11. Dare to care: Negotiating organizational norms on combining career and care in an engineering faculty

Channah Herschberg, Claartje J. Vinkenburg, Inge L. Bleijenbergh and Marloes L. van Engen

The demands inherent to combining career and care responsibilities experienced by growing numbers of academics have been well documented (King, 2008; Schiebinger, Henderson and Gilmartin, 2008). The combination of an academic career and care is complicated by the notion of the ideal academic as “someone who gives total priority to work and has no outside interests and responsibilities” (Bailyn, 2003, p. 139), which still appears to be the existing norm within academia (e.g., Bleijenbergh, Van Engen and Vinkenburg, 2013). Academics are typically described as “committed solely to scientific discovery and, [...] in an androcentric manner, thought free from the requirements of self-care and the care of others” (Aulenbacher and Riegraf, 2010, p. 66).

Norms are an important component of organizational culture (Schein, 1990). We define them as manifestations of “shared, taken-for-granted implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about, and reacts to its various environments” (Schein, 1996, p. 236). Norms influence organizational behavior as they take descriptive and prescriptive forms in determining “how we do things around here” (Sun, 2008), and enable organization members to anticipate each other’s actions (Feldman, 1984). Members need to learn what the existing organizational norms are, usually by means of socialization (Wiener, 1982), and how to cope with them (Schein, 1990).

Poelmans (2012) developed a multilayered model or typology of different ways of dealing with organizational norms on combining career and care. The first type or intra-individual level of dealing with norms is...
to become aware of them so that one can decide how to confront them, referred to as norm nomination (Poelmans, 2012). Recognizing or becoming aware of norms is complicated, because norms often remain implicit and may have been internalized during organizational socialization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). It may therefore require direct confrontation with individuals that do or think differently, or a change in family status (e.g., becoming a parent, getting divorced) for this type of intra-individual nomination to take place. The second type or inter-individual level as suggested by Poelmans (2012) is norm navigation, which means actively coping with norms. This process of coping can take different forms, such as conforming to, creatively and subtly moving around, or openly rebelling against norms (Schein, 1990). The final type or inter-group level of dealing with norms according to Poelmans’ model (2012) is the development of new norms. Changing societal or organizational norms can take the form of the adoption of innovations, with early adopters openly navigating and creating new norms and laggards hanging on to the existing norm for as long as viable (Rogers, 1995).

Women, in academia and elsewhere, still predominantly bear the burden of care responsibilities. Once they have children, they face expectations of diminished career commitment, despite their growing presence in academic positions (King, 2008). Hence, the main focus of studies on combining academic careers with care responsibilities has been on women (e.g., Fletcher, Boden, Kent and Tinson, 2007), arguing that women are disadvantaged, especially those who have family involvements (Grant, Kennelly and Ward, 2000). Even though most scholarly attention goes to caring for children, we also mean care responsibilities to include the responsibility of caring for other (extended) family members and other dependants (Van Engen, Vinkenburg and Dikkers, 2012).

Owing to an increasing number of dual earner couples among academics (e.g., Schiebinger et al., 2008), the lived experiences of both men and women in academia may no longer match the ideal academic norm of having no care obligations. The rise of dual earners among academics matches current demographic developments common to industrialized nations, such as increasing female labor force participation, low fertility, and low mortality, which makes combining career and care an increasingly important social issue (Van Engen et al., 2012). This social issue concerns both men and women, as Fox, Fonseca and Bao (2011) found that both women and men scientists in nine US research universities reported work interfering with family. The masculine culture of academia also puts a burden on men who do not (want to) meet the androcentric characteristics of the ideal academic. Liebig (2010) presents one of the very few studies of fathers in academia, which clearly illustrates that
active fathers struggle when trying to meet organizational norms. This struggle may be caused by the general expectation that men, in contrast to women, will remain dedicated to work even after the birth of a child. Fathers that do not adhere to these expectations (e.g., by asking for reduced hours) are more likely to be confronted with stigmatization and career penalties than mothers (Coltrane, Miller, DeHaan and Stewart, 2013, Williams, 2000).

Exploring the way men and women in academia cope with organizational norms on combining career and care is of importance in the domains of science, engineering, and technology (SET) as they are traditionally more tied to notions of masculinity than other domains such as arts, social sciences, and humanities (Barnard, Powell, Bagilhole and Dainty, 2010; Sagebiel and Vázquez-Cupeiro, 2010). In SET, the symbolic masculinity of the ideal academic is tied to the numerical dominance of men because of women’s underrepresentation at all hierarchical levels (Britton, 2000), which renders combining career and care even more difficult than in other academic disciplines. Engineering is recognized traditionally as a scientific discipline that is practically devoid of connotations with femininity (Faulkner, 2000, 2007). In the context of academia, organizational norms are cross-cut by professional or occupational norms which may differ by academic discipline (Anderson, Ronning, De Vries and Martinson, 2010; Braxton, 1990). Since earlier research showed the norm of the ideal academic to be fluid between different disciplines (Bleijenbergh et al., 2013), the content of the organizational norms on combining career and care leaves room for exploration.

Moving beyond the issue of individual strategies for dealing with work–family conflict, in this chapter we explore organizational norms on combining career and care. Rather than considering work–family conflict as a given, we explore how academics in an engineering faculty relate to these norms by recognizing, debating, and challenging them. We inductively analyze transcripts of interviews and a focus group with academic staff in different hierarchical positions. We first illustrate how academics implicitly or explicitly address norms on combining career and care within the engineering faculty. Second, we explore how academics debate the nature and existence of the prevailing norms as well as try to figure out whether or not one can deviate from them. Third, we explore the conditions under which academics are able to navigate around these norms. Fourth, we show how a number of academics make a first step in changing the norms. Finally, we discuss how our analysis can advance theory building and research about organizational norms on combining
career and care. In conclusion, we describe how our insights and our research approach can contribute to making academia a more inclusive workplace.

METHOD

Procedure

The study described in this chapter is part of an action research project conducted at two faculties of a technical university in the Netherlands (Van Engen, Bleijenbergh and Vinkenburg, 2010). We gained access to the organization because the executive board of the university commissioned the study of the representation of women and men academic staff at different hierarchical levels, and to gain insight in the recruitment, selection, performance evaluation, promotion, and retention processes that led to inequalities between women and men. We were explicitly invited to provide not only insights but also concrete suggestions for policy development and implementation, in order to support the executive board in meeting its goals for improvement in the representation of women at all hierarchical levels. The multi-method project entailed an analysis of data from the personnel information system, a survey, interviews, and focus groups. This chapter uses data from interviews and a focus group, as explained below.

The action research nature of this project materialized in a final series of three workshops organized for each faculty separately, with the dean, department chairs, and the HR director, i.e., the decision-makers. During these workshops, which were led by a professional facilitator, participants were first given the opportunity to confirm or alter the findings we presented. Next, all participants jointly deepened their insights into these findings and came up with possible intervention practices on which there was consensus among participants. These evidence-based recommendations were presented in a final written report (Van Engen et al., 2010) and an oral presentation to the executive board of the university, and are currently in various stages of implementation.

For this chapter, in order to analyze how academics relate to norms on combining career and care, we used data collected by interviews and a focus group at the faculty of engineering. In 2009, the faculty of engineering employed 684 academics of which 17.7 percent were women. Of the 55 full professors, 5.2 percent were women. The selection of the interviewees and focus group participants was made in cooperation with the HR departments of the faculties. Selection criteria reflected a
small but strategic sample of women and men academics working at different hierarchical levels in the engineering faculty (the dean, full professors, associate professors, assistant professors, post doctoral researchers, and one academic that had recently left the university), both from Dutch and non-Dutch descent, from different ages, and with and without children. In alignment with the goal of the research project, women were purposefully oversampled.

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted within this faculty by three of the authors in 2009 and 2010. The interviews addressed a wide range of issues related to the professional and personal lives of the academics. The interviews were conducted either in Dutch or in English (depending on the preference of the interviewee) and lasted approximately one and a half hours. To perform a member check of the preliminary findings, we performed a two-hour focus group with four other academics of the same strategic sample (three women and one man) in 2010. During the focus group meeting, we presented our preliminary findings in statements to the participants, which allowed them to confirm or alter the analysis we presented. The same researchers who performed the interviews also led the focus group. The interviews and the focus group were recorded on tape, transcribed verbatim, and inductively coded on the basis of sensitizing concepts (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) that were derived from the conceptual model of Poelmans (2012).

Framework of Analysis

As sensitizing concepts for our analysis we used the three types of coping with norms about combining career and care distinguished by Poelmans (2012): norm nomination, norm navigation, and new norm creation. These three concepts supported us in identifying different ways men and women related to the norms on combining career and care in the organization. In analyzing the data, we were struck by how the (previously implicit) norm of not talking about care was first recognized, then debated, and in some cases challenged over the course of an interview or the focus group. Especially the lively debate on the organizational norm in the member check focus group motivated us to scrutinize potential ways of dealing with organizational norms as well as possibilities for changing them. As a result of the different ways of coping with norms about career and care that we found in the data, we propose a refinement and adaptation to the existing typology. In addition to the types distinguished by Poelmans (2012), our study spurred an additional, mainly inter-individual type of dealing with norms, which we have labeled
“norm negotiation”. Norm negotiation implies debating the existence and nature of the norm, as well as possible room to deviate from it, which takes a different form than nomination or navigation.

RESULTS

1. Nominating Norms

The first theme we identified in our analysis was nominating norms: recognizing or naming the existing norm. Our data showed that academics are or became aware of the norm that care is not a topic of conversation within the engineering faculty. For some of them the norm was self-evident. When we asked a woman associate professor about the support she experienced from colleagues in combining career and care she replied: “It’s none of their business I think” (Interviewee 1, woman). Others too recognized the norm as self-evident, but were able to identify these explicitly as “a norm”. In the next excerpt a woman assistant professor actively reflects upon this experience. She becomes aware that the joint experience of combining work and care is not a topic to discuss:

[...] I suppose that for each one of us, the partner is also working. So combining private life and work is an issue for everyone, I think. Um, so supposedly that should yes, in itself um, yes, be a kind of a connection between um all the members of staff, let’s say it that way, however I haven’t experienced it. [...] But I realize now, actually everyone has a partner who works, but that’s never a topic.

Okay. You don’t talk about it?

No, no.

Now I understand.

So the communication is mainly content based (Interviewee 2, woman).

Evidently, during the interview the academic realizes (“I realize now”) how shared the experience of combining work and care in fact is (“that should yes, in itself um, yes, be a kind of connection between um all the members of staff”). At the same time she realizes the issue is not discussed at all (“that’s never a topic”). Conversations by and large are based on the content of research. In the following excerpt a man assistant professor is aware of the organizational norm that a career in academia has primacy over all aspects of life. He explicitly states that deviating
from the norm has a penalty and one should therefore be careful not to reveal if one personally does not support that norm. He literally calls that “stupid”.

[... so colleagues around you make different choices also?]

Yes, I noticed that they often value a career more than I want to. Actually, yes however you should not say this out loud, a career is not of a very high importance to me, like I said, what do you expect? That, yes, you should enjoy it, it should give you satisfaction, a little appreciation of others is also nice. But that you are working in a harmonious team and that together you accomplish something and much less that um who will be, as quickly as possible, the boss of as many people as possible. Then I could have made different choices.

Yes, but you’re also saying that you should never say it out loud, so that you think that is important. You have that in mind but you’re not gonna say I think that is important, well maybe you will.

Yes, it is stupid in an organization like this to say out loud that you want to do something in moderation and um that it is not your highest goal. Well that is my impression (Interviewee 6, man).

When we disclosed our interpretation of the interview findings that care is not a conversation topic within the faculty, the focus group participants started to consider and discuss this norm. The next excerpt shows that one of the focus group participants immediately agreed with this interpretation whereas others asked for clarification before realizing that this is a norm that actually exists within the faculty.

**Researchers:** At [faculty], family is not a conversation topic amongst colleagues.

**Participant (woman) B:** I can agree on that.

**Researcher A:** [Name participant] can agree on that.

**Participant (woman) C:** You receive this feedback from people. So I wonder whether it is just a remark or is it a slight complaint they’re making, or? That’s why I wonder, is it an issue?

**Researcher A:** No, it is not a complaint. This is what we found very poignant.

**Researcher B:** It struck us as interesting. That several people mentioned it. Well, they mentioned it, they observed it, so.

**Researcher A:** They said things like “no, no we don’t discuss that”. And for us that was new.

**Participant (man) A:** Is it family or personal interest?
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Researcher B: Family.

Researcher A: We have been discussing that. But we found that personal interests with regard to hobbies were discussed. So we thought we should call it family. Because it’s about family relations; most often partners, children, or parents.

Participant (woman) C: Why did you find it striking? Sorry, we’re now asking questions to you. Why did you find it striking?

Researcher A: Um because I’m also working at a university in [city]…

Participant (woman) C: And you discuss it?

Researcher A: and we discuss family um I think every lunch break.

Researcher B: At the coffee machine. Very often.

Participant (woman) C: So it is like a different culture or something?

Researcher A: That’s right. So that’s where the point of amazement began. So that’s why of course also why we put it in a statement. So this is typically.

Participant (woman) B: I can agree on that because I also worked at an academic medical centre for a long time […] for one day a week in [city], at the [organization] and I observed that there family is more often discussed than it is here.

Participant C first becomes aware of the existing norm when the researchers reveal their findings. She questions whether this is an issue at all and why the researchers experience the findings as striking. Apparently, the norm is so deeply embedded in the organization that to her not talking about family is not out of the ordinary.

These examples illustrate that in the dialogue with the researchers, academics become aware that even though nearly all academic staff combines career and care, it is not a topic of conversation in the workplace: they recognized and named the organizational norm.

2. Negotiating Norms

In the interviews some academics mentioned the existence of the organizational norm on combining career and care, subscribing to the implicit assumption that one does not talk about care. In their conversations with the interviewers and in the focus group, the participants explored the room for when is it allowed to talk about care and with whom.
There are instances when family issues can be discussed with colleagues, as in the example of two non-Dutch women researchers who share an office and both recently had a baby. As disclosed by one of the women:

*And in your particular case, being a PhD student who is also a parent. Do you experience support there from your colleagues?*

Yes, we’re lucky, I’m sharing an office with a woman who is now postdoc and has a baby who is … She’s not a baby any more, she’s a [toddler]. She is one and a half years old. So she just went through everything and now she knows what, yes she can give me advice what to do. And she’s also a foreigner so she, probably it’s also helping because um for Dutch people many things are obvious and you, if you experience that for the first time, then it’s a bit different (Interviewee 5, woman).

The woman academic expressed that she discusses family life with a colleague that has been in the same situation. Implicit is that the separate space for discussing the issue is the shared office. The same is the case for a man academic who experienced support from one man colleague in the same research group who was also in the same life phase:

*And do you experience support from your colleagues? In your career?*

From one direct colleague certainly. I am under the impression that we give each other that support, so to say. We are also about in the same phase, so that is possible. From others a bit less but I do not actively seek out for them, so um.

*And the direct one, does this person work in your group too?*

Yes.

*Yes, he is a man as well?*

Yes, he is a man as well (Interviewee 6, man).

These examples reaffirm the nominated norm that one does not talk about family issues, but also show that there is space for deviating from the dominant norms on combining career and care in the proximity of the same lab group or in the seclusion of a shared office for individual, yet shared deviations from the norm. The data also illustrates negotiations of the norm in relation to supervisors as the next quote reveals:

*But do you also experience social-emotional support from them [two promot- ers]?*
Yes. Because my professor, [...] promoter, he knows that I’m alone here and also he knows that I don’t have much friends here. So if I have any family problems as such, like once my father had a heart attack. So that time I went and I told him I could not work, because I was totally disturbed. Because I’m more attached to my family [...] I could not work anymore. So he gave me holiday as such. [...] So he’s more supportive in my personal life (Interviewee 3, woman).

Noteworthy is the situation in which this academic asks for support in combining career and care. Her circumstances were quite extraordinary (living and working abroad, having a father living in another continent who had a heart attack) and in this extreme situation, family could be a topic of conversation. Again, in the separate space of an interaction between supervisor and subordinate and under extreme conditions, the issue of family life could be a conversation topic.

Interestingly, the focus group members too, once they had nominated the norm, started negotiating:

Participant (woman) A: So then let me ask you whether you discuss your family with all of your colleagues or with some of them?

Researcher A: If I would think about it, everyone with whom I would have lunch will discuss his or her family. But I’m not lunching with all of them of course.

Researcher B: No, but I would, I would. With the boss, with the dean. Yes.

Researcher A: How is that to you?

Participant (woman) A: Because in my opinion it’s normal that you cannot, you won’t go around the whole faculty discussing your family with persons who might be your colleagues but you don’t really know. But on the other hand there are some colleagues which, with whom you will discuss it.

Researcher A: And what’s the difference between these colleagues with whom you discuss it and the others?

Participant (woman) A: Um some you better know simply.

Participant (man) A: Yes, some you consider as friends and most of them are just colleagues. There is a difference.

Researcher A: So some colleagues you consider as friends and if you.

Participant (man) A: Yes, personally. [...] So um, but that I come back to more personal things, yeah. But that not with everybody. No, certainly not. And I don’t feel the need for it either. But on the other hand, in our laboratory we have a procedure of drinking coffee two times a day as a group. So everybody sits together [...] discusses a lot of things. But coming to think of it, family is not the hottest issue, no.
Researcher A: But it is an issue?

Participant (man) A: Sometimes yeah. Yes, but we have people, young fathers that discuss their children. If you call that discussing your family, yes. It’s one-sided in a way because usually it goes about how they were kept awake all night.

(everyone laughs)

Researcher A: What is the hottest issue?


Researcher A: Music?

Participant (man) A: Yes. Because there are a lot of people below 30, 35. Maybe I consider it the hottest issue because their choice of music is quite different than mine.

(everyone laughs)

The focus group members discussed the occasions when they talk about care with their colleagues and agreed that with colleagues who are considered as friends family can be a conversation topic. However, with colleagues who you do not know well, care responsibilities are not a topic of conversation and some “don’t feel the need for it either”. Interestingly, examples are given of young fathers who explicitly resisted this norm by talking in the larger group about their babies. Immediately after putting forward these deviations from the norm, these men are ridiculed. This may be because they mention babies only as examples of sleep deprivation – reinforcing the primacy of their work. However, it is also likely that this mockery, paradoxically, is a way for all involved to compensate for norm deviation and in doing so restoring or reproducing the norms about combining career and care.

The results show that the academics engage in negotiating the norm and find some room to deviate from the existing norm, but only in instances of major life changes (e.g., birth of a child, sickness of a parent), among close colleagues who are in a similar life phase (e.g., having young children), or with colleagues who are considered as friends. They do not see the need, or the opportunity, to change the existing organizational norms and adhere to the norm when they do not find themselves among colleagues they share a room or friendship with.

3. Navigating Norms

The interviews revealed that some academics found a way to cope with the existing organizational norms by navigating around them. By
navigating the norm, they can possibly alter the masculine environment in which it is the norm not to talk about care obligations.

One man assistant professor had been working four days a week by using his parental leave to take care of his two young children one day a week. He tried not to “join the rat race” that comes with working in academia and tried to maintain his personal norms. At the time of the interview he was not entitled any longer to use parental leave but he used his vacation days to be able to take care of his kids one day a week. He wished for reduced hours and thus requested that by his supervisor. The next quote illustrates how he reflects upon the effect of care on his career, and at the same time challenges the existing norm in the faculty by considering care more important than his career:

*Um what effect does your private life have on your career? Or did it have?*

*Um I hope an important effect in a way that it refrains me from giving work even more priority. Um it already is too much, but I refuse to, let’s say, join the rat race to finish everything as good as possible and as quickly as possible. Even in the sense that my supervisors tell me ‘actually you are fully qualified to make the next step’, but I’m like I will continue proportionately but I have other priorities than um than those.*

*And um how do they look at that here?*

*With astonishment but with respect (Interviewee 6, man).*

Even though he feels that his colleagues are astonished by the fact that he does not give total priority to work, this man academic refuses to entirely give in to the organizational norm and tells his supervisor and colleagues that he has other priorities besides his work. He used his right to paid parental leave to reserve time for care and now “buys time” by taking up vacation days.

In the situation of a temporary appointment buying time for care is more complicated. A woman PhD student had a baby during the first year of her PhD and requested extension to be compensated for the loss of time owing to her maternity leave.

*My [personnel] advisor. I did ask if in case I required it, would I get an extension to um change the four months maternity leave, to um, exchange for that [long term illness of supervisor]? And basically she said ‘It’s possible, but still whether or not the budget is there’. So it’s not really ... a right?*

*Yes. You don’t really get, it’s not, it’s not definitive that you will always get it, I think.*

*[…] So you got an extension of how long?*
I got five months.

*Five months’ extension?*

Yes.

*But because your supervisor had been ill?*

Yes. Yes.

*Okay. But still the same extension.*

Yes. Yes for me doesn’t really make any difference. I mean um, maybe I’m the type of person who, who negotiates with my supervisor (Interviewee 4, woman).

This women academic altered her request when it turned out there was a chance of not getting an extension owing to a lack of budget, and ultimately got an extension owing to the illness of her supervisor. Note that in the Netherlands, contract extension on account of statutory maternity leave (16 weeks) is a legal right. Yet, executing this legal right is difficult when it concerns project-based, externally funded research. In this highly masculine environment, where maternity leave is not common, she managed to get an extension by amending the reason of her request. She found a way to deal with the organizational norms on combining career and care while still pursuing her goal.

The results show that, even though it is not really facilitated by the organization, academics sometimes creatively and subtly find their way around the norms on combining career and care: they manage to combine both worlds.

4. Creating New Norms

By not adhering to the prevailing organizational norm, some participants made a first step in changing the nominated norm. While acknowledging that working part time to care for children is much less common among (young) researchers than among administrative and technical support staff, one of our interviewees told us she does not think she is perceived differently for doing so. However, the jokes of her supervisor simultaneously show that her working pattern is present in the conversation as something that is deviating from the norm.

I just simply work less. So the output of each week is less than it could be.

*But are you also viewed differently? Or in, more in general, is a person who works fewer hours viewed differently?*
No, I don’t think so.

No.

Yes, sometimes my supervisor said: ‘Oh you’re not working on Fridays, I would rather meet with you or do some stuff on Fridays, but you’re not here’. But he’s not, he’s just joking mostly. It’s not that he [is] um blaming me for something (Interviewee 5, woman).

In some cases, supervisors are more open about their own family situation and seem to accept and support the care responsibilities of their colleagues. When the next woman academic compares her case to others, she qualifies this situation as exceptional.

Um, um, well for my case I think people have been quite understanding. People around me. My supervisor has been quite understanding […] Um so, for this, for my case I think it’s okay. But I do know a couple of my friends who are not always that easily um combining their private lives […].

Yes. Yes. So you were lucky?

Yes, in that sense I was lucky. I mean, I have a supervisor who understands family life. And [for] some of my other friends are [sic] not always the case.

Yes. Um, how, you say ’my supervisor understands family life,’ how does it come?

Um, well he knows that I have a [child] and then he, he himself have [sic] children. And then I, I think in that sense he knows the obligations that I have to fulfill for my [child] and he doesn’t push things beyond that, I think. Even if for example he wants me to go to a conference, he knows that I have to check my schedule with my husband’s schedule. So both of us don’t go to conferences at the same time (Interviewee 4, woman).

The next excerpt illustrates that by openly deviating from the existing norm, someone can become a trailblazer within the work environment.

Um and colleagues? To what extent do colleagues offer support in combining career and private life?

Um well sometimes by setting an example for instance when someone achieved something particular, for example that he works one day from home and then a precedent has been established that it um is thus possible.

Okay and were you actually the precedent or were there others before?

Um not in this case [working from home], no. With parental leave maybe, but yes that can be legally enforced so that actually doesn’t count.

Yes, but to enforce it and to do it are two different things.
Yes, well as a matter of fact I’ve made two people um aware of that possibility, especially people that um for example come from the United States. They are brought up in the rat race so they um explicitly ask if you won’t be judged by that later on.

_Oh they ask that?_

Yes, like um how do people look at that and um is that even possible? (Interviewee 6, man).

This man academic explains he made other colleagues aware of the possibility to take parental leave to be able to care for children, as he did himself. Acting as a role model, he can create a snowball effect within the organization by recommending other academics with children to take up parental leave. In the long term, making it acceptable to talk about care may result in a change of the norm.

However, to really create new organizational norms it will take more than a few navigators, trailblazers, and role models to form a critical mass. As Poelmans (2012) stated: “We need the quiet leadership of courageous individuals who swim upstream and challenge the norms around parenting and career success” (p. 844).

DISCUSSION

In this chapter we have explored the way men and women at an engineering faculty relate to organizational norms on combining career and care. During the data collection we discovered that care is not considered a topic of conversation within the faculty, revealing a strong prescriptive norm of acceptable behavior. The interviews and focus group revealed that academics not only nominate or recognize this organizational norm on combining career and care, but also openly negotiate and sometimes even actively and publicly challenge it.

Poelmans’ (2012) typology suggests different ways of dealing with organizational norms on combining career and care. He distinguishes between nominating norms at the intra-individual level, navigating norms at the inter-individual or individual-group level, and creating new norms at the inter-group level. In addition, Poelmans (2012) describes how these different ways and levels are phased, suggesting a development over time resulting in the creation of new norms. Based on our analysis, we propose to add the layer of “negotiating norms” to Poelmans’ typology. Between norm nomination and norm navigation, we identified an intermediary form of actively negotiating norms, especially in the focus group. People engaging in this way of dealing with norms are openly
debating the nature and existence of the norm, as well as trying to get a sense whether or not there is room to deviate from the existing norm. Furthermore, we propose that nominating, negotiating, and navigating are types or dimensions of dealing with norms rather than phases in time. Our interviews and focus group revealed that individuals can nominate, negotiate, and navigate at the same time, intra- as well as inter-individually. Academics do not go through different phases of confronting and dealing with organizational norms but rather vary between different ways of relating to the norm, depending on the situation.

Nominating norms (Poelmans, 2012) means recognizing and naming norms on combining career and care. Typically, “insiders are so thoroughly immersed in the culture that the normative system is invisible to them” (Anderson et al., 2010, p. 373). Indeed, Liebig (2010) in her study of fathers in academia finds that “male colleagues quite often do not know from each other if they have children. This situation reflects the power of a collective norm” (p. 167). Our interviewees and focus group participants become aware of what was previously invisible to them, and in doing so the implicit norm of not talking about care becomes explicit.

Norm negotiation, by debating the nature and existence of the norm as well as trying to figure out whether or not one can deviate from the norm, appears to be possible. Talking about care appears to be possible under extreme circumstances or in secluded spaces, among colleagues who are friends or who are in a similar life stage. According to Feldman (1984), groups “establish norms that discourage topics of conversation” (p. 49) in order to prevent damage to the self-image of a group member. Indeed, disclosing personal information may not be without risks (Philips, Rothbard and Dumas, 2009), especially for low status group members. The negotiated conditions under which it is possible to talk about care provide some room within the existing masculine culture to deviate from the norm, without openly challenging or changing it. The mockery of young fathers, when talking about sleepless nights over coffee, in the focus group becomes a normalization account – the norm is in fact not challenged but reinforced. The norm is used as a mechanism of informal social control (Braxton, 1990), and by making fun, the self-image of fathers is preserved.

Navigating norms, by actively and openly coping with the norm, is quite remarkable under such circumstances. Some academics proactively confront the norm, by taking up parental leave or by requesting compensation for maternity leave. Some academics go even further, in working reduced hours, in taking care responsibilities into account when scheduling conferences, and by promoting parental leave to new colleagues. Talking openly about these care-related decisions with supervisors or
colleagues means that these academics are publicly demonstrating they dare to care. These academics act as trailblazers in contributing to the development of new norms and in creating more room for care in academia.

Even if creating new norms is hard to achieve and not (yet) common, in line with Braxton’s (1990) finding that “norms of science are not absolutes but are relative” (p. 474), these early signs of change are promising. In this sense, the negotiation and navigation of existing norms may precede the creation of new norms. With the addition of active negotiation of organizational norms to the Poelmans (2012) typology, we identify a research space for studying incremental change in scientific organization cultures.

Practical Implications

Our study suggests that care issues are important for both men and women academics working at an engineering faculty. Our data also illustrate that care as a public conversation topic is a taboo, except for occasional complaining about sleepless nights – a confirmation of the prevalence of work over care. Maintaining and reproducing this norm in a changing demographic context causes inertia for academics with care responsibilities.

The engineering faculty we studied offers various statutory arrangements for paid maternity and parental leave. However, the possible use of these arrangements is hindered because their existence and utilization are not openly discussed. As long as those academics taking up maternity or parental leave remain largely invisible, others will not consider it a viable option, especially those coming from abroad. Similarly, the apparent lack of compensation for taking up maternity leave during a temporary appointment such as a PhD project or postdoc thus remains largely unchallenged. Under such conditions, taking up maternity or parental leave has negative consequences for performance evaluations, as academics who do so are held against the same standard as those who did not take leave.

Our analysis suggests that universities in general, and this faculty of engineering in particular, can facilitate the combination of career and care if they would actively and openly compensate for “time to care” (e.g., maternity and parental leave) in promotion criteria and research time allocation. Furthermore, these compensation policies should be communicated as a regular labor condition. In such manner, the burden of responsibility of requesting compensation is moved away from the individual (Brescoll, Glass and Sedlovskaya, 2013). This is one way to
explicitly make care a topic of conversation. We indeed recommended introducing compensation of maternity and parental leave in output norms, which was adopted by the university board.

Another way to facilitate the combination of career and care is to introduce role models, preferably in senior positions, who “dare to care”. One way to support this is to abolish the prohibition of part-time or compressed work weeks for managerial positions. The university board, based on our recommendations indeed decided to allow compressed workweeks (e.g., 4 x 9 hours) and large part-time positions (32 hours) for managerial positions. Finally, we advised the board that the universities HRM policies should assume that each employee is part of a dual career couple. As a consequence the university needs to offer childcare on campus, dual hiring streams for international employees and leave facilities. These measures help to expand the notion of the ideal academic to incorporate the combination of career and care (Van Engen et al., 2012).

In the light of demographic changes, it becomes increasingly important to promote sustainability in combining career and care in academia (Van Engen et al., 2012). With most, if not all, academics having to combine career and care responsibilities, universities need to facilitate this combination. When universities become more open and inclusive towards academics who dare to care, they will be better able to utilize all academic talent, both women and men. As argued by Liebig (2010):

Actively parenting men and changing gender relations challenge the structural premises and rationalities of academic life. [...] Higher education should get prepared for men and women, who start from a new societal understanding of parenthood, far away from stereotypes such as the ‘male breadwinner’, or ‘male achiever’ and want to make use of paternity leave, part-time work or other family friendly policies (p. 169).

**Strengths and Limitations**

Anderson, Ronning, De Vries and Martinson (2010) suggested the use of focus groups: “discussions with scientists using the format of focus groups to elicit both individual and group assertions and reactions concerning scientific norms [...] used specifically and deliberately to investigate the normative structure of science” (p. 373). Taking this approach has provided us with the opportunity to uncover the existing norm of not talking about care in the faculty of engineering, as well as witness an active negotiation of that norm. A limitation of our study, however, is that we examine this organizational norm on the basis of a single case. Case study research is a suitable research strategy to
understand organizational norms in their context, but the validity of the results would be improved by systematically comparing our case with other cases at a technical university (George and Bennett, 2004). Are comparable processes of nominating, negotiating, navigating, and creating norms to be found in technical universities in different countries? For future research we suggest comparative case study research in technical universities, especially in settings with more women academics. In addition, a carefully designed intervention study in order to uncover, challenge, and change organizational norms on combining career and care in academia would provide an opportunity for both external generalization and a quantitative test of predictions derived from this explorative study.

As a final point, we want to emphasize that we describe our case explicitly as action research. Indeed, being involved in the research process as researchers with a feminist perspective, helped to put the existing organizational culture on the research agenda. The active debate in the focus group on organizational norms on career and care in comparison to those at other universities helped us realize how much organizational cultures differ and to become more aware of our own assumptions. The fact that the three researchers performing the interviews and focus groups were senior researchers in the ranks of associate and assistant professor helped us to be conversation partners on an equal academic level to the academics working at the engineering faculty. As previous research suggests that decision makers, especially in their role as supervisors, play an important role in facilitating the combination of career and care (King, 2008), we involved them in various stages of this action research project. Proponents of the dominant “inclusive excellence” approach in promoting diversity in academia, according to Danowitz and Bendl (2010) recognize “the importance of deep organizational cultural change, although it gives only minimal attention to the power of faculty norms and cultures and the difficulty of changing them” (p. 358). We hope to have overcome some of the difficulties inherent to this approach by involving decision makers, by exposing them to the existing organizational norm, by exploring how academics differentially relate to this norm, and by challenging their own norms about combining career and care. Their continued involvement in implementing the suggested recommendations is of crucial importance in making this technical university a more inclusive employer for those who dare to care.
REFERENCES


Women in STEM careers


