

Career and family: Choose your path

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When it comes to making decisions, women and younger executives value the balance between personal/family life and professional life.

How does an executive see him or herself when they get home? As a parent? A spouse? And how do these perceptions affect the decisions executives take and their career path? A new study of Spanish executives focuses on their priorities, as well as on the decisions that affect professional career path and the support they receive in taking care of dependents.

According to researchers at IESE's International Center of Work and Family, studying these factors is the basis for understanding the man's role within the family.

The study, "[Career Path, Conciliation and the Role of Executives](#)" ("Trayectoria, conciliación y rol de los directivos"), shows no widespread perception that the man's role within the family is in a state of crisis. However, when analyzed by age or gender, opinions vary significantly, with older executives most often perceiving a "crisis." Among executives in general, younger men especially say they would devote more time to their children if they could. Women, on the other hand, wish they had more time for activities outside the family realm, such as for training or leisure.

Of those surveyed, 67 percent were men and 33 percent women, representing all business sectors. Half were department directors and a third general managers. They were asked for information regarding professional decisions, situations that could potentially create conflict, the man's role within the family, and so on. In order to evaluate the responses received, the authors used a direct method, taking the average answers of those polled.

The survey reveals different profiles. Among the executives, the men, on average, are older

and have more experience and a higher hierarchical status than the women. The average number of children is also higher among the men. The husbands/partners of female executives are, for the most part, executives themselves whose level in the hierarchy is, on average, greater than their partners'.

The authors break their results down into five sections.

1. Criteria in decisions regarding career path. Preferences are more concentrated among women than they are among men. For women, the dominant criteria are personal/family balance followed by the challenge of their job, whereas for the majority of men, those two criteria, along with professional promotion, are the most important.

2. Potential conflict situations. The most frequent conflict is maternity/paternity leave, while shortening the workday to take care of children is the least frequent. Conflict situations are more frequently experienced by women, except for those related to parental care, although these cases are so infrequent that the data available are insufficient for drawing any conclusions. Generally speaking, among the men who have had to take care of a dependent family member, most feel that this situation has made a positive impact on their career path. In the case of women, however, the predominant opinion is that this situation hurt their career. However, the study did indicate that women seem to have greater success in reaching general management, especially in smaller companies.

3. Support in taking care of dependents. Men say their main support is their partner, whereas for women it is housekeepers.

4. The man's role within the family. The differences between men's and women's answers are greater in this area. Men are, on average, less critical. Age and gender influence the responses in different ways: "Does the man's role within the family need to be redefined?" Women were more likely to say yes as they got older (going from 63 percent to 83 percent as their age increased), whereas among the men, this progression was far lower.

5. How executives would spend their free time. Men exceed women in their expectations for the use of free time, if they had any, with respect to family endeavors -that is, spending more time with their children and their spouse. Women have greater ambitions than men in terms of their use of free time on non-family related activities.

Many parents with school-age children often feel they are neglecting their role as parents because their profession limits the amount of time they can spend with their kids. Therefore,

the authors suggest that responsible family policies at companies are necessary for supporting not only working mothers, but also fathers, who appear to want it, by helping them achieve a better balance.

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