Table 1. It is particularly noteworthy that the coops and social economy sector respondents are the ones who present the strongest agreement with the proposition since they are 73% (the highest percentage of all groups) indicating that they do manage the issues to their satisfaction (addition of agree and totally agree). The police sector comes next, which may be surprising and indeed we were surprised when we first looked at the data, since we would expect a masculine sector to present more difficulties. Indeed, contrary to what we expected—i.e. work-life balance is more difficult in a masculine work environment (Families and Work, 1998)—, we found that the police sector seems to offer a better support to work-family balance than two other strongly feminized sectors—nursing and social work (Tremblay and Larivière, 2009), especially with respect to parental leaves, which are much more easily supported here. Of course the police sector presents specific difficulties for work-life balance, in particular due to the schedules of work, which go 24 hours a day, implying many rotating and night shifts, as in the nursing sector. However, not only this data, but the analysis of all the survey data (qualitative and quantitative) has shown clearly that the support of managers and colleagues (exchange of shifts for example) in the police sector make it possible to partly compensate for these difficulties related to schedules (Labrèche and Lavoie, 2004; Lavoie, 2005; Thompson et al., 2005). The collaboration of colleagues came out as particularly important as a mediating effect of the professional environment and it does have an impact on the (rather positive) perception of work-life balance.

However, the coops and social economy sector presents an even more positive picture, while the social work and even more the nursing sector present more disagreement with the proposition, thus indicating higher levels of difficulty, as is shown in table 1.

**Table 1**  
**I have the feeling that I manage to reconcile well my professional and family life**

	Social economy	Police	Social work	Nursing	Total
Totally disagree	12 3.03%	5 2.67%	14 3.35%	7 4.61%	38 3.30%
Rather disagree	51 12.88%	31 16.58%	69 16.51%	41 26.97%	192 16.65%
Neutral	42 10.61%	33 17.65%	136 32.54%	36 23.68%	247 21.42%
Agree	204 51.52%	79 42.25%	116 27.75%	56 36.84%	455 39.46%
Totally agree	87 21.97%	39 20.86%	83 19.86%	12 7.89%	221 19.17%
Total	396	187	418	152	1153

	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
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In order to get a more complete view of the issue, we used other propositions that had been tested in the literature on work-family balance (Gu erin et al., 1997, 1994) and then asked respondents if they had the feeling they were sacrificing their professional life for their family life, or the opposite if they were sacrificing their family life for their professional life. In Table 2, there are significant differences between all the groups ( $p < 0.05$  and small effect size  $r^2 = 0.050$ ), except police and nursing who both tend to agree somewhat more with the proposition than the others.

The data indicate that most respondents are in disagreement that they are sacrificing their professional life, many of them being neutral towards the proposition and a small percentage being in agreement (8% in coops and social economy, 3% in social work, but up to 17% in police work and 20% in nursing. This seems to indicate that in the case of nursing, it is particularly difficult and in police work also, it may be somewhat difficult to easily reconcile both.

**Table 2**  
**I have the feeling that I am sacrificing my professional life for my family life**

	Social economy	Police	Social work	Nursing	Total
Totally disagree	149 37.63%	61 32.97%	209 50.00%	43 28.29%	462 40.14%
Rather disagree	126 31.82%	35 18.92%	107 25.60%	36 23.68%	304 26.41%
Neutral	86 21.72%	57 30.81%	85 20.33%	43 28.29%	271 23.54%
Agree	32 8.08%	28 15.14%	13 3.11%	28 18.42%	101 8.77%
Totally agree	3 0.76%	4 2.16%	4 0.96%	2 1.32%	13 1.13%
Total	396 100.00%	185 100.00%	418 100.00%	152 100.00%	1151 100.00%

In table 3, we can see that it is in the nursing sector that people feel they are sacrificing their family life for their professional life. We know that there is a labour shortage in this sector so this may explain partly the situation. The statistical analysis does not reveal significant differences for the coops and social economy sector, except with the nursing sector, so it appears that in the three other sectors (police, social work and social economy), it is not necessary to sacrifice one's family life for the professional life. Still some 23% do feel this in the social economy sector, some 23% as well in the police sector and 19% in the nursing sector, while it is 48% in the nursing sector (totals of agree and totally agree).



**Table 3**  
**I have the feeling that I am sacrificing my family life for my professional life**

	Social economy	Police	Social work	Nursing	Total
Totally disagree	95 23.99%	51 27.72%	120 28.71%	23 15.03%	289 25.11%
Rather disagree	125 31.57%	33 17.93%	101 24.16%	28 18.30%	287 24.93%
Neutral	84 21.21%	58 31.52%	119 28.47%	30 19.61%	291 25.28%
Agree	77 19.44%	34 18.48%	57 13.64%	58 37.91%	226 19.64%
Totally agree	15 3.79%	8 4.35%	21 5.02%	14 9.15%	58 5.04%
Total	396 100.00%	184 100.00%	418 100.00%	153 100.00%	1151 100.00%

### Organisational support to WLB

With respect to organisational support toward parental and family responsibilities, a number of studies draw attention on the importance of organisational culture and the behaviour or attitude of colleagues or managers (or supervisors) when problems arise in balancing professional and personal responsibilities (Haas et al., 2002; Lewis, 2001). Elsewhere, Guérin et al. (1997) found that organisational culture may affect work-family conflicts; according to that research conducted among union members, workers perceive that WLB is made easier when they incur no loss or suffer no consequence for taking care of their family. Conflicts are also toned down when the employee believes that his manager or supervisor expresses empathy or accepts accommodations or arrangements that help balancing professional activities and family life. Caussignac (2000) indicates that organisational support contributes significantly to lessen work-family conflict. Chenevier (1996) identifies three studies that underline the influence of non receptive attitudes or lack of flexibility of the supervisor toward employees and work-family conflicts. Negative attitudes stress the employee and feed discontent; as a result, employees take leave from work more often. Nelson and Quick (1985) developed a model of stressing agents among employed professional women and several of the variables are related to the organisation. According to a number of studies, support from colleagues appears to be among the significant variables (Guérin et al., 1997, 1994), but this does not crop out as a determinative factor in all studies, hence the interest in pursuing research on organisational support in other sectors such as the social economy sector which has seldom been investigated.

Given the fact that the coops and social economy sector's mission is centered on people over other issues, but mainly the fact that it is based on its democratic and participative management style, we might hypothesize that this sector would be more supportive to work-family balance. This could be translated into two hypotheses: first, that the care and social economy sector offers more support from the superior or management than the other; second: the coops and social economy sector offers more support from the colleagues or management than the others. We now look at the data

on organisational support, that is support from the immediate superior and from the colleagues, as defined by Behson (2005).

In table 4, statistical analysis reveals significant differences between all the groups and here the effect size is high, which means that the differences are here clearly confirmed and important, and there are important differences, i.e. between social economy and each of the other groups. ( $p < 0.05$  large size effect,  $r^2 = 0.220$ ).

**Table 4**  
**I have the feeling that my superior (manager, coordinator) is supportive in terms of work-family balance**

	Social economy	Police	Social work	Nursing	Total
Totally disagree	12 3.02%	7 3.78%	69 16.51%	45 29.22%	133 11.52%
Rather disagree	26 6.53%	23 12.43%	89 21.29%	46 29.87%	184 15.93%
Neutral	78 19.60%	49 26.49%	121 28.95%	26 16.88%	274 23.72%
Agree	139 34.92%	67 36.22%	116 27.75%	35 22.73%	357 30.91%
Totally agree	143 35.93%	39 21.08%	23 5.50%	2 1.30%	207 17.92%
Total	398 100.00%	185 100.00%	418 100.00%	154 100.00%	1155 100.00%

Support is clearly higher in the social economy group. We can see that over 71% support the proposition, while levels of support are lower in the police sector (57%) and definitely much lower in the two other groups: 33% only in the social work sector and 24% in the nursing sector. This clearly shows that the social economy sector is more supportive and the fact that it is significantly different from the other sectors leads us to think that the social economy mission and mode of management would be the explanation. We thus pursued this question in the interviews and our hypothesis seems supported, as we will show further on, after having analysed the colleagues' support in table 5.

There are many significant differences, as it is only between police and social work, and police and nursing that the differences are not significant. The coops and social economy sector again appears to differentiate itself here. We can see that levels of support from colleagues are higher in this sector: 43% agreeing and 36% totally agreeing for a total of 79% in agreement. The police sector comes next with 65% agreement, then 60% in social work and 58% in nursing. In the interviews we conducted in these sectors, it does come out that colleagues are quite supportive, offering to change schedules in order to accommodate a colleague, finishing up some work for a colleague who has to leave for family reasons and the like. In some cases, it was mentioned to us that colleagues' support can compensate for the lack of superior's support, since it can happen that a manager may not be supportive even if the environment is generally supportive.

**Table 5**  
**I have the feeling that my colleagues are supportive in terms of work-family balance**

	Social economy	Police	Social work	Nursing	Total
Totally disagree	6 1.51%	5 2.70%	13 3.11%	13 8.39%	37 3.20%
Rather disagree	20 5.04%	20 10.81%	39 9.33%	19 12.26%	98 8.48%
Neutral	54 13.60%	41 22.16%	115 27.51%	33 21.29%	243 21.04%
Agree	172 43.32%	89 48.11%	160 38.28%	71 45.81%	492 42.60%
Totally agree	145 36.52%	30 16.22%	91 21.77%	19 12.26%	285 24.68%
Total	397 100.00%	185 100.00%	418 100.00%	155 100.00%	1155 100.00%

The statistical data cannot explain the reason why the support is higher in the coops and social economy sector and so we conducted some interviews (36) in the social economy sector to have a better understanding of why the coops and social economy sector might be more supportive than others.

Factors that can explain the supportive attitude of the social economy sector towards WLB

As we saw, our respondents indicate that the coops and social economy sector is more supportive; as there are space limits for this paper, we cannot present here all the details of the reasons that people put forward in our interviews to explain this more positive attitude or organisational culture.

In a nutshell, the coops and social economy sector presents itself as a sector with “different” values, which favors the idea of « doing things differently ». They are very much embedded in their history, their social mission, the rules and regulations that support this mission, and all this is oriented towards collective wellbeing. Many persons interviewed in this sector naturally make a link between these values and the fact that their working environment is open to work-family issues.

The social coops and economy sector arises from citizens’ concerns with issues that are poorly if at all covered by the State and with an interest for local economic development focused more on people than on profit or return. For our respondents, the connection between this history of activism, social struggles, individual needs and the existence of good organisational support to WLB for employees is only logical. According to our respondents for example, the cooperative and union values that underpin the foundation of a number of community organisations explain why WLB measures are embedded in the working conditions of the employees.

The processes, rules and operating principles that guide enterprises in the social economy are based on a shared vision of both collective and individual well-being. Moreover, according to the Chantier de l’économie sociale, the principal defining characteristic of social economy enterprises is to pursue “economic development with a social mission.” The social mission is therefore an intrinsic

part of the activities and/or the operation of the business. The persons we have met therefore believe that the employers' openness to WLB stems from that social mission which in turn shapes how personnel management is streamed.

The same question was put the employee of a housekeeping services cooperative catering to persons experiencing loss of independence; this respondent believes that offering services to people in need requires that all the personnel be sensitive to other people's needs and therefore understand the necessity of WLB measures. Likewise, one founding member of a cooperative, the father of two toddlers, explained why he founded a worker cooperative; it is because, he says, the philosophy and the operating rules promote equity principles, democratic decision-making and a concern for persons. These are naturally in line with work-life balance measures.

A number of respondents indicated that the decision-making process in their enterprise is often carried out in teams. As we have seen earlier, collective enterprises establish, in their statutes and code of conduct, "a democratic decision-making process that implies the necessary participation of users and workers." While an overwhelming majority of respondents work in collective businesses that are managed or coordinated by persons who supervise decisional processes, both managers and employees among the respondents have indicated that decisions are taken collectively or at least discussed in teams. For example, managers will often submit their opinion to employees or request their opinion on matters of concern to them. This process blends in with managers' concerns for their employees' needs and well-being. We shall return to this question in the following section.

The intrinsic values in the coops and social economy movement are seen as the building blocks on which the openness to work-life balance grows. In addition, it seems that our sample of managers in coops and social economy enterprises individually share the same set of values which are carried over to work-life balance issues. As we have learned, measures toward work-family balance bear little fruit where managers fail to support them with an open mind (Behson, 2005; Duxbury and Higgins, 2003; Behson, 2005). It is crucial that values inform management attitudes. In this sense, the take up of leaves for family reasons eventually allows to confirm the significance of management support in this respect. During the interviews, our respondents who hold management positions have spoken of the values that strengthen their behaviour with respect to work-life balance measures, and employees told us about the values they perceived in their employers. The managers interviewed expressed an interest in the general wellbeing of their employees. One manager in charge of a cooperative told us how the organisation is sensitive to employee needs in terms of work-life balance:

*Yes, well I'd say—for myself and the members of the board— that there is a belief in the central importance of human values in the organisation. [...] administrative processes are centered on the employee. And while we focus on employee needs, we listen to them and try to implement solutions that are supportive. [...] We systematically try to offer them the best possible support.*

The same concerns are held by board members. To explain the board's outlook on their responsibilities, one coordinator believes that board members are concerned with employee needs as well:

*No doubt board members always fully supported me in this respect. They have an intimate understanding of what it is to 'be employed'. Upfront, they believe that work should not impinge*

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*too much on personal life. [...] And there is constant monitoring of employee satisfaction with their job. [...] Board members pay attention to employee needs.*

## Conclusion

In conclusion let us recall our main observations. First, it is clearly easier to balance work and family in the coops and social economy sector in comparison with the other sectors. While this could be attributed to the strong presence of women in the sector, this is not sufficient, since the social work and nursing sectors are also very feminine and it appears more difficult to balance work and family in these sectors. In particular in the nursing sector, it was shown that professional life spills into private and family life much more than is the case in other sectors, amongst which the social economy sector.

We also showed that organisational support in the form of the superior's support and the colleagues' support are both more important in the coops and social economy sector than in others. While the police sector came in second place, there were significant differences between all groups, with more support from the supervisor in the coops and social economy sector, and quite little in the social work and even more nursing sector.

We then tried to explain the reasons for which this support appears more important in the social economy sector, and here we referred to the qualitative part of our research, as the interviews made it possible to discuss the reasons why the coops and social economy sector could be more supportive than the other sectors. The history of the sector, its accent on a social mission, with principles of democracy, equity, and respect for individuals seems to be very clearly the explanation.

We were to a certain extent surprised to observe this stronger support since we might have expected that public sector organisations (such as found in nursing, social work and police) would have more means to offer better working conditions and better support for work-family balance. This also appears to confirm the thesis put forward by Behson (2005), indicating that organisational support (from supervisors and colleagues) is at least as important as formal measures. Indeed, while formal measures and policies may well exist in public sector organisations, it may be that the application of these is quite rigid and therefore that the objective of work-family balance is much less supported in these organisations.

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## Notes

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<sup>ii</sup> At the conclusion of the online questionnaire, participants interested in meeting with us were invited to provide their contact information; we were then able to proceed with the second phase of the research in face to face interviews.

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