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TRANSFORMING WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT INTO COMMITMENT IN NETWORK MARKETING ORGANIZATIONS

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A qualitative study of three network marketing organizations that sell products and services using distributed workforces suggests how these organizations harvest members' work-family conflict and transform work-related ambivalence into commitment. We offer a model depicting how specific organizational practices, which we label "making workers into family" and "bringing family into work" practices lead to and maintain two types of relationship-based commitments: those based on relationships with members and those based on relationships with nonmembers. Implications for theory and practice are offered.

Make other people's excuses reasons to build the business instead of reasons not to build the business. So many people will say, "Well, we've got kids. We can't build the business." Make their kids the reason.

From a taped message to a group of Amway distributors on how to build their distributorships

Several trends work against the creation of strong member commitment in modern organizations. To begin with, there has been a change in the psychological contract whereby the exchange of loyalty for job security no longer seems to hold (Kanter, 1989). Additionally, it is increasingly common to find workers spending their time outside of the physical boundaries of their organization while they work—whether at home or "on the road," with customers and other constituents. Such practices provide few opportunities for member socialization, and they may create a substantial drop in the number of cues that remind workers of their organizational roles. Further complicating matters are competing demands on members' attention, many of them from family, spiritual, and other "nonwork" concerns that workers are increasingly unwilling to forego. It is not surprising that researchers have noted the existence of a "commitment crisis" (De Meuse & Tornow, 1990; Weick, 1990), raising the question, "How can organ-

izations continue to create and retain member attachment in the face of these challenges?

This article examines how one type of organization, the network marketing organization, is able to engender strong commitment in their members against the grain of these general trends. On the face of it, commitment to these types of organizations seems unlikely. First, network marketing organizations sell products and services away from a central business location and are often geographically dispersed. It is not clear if or how commitment can be built among a distributed workforce, given the challenges inherent in their socialization. Extant commitment research may not prove to be a useful guide, since it has been developed in contexts where members are "colocated" (Meyer & Allen, 1997), not dispersed. Second, exit barriers in network marketing organizations are relatively low. Network marketing organization members are technically independent contractors. They are free to resign their voluntary membership in a network marketing organization at any time, and since they are not required to maintain an inventory, their losses upon exiting the organization can be minimal. Hence, a model in which organizational commitment is based on financial sunk costs such as investment in pension plans (Becker, 1960) does not hold strongly in network marketing organizations. In a similar vein, calculative models of commitment (e.g., Rusbult & Farrell, 1983) also seem inadequate, as the total earnings for many members are often quite low.¹ Finally, the members of these

We thank David Brandon, Lorna Doucet, Jeffrey Kaufmann, Kevin Rock, William Qualls, Julie Ruth, and Mary Waller for their comments on drafts. We also thank Tom Lee and three *AMJ* reviewers for their productive insights, critiques, and suggestions. Both authors contributed equally to this research and article.

¹ Coughlan and Grayson (1998) found that less than half of the distributors they questioned listed money

organizations often face even greater competing demands for their time and energy than people in most other organizations. The majority of network marketing organization members have other jobs, either within the home or in other corporate settings (Biggart, 1989), adding the balancing of two sets of work roles to the challenges listed above. Such combined work arrangements are not unlike those forged by an increasing number of contingent, temporary, and other nontraditional workers in the “new economy” (Pratt, 2000a). The nature of commitment among these various other nontraditional workers is also not known and has just recently begun to be explored (e.g., Davis-Blake, Broschak, & George, 2003).

As we examined the creation of commitment in network marketing organizations, we were struck by the importance the organizations placed on members’ nonwork lives. Instead of denying or minimizing these lives, the network marketing organizations openly and repeatedly acknowledged the competing demands of work and family. Moreover, we discovered that managing conflicts between work and nonwork domains was at the heart of these organizations’ systems for creating and maintaining commitment. Thus, as we examined these organizations, we refined our research question from a general inquiry into how network marketing organizations engender organizational commitment to a more specific one: How do network marketing organizations use work-nonwork issues in generating and maintaining member commitment? We focused primarily on family as the dominant nonwork domain, but we also included network marketing organization members’ nonwork friendships. Because the intent of our study was to build theory, we begin here with a detailed discussion of our contexts and methods. We then discuss our findings and their relevance to existing theory.

among the factors that kept them active in network marketing organizations. They also found that over 70 percent of distributors earned only \$12.00 per hour in gross income, from which they had to subtract the cost of transportation, training and promotional materials, and other expenses associated with direct sales. In effect, network marketing organizations’ distributor net earnings before taxes are often less than \$7.00 per hour. Pratt (2000a) made a similar assertion in his analysis of Amway distributors. Citing Amway’s own corporate literature (the 1992 *Amway Business Review*), he stated that the average monthly gross income for active distributors is only \$65 per month. More generally, research has also suggested that the nonmonetary aspects of distributing account for a significant proportion of distributor motivation (see Biggart [1989] for a review).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To facilitate theory building, we gathered data from multiple sources within three distinct organizational contexts. Our data collection and analysis began with the Amway Corporation and was continued with Mary Kay Inc. and The Longaberger Company. We gathered similar types of data in all three settings: archival materials, observations, and interviews. Data analysis, like data collection, occurred in two phases and is depicted in Figure 1. We begin by describing the general context of our study, the particular organizations we studied, and the data sources for our study and then discuss each research phase.

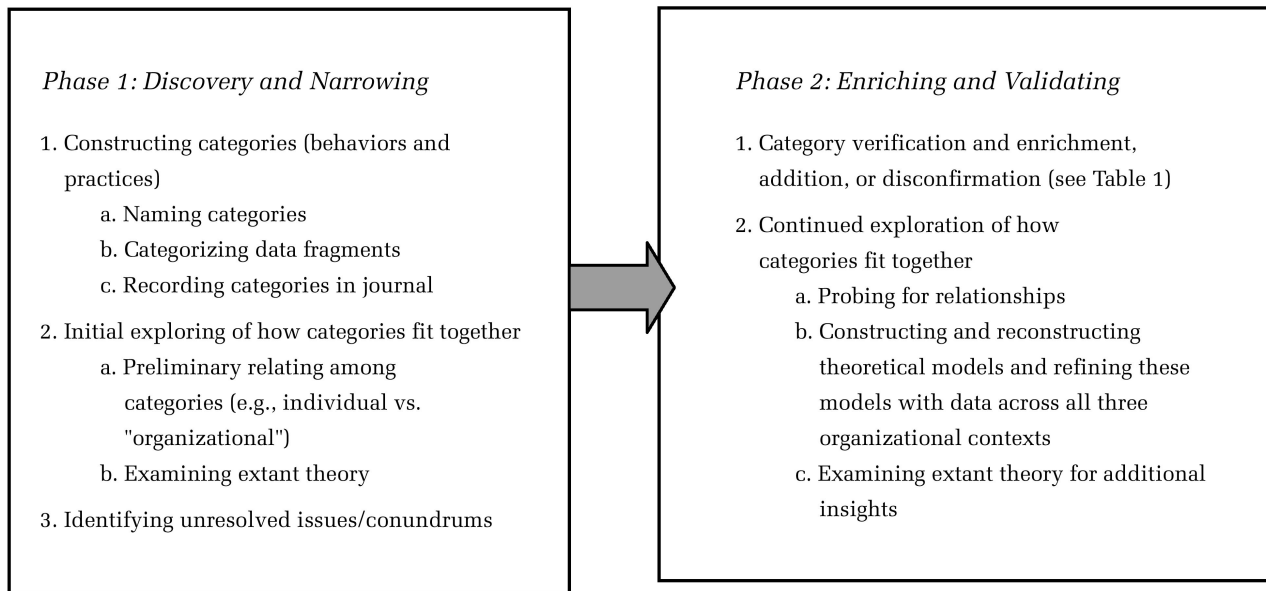
General Context: Choosing Network Marketing Organizations

Network marketing organizations serve as an “extreme case” for purposes of theory building because they are recognized for engendering strong attachments and emotions (see Biggart, 1989; Butterfield, 1985). Moreover, although actual turnover information for these organizations is not available, estimates place it somewhere between 40 and 100 percent annually (Biggart, 1989). Thus, these organizations are excellent contexts for examining how organizations gain and lose commitment. The use of extreme cases facilitates theory building because the phenomena under study are “closer to the surface” and easier to observe (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990).

In network marketing (also known as network direct selling or multilevel marketing), salespeople operate as independent contractors in direct contact with final consumers to whom they offer products (such as vitamins or cosmetics) or services (such as insurance). In addition to selling, distributors (known as “consultants” in Mary Kay) are encouraged to recruit and manage new salespeople (Grayson, 1996). Income accrues to distributors both from their own sales and from those of their direct and indirect recruits. (See Coughlan and Grayson [1998] for a detailed explanation of network marketing organization salesforce compensation.) As we discuss below, the stated goal of many network marketing organization members is to build a sales network large enough to allow them to live off the commissions they receive from their recruits’ sales.

Groups of salespeople linked by common sponsorship are often referred to as units, families, or branches. Because distributors are encouraged to recruit from within their social and family net-

FIGURE 1
Data Analysis



works regardless of where the recruits live, there are virtually no geographic limitations on unit membership (e.g., Carmichael, 1993). Network marketing organizations do not have formal sales management structures apart from their independent salesforces. Rather, network sponsors manage their own direct recruits and often get involved in overseeing the salespeople who are brought in by their own recruits as well. In practice, a typical network marketing organization salesforce is composed of individuals taking the role of salesperson-recruiter-manager who build and oversee geographically dispersed sales units of different sizes. These individuals perform many of the same duties as traditional salespeople, particularly those who service final consumers and small businesses. In addition to selling products and recruiting new members, they service active customer accounts, collect payments, and in many instances serve as the first line of contact when products fail.

Since the 1950s, network marketing organizations have multiplied and grown to engage millions of people around the globe. The three companies in this study have been in existence between 30 and 44 years, had aggregated annual sales of over \$10 billion worldwide throughout the 1990s, and boast of having close to 4 million distributors worldwide. An accurate global count of all network marketing organization distributors is hard to achieve given their sheer number and mobility, but estimates for the United States alone range as high as 12.2 mil-

lion people, according to the Direct Selling Association (2001).

Site Selection: Choosing Amway, Mary Kay and Longaberger

Once we decided to investigate network marketing organizations, we chose a representative sample of these companies to help bolster the reliability and generalizability of our findings. As noted above, we chose to investigate Amway, Mary Kay, and Longaberger. These are well-known network marketing organizations that all engender observably high levels of distributor effort (Biggart, 1989) but vary in age, size, and the product lines they offer. Amway, founded in 1959, is the oldest, and it is the largest of the three, with over three million distributors. It sells the widest variety of products and services for personal, home, and commercial use, and it has the broadest international reach, operating in over 70 countries and territories. Mary Kay was founded in 1963 and boasts over 850,000 distributors, or consultants, as the organization terms its members. It is not as large as Amway globally (it operates in 33 countries) but rivals the success of the latter in the United States by selling primarily in the narrow and competitive market for women's cosmetics. Longaberger (founded in 1973) is the youngest and smallest of the three organizations we studied, with over 42,000 distributors. It focuses almost exclusively on selling handcrafted

decorative wood baskets and related home and office décor products within the United States.

Data Sources

Archival materials. One source of published data for our study was distributor-aimed promotional and educational materials in different media. We content-analyzed four types of published materials across the three network marketing organizations: books and booklets/monographs ($n = 13$), Internet sites ($n = 7$), audio- and videotapes ($n = 28$), and issues of monthly publications spanning several years: *Amagram* (Amway), *Applause* (Mary Kay), and *Your Success* (Longaberger).

The founders and influential distributors of a network marketing organization often author company-promoted books that summarize their company's historical development and broad operating philosophies. Such books provided us with the framework, logic, and rationales that organizational elites use when socializing members into these organizations. Tapes and monthly magazines provided us with detailed knowledge of the companies' prescribed selling, recruiting and managing practices, including recommended "fixes" for many of the problems commonly faced by distributors.² Also supporting network marketing organizations' promotional and educational efforts are Internet sites, which give distributors substantial up-to-date information on the ever-changing arrays of products and services offered and reinforce the management and recruitment techniques that the companies prescribe in greater detail through the other media.

Participant observation. We engaged in two types of participant observation. The first author engaged in semiovert participant observation in Amway (Whyte, 1984). This type of participant observation, which entails joining an organization as a functioning member, while letting fellow mem-

bers know of your dual role as member and researcher, is particularly appropriate when exploring intangible and complex phenomena such as ambivalence and commitment (e.g., Douglas, 1976). This semiovert participant observation took place over two years, with the most intense data gathering occurring during a nine-month period of dedicated immersion in the network marketing organization sales role. The second author engaged in nonobtrusive observations of Mary Kay events (such as product shows and demonstration clinics) where sales, recruitment, and training took place. In both cases, observations were logged in research journals.

Distributor interviews. Our interview sample consisted of individuals who, at the time of the initial interviews, were members of one of the three organizations in our study. None of the interviewed distributors was a member of multiple network marketing organizations concurrently, and only four reported having been members of other network marketing organizations before becoming distributors for Amway, Mary Kay, or Longaberger. These four interviewees often compared their experiences in the different organizations. All interviews averaged between one and two hours in length and were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The interviews with Amway distributors ($n = 17$) occurred earliest. In these interviews, we adopted an open-ended and unstructured style so as to better capture a distributor's perspective (Spradley, 1979). Interviewees were chosen on the basis of their level of engagement; about half were highly active in sales and recruiting, and the remainder were not. Approximately equal numbers of men and women were interviewed, and their tenure ranged from seven and a half months to 22 years. The interviews began with broad questions, such as "Would you please tell me what you do as a distributor?" As the interviews progressed, we probed specific points of information and terminology (for instance, "What do you mean by the phrase 'family tree'?") via more structured questions (Spradley, 1979).

Our interviewing philosophy with both the Mary Kay and Longaberger informants differed from that employed for Amway. Instead of seeking breadth of understanding by interviewing several people at a single point in time, we wanted to add depth by cultivating deeper relationships with a smaller number of network marketing organization members. Thus, we worked closely with two key informants each from Mary Kay and Longaberger. Given that these organizations tend to have a high percentage of working mothers as distributors, and

² Given the size and age differences between the three companies, it should not be surprising that the largest proportion of our archival information came from Amway. It is the largest and oldest of the network marketing organizations studied, and it has the most developed system of tapes and books. Ten of the books we analyzed were from Amway, whereas we examined only two Mary Kay books and one Longaberger book. Similarly, Amway's after-market motivational and instructional tape programs allowed us to analyze 24 of its tapes. Since Longaberger and Mary Kay do not have such programs, however, their materials were more limited. We were able to analyze three Mary Kay tapes and one Longaberger tape.

our interest in examining work-family dynamics among committed employees, we approached female distributors who had children. The tenure of our key informants ranged from two to six years, and they varied in their level of activity within their organizations. At the time of the interviews, three of the informants were in their forties, and one was in her twenties. All had full or part-time jobs outside of the home—in addition to their distributing—and three of the four had at least a four-year college degree.

The use of key informants typically involves developing relationships that are more intense and trusting than the typical relationship with an interviewee (Douglas, 1976), and our study was no exception. We held a minimum of two and as many as five extended conversations with each Mary Kay or Longaberger informant, in contrast to a single interview with most Amway distributors. Over the course of three years, we engaged in follow-up conversations and tracked changes in members' attitudes toward their respective network marketing organizations.

Data Analysis

We adopted a modified grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to data analysis, whereby we constantly compared data and emerging categorization schemes in order to build theory. In our description of each phase of the research, we draw heavily from Locke's (2001) description of grounded theory.

Phase 1. Only data from Amway were analyzed in this phase. As noted in Figure 1, we began by first *constructing categories* from the data. Constructing categories involves creating a common meaning that captures the essence of multiple observations (Locke, 2001: 46). For example, several references to the importance of nonwork relationships as a motivator for distributing occurred in our observations, interviews, and archival materials. We therefore created a category, "Nonwork relations motivate work." After a category was named, we studied the data again and looked for other fragments of data (like interview quotes) that fit that category. If revisited data did not fit well into a category, we either abandoned it or revised its defining parameters. As categories were created and refined, they were recorded in a research journal. Prominent categories from this phase included "positive reactions to distributing," "negative reactions to distributing," "nonwork life as motivators for work," "use of family labels in distributing," and "organizational socialization practices."

After identifying a number of categories, we tried

to discover how different categories fit together into a coherent picture. For example, some categories were grouped as "organizational practices," and others were labeled "individual emotional responses." We scanned the data again for how specific responses were linked to particular organizational practices and whether or not we could ascertain any causal ordering (for instance, the organization did "x" and people responded with "y"). In a modification of grounded theory, we also looked to existing research (commitment theory, for example) for any light it could shed on what we had discovered. We discuss some of this theory in the findings section of our article.

At the conclusion of phase 1, we decided that we had a rudimentary process theory regarding how network marketing organizations engendered commitment in their members. However, except for the first author's notes, we had little longitudinal data from organization members that could help us see how commitment unfolded. To help us better understand the relationships among the categories found in phase 1, we *identified unresolved issues* in our data and conducted additional data gathering and analysis in phase 2.

Phase 2. We went to similar sources of information in two new network marketing organizations (Mary Kay and Longaberger) during phase 2. Drawing on the prominent categories from phase 1, we focused our data collection in the following areas: emotional reactions to distributing, organizational socialization practices, the role of family (and friends) in distributing, and the use of family labels in distributing. As in phase 1, the inclusion of additional data caused us to *verify* and *enrich, add, or disconfirm* our categories. We followed up with a review of the data from all three organizations to inventory our evidence for each specific concept. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), we constructed a table to show the strength of evidence across case contexts, which we replicate here as Table 1. The table shows the evidence we had for the existence of particular organizational practices across the three network marketing organizations. The evidence labeled "strong" appeared in all three major sources of data (observational, archival, and interview). "Moderate" evidence occurred in two data sources, and "weak" and "nonexistent" data appeared in one and none of our data sources, respectively.

In our ongoing interviews with key informants, we probed for *how categories fit together*. As we discovered relationships, we attempted to construct a model showing how different concepts were related. Ultimately, we arrived at a tentative model that combined several of our concepts. At

TABLE 1
Strength of Evidence of Themes across Three Network Marketing Organizations

Network Marketing Organization	Practices						
	Harvesting Work-Family Conflicts ^a		Transforming Work Ambivalence		Reducing Work Ambivalence		
	Recruitment/Selection	Socialization	Bringing Family into Work	Making Workers into Family	Neutralization	Buffering	Dream Renewal
Amway	Strong (men and women)	Strong	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Mary Kay	Strong (women)	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak
Longaberger	Strong (women)	Strong	Weak	Strong	Moderate	Weak	None

^a Although evidence for harvesting work-family conflicts was found in all three sources of data for Longaberger, its harvesting practices (as reflected in its recruitment and socialization statements) tended to be less direct and pointed than they were in the other two organizations.

this point, we returned to the data and engaged in some data-driven reduction of those constructs that seemed unrelated to what we had by now labeled the “commitment process.” The emergent model continued to be refined as we revisited the data to examine its fit with the model. Once we were satisfied with how the model fit our data, we studied extant theory to compare—and to link when appropriate—our findings with existing concepts and relationships. The end result of phase 2 is the model depicted in Figure 2.

FINDINGS

As Figure 2 illustrates, network marketing organization members were sensitive to work-family conflicts, but they also expressed commitment to distributing. We found the coexistence of these attitudes surprising, especially given that membership in network marketing organizations would appear to exacerbate work-family conflicts: working nights and weekends as a distributor leads to time away from one’s family. As we examined specific distributor practices, it became clearer how network marketing organizations attempted to transform work-family conflicts, and the ambivalence toward work that stems from these conflicts, into commitment.

Harvesting Work-Family Conflicts

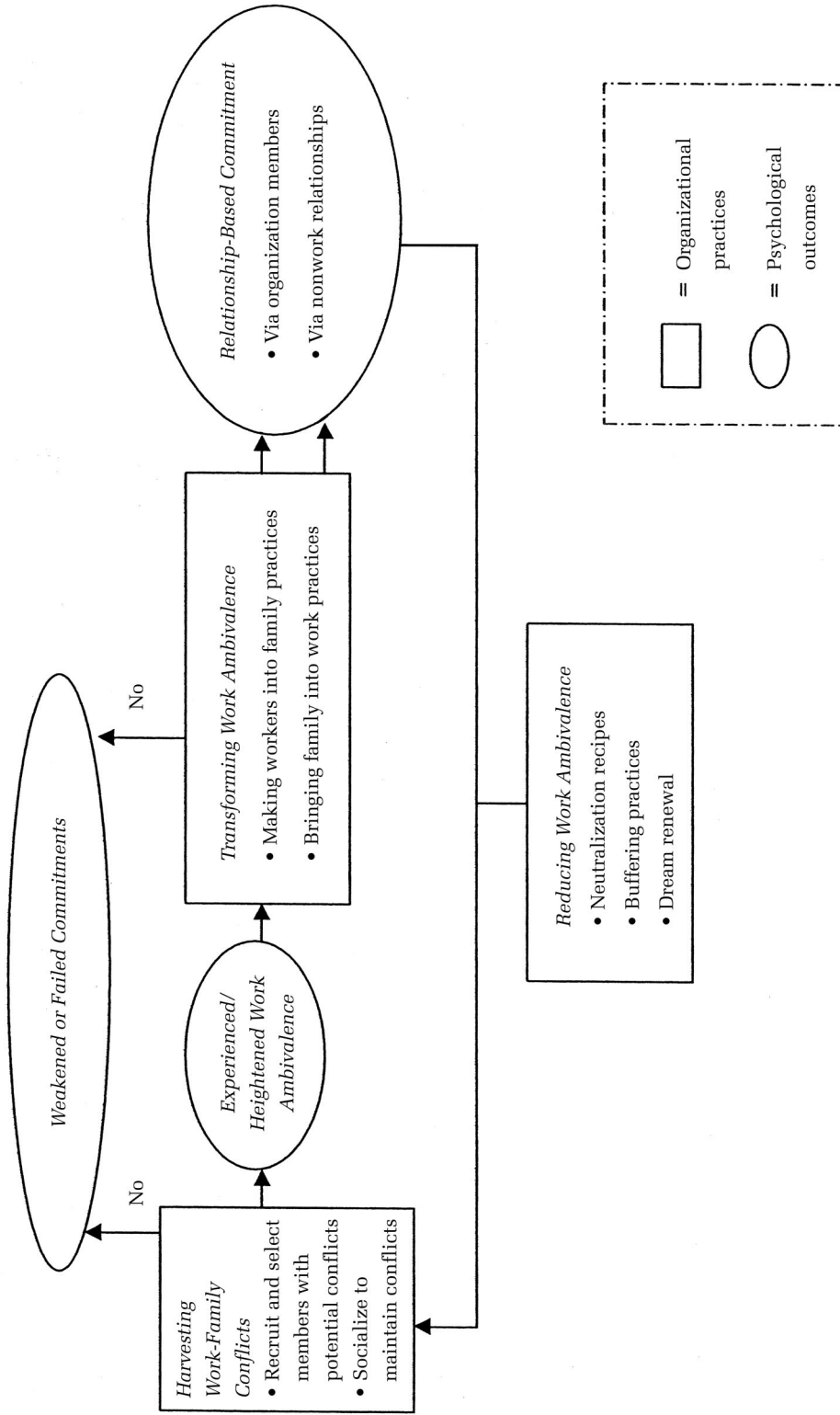
As illustrated in Table 1, work-family conflicts were made salient in each network marketing organization we examined. We refer to these practices collectively as “harvesting work-family conflicts,” because their purpose appeared to involve recognizing and sometimes exacerbating the conflicting demands posed by these distinct life domains. We use the word “harvesting” to emphasize

that network marketing organizations utilize such conflict and the resulting ambivalence, whether or not they create them.

As illustrated in Figure 2, harvesting work-family conflict begins with recruitment and selection. Although the position of most network marketing organizations is that anyone can be a good distributor, distributor groups often target specific classes of individuals as potentially better candidates. Amway distributors, for example, prefer to recruit married men and women, especially those with children, because “they will have more reasons to be motivated.” The first author was directly told that single people are typically less attractive “prospects” than married people. And as the opening quote suggests, distributors were told to make prospects’ kids the reason for them to build an Amway business. Similarly, we found evidence that both Mary Kay and Longaberger targeted women (see Table 1), particularly those who were married and had children still at home. Hence, it appeared that network marketing organizations and their distributor groups prefer to recruit individuals who are at risk for work-family conflicts.

Integral to harvesting work-family conflict was elevating the importance of family. References to family abound in the recruiting materials for all three companies. On the Mary Kay Web site (www.marykay.com), for example, under “Mary Kay Career,” the very first point made is that Mary Kay enriches a woman’s life by offering the following: “An inspiring career. Boundless earning potential. The flexibility to create your own schedule. *Time for your family and yourself.* And the support of a remarkable community of women” (emphasis ours). Similarly, both Mary Kay and Amway have recruitment stories written by existing members that discuss the importance of family and the potential conflicts between work and family

FIGURE 2
A Model of Engendering Relationship-Based Commitment in Network Marketing Organizations



demands. As one distributor quoted by Amway (www.amway.com) put it, "Although I was earning quite well in my own business by selling electronic instruments, my wish to spend more time with my family was the most important factor for starting this business." Longaberger, while often less direct about work-family conflicts than Mary Kay or Amway, does describe itself as "family friendly" and notes (www.longaberger.com) that one advantage of selling their products is that you can "work from home, allowing you to devote precious time to your family."

Recognition of the importance of family continues during distributors' socialization, the process whereby members are taught organizational values and roles (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In network marketing organizations, socialization often occurs via small meetings with other distributors, larger group functions, and public forums such as books and magazines (Pratt, 2000a). The importance of family, for example, was mentioned in many of the chapters in Mary Kay's books, as well as in over 80 percent of the distributor success stories published in the *Amagram* that we analyzed. In addition, sayings such as "God first, family second, career third," and anecdotal elaboration around such themes were common in all three organizations and repeated often in meetings and publications. Retrospectively, we noted that getting married and having children were espoused goals mentioned by several single distributors, most often within Amway. These goals were also emphasized by Amway publications such as the *Amagram*, in both first-person—"Long term, I want to have a family and get married" (from the issue for May 1993)—and third-person accounts: "Last year the Haagens moved to Michigan. Their next goal is to qualify as Diamonds and then start a family and buy a home of their own" (March 1993).

At the same time that the importance of family is elevated, work is often depicted as a "necessary evil." A common theme among distributing groups is that while individuals need to have enough income to support the family, work demands often impede their ability to spend quality time with family. Especially during recruiting efforts, working a "traditional" (non-network marketing organization) job is often positioned as harmful to good family life. Supporting this view, Richard DeVos (1993: 52), a cofounder of Amway and the author of *Compassionate Capitalism*, argues that American families are in trouble:

The traditional American family is also in decline. What we once regarded as the mainstay of our society has become the exception and not the rule. Be-

tween 1960 and 1980, the number of divorces in this country shot up by a hundred percent. If the numbers hold, an alarming fifty percent of all first marriages will end in divorce. That means that fifty percent of America's children will live at least part of their lives in a single-parent household.

Part of this decline, network marketing organizations tell their members, has occurred because both parents work away from home in an increasing number of families. As Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay Inc., noted in a speech and in the 1997 "Mary Kay You Can Have It All Calendar,"

In the 1980s, it was common to hear a woman proclaim, "I want to have it all." By this, she means she wanted a successful career while being a wonderful wife and mother. Wanting it all is an admirable goal, but some women run into trouble when they try to translate that dream into reality. It's no easy matter for both a husband and wife to work full-time and manage a family.

This published (*Amagram*, April 1993) story of a successful Amway distributor couple more pointedly uses concern over the difficulties that arise when both parents in a family work as an impetus to distribute:

"Bill and I worked at his veterinary practice from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., then Bill ran an emergency clinic that was open all night. . . . Because we were both working so much, our dates consisted of meeting at 2 a.m. to deliver a calf. If I ever wanted to see Bill, I had to go along on farm calls!" . . . Their lifestyle didn't change when they were married. Lisa continued to work after their three sons were born. "To be with Bill, we had to take supper to the emergency clinic at night. During the day, because I worked, the kids spent too much time in day care."

Traditional work, however, is not the only impediment to quality time with family that network marketing organizations have identified. In an interesting departure from what we have come to expect from for-profit companies, these organizations readily admit that spending nights and weekends building a distributor network will entail family sacrifices. While encouraging women to build successful sales careers, the *Mary Kay Consultants Guide* notes, "[I]t is not enough to love your family; you must also spend time with them and let them know that their happiness will never be sacrificed for your career" (Mary Kay Inc., 1984: 102–103). However, while family time is important, we found that speakers at Amway functions often began by making impassioned statements to distributors about "how much they must miss, being away from their children" and thanking them for "making the sacrifice." In less passionate terms, Longaberger

and Mary Kay also thank their distributors for taking time away from family to attend functions and meetings. This dual focus on maintaining quality time with family while also sacrificing time with them to distribute helps keep conflicts between work and family salient.

Experienced/Heightened Ambivalence toward Work

In the wake of efforts by network marketing organizations to make work-family conflicts salient, our interviews revealed that distributors do, in fact, think about work-family conflicts often and that such conflicts can be personally painful. We further argue that given how work and family are depicted in the organizational materials, this conflict is shaped in very specific ways. Our interviewees and key informants always described family as positive—never as something that might “get in the way of work.” Work, by contrast, was depicted both as necessary for supporting a family and as an impediment to family time. It is not surprising, therefore, that distributors often also expressed ambivalence toward work. Derived from the Latin *ambo*, meaning “both,” and *valere*, “to be strong” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), “ambivalence” refers to the existence of strong and opposing forces within a single individual. In this context, we found that network marketing organization members experienced *emotional ambivalence*³—the sensation of being pulled in opposite directions as one feels both positive and negative affect toward a target (Pratt & Doucet, 2000: 205)—directed toward work in general, and even toward their network marketing organization work.

Such ambivalence was often expressed by the distributors. As one Mary Kay consultant told us:

Mary Kay’s whole thing is “you can do this and be at home with your kids. You can work at home.” You know, if I worked for any other company, I would not be able to take the time off to go to my son’s baseball games. I would not be able to have dinner with my family. I would be working. And that’s their pitch. And there’s a little inconsistency there, because . . . yes, that’s the value, but realistically,

when are you holding these classes [beauty classes for potential customers]? In the evening!

Similarly, a mother in Amway noted that while she was very excited about being a distributor:

I miss Franklin [her son].⁴ I mean, we go to these functions—and I work full time, and then I have to give him up on a Saturday too. That hurts; and I realize that I’ll be seeing less and less of him.

Because Longaberger is less direct about pushing the work-family angle in their recruiting and socialization, we did not find as many direct statements about experienced work-family conflict and accompanying ambivalence. However, these distributors did also allude to trade-offs associated with being in Longaberger:

I constantly have to fight the negatives. . . . There are pros and cons. . . . Not everything will be a high. The lows makes you appreciate the highs you receive, even if they are few and far between.

Evidence that ambivalence was widespread also came from observing the general response at member functions when speakers mentioned work-family conflicts. Nodding heads, murmured approval, and occasional applause when these topics were discussed were not uncommon, and these observations suggested that the speakers’ observations resonated with at least part of the audience. Ambivalence was also evident in stories found on the Internet. The following excerpt from GetFacts.com’s section on multilevel marketing (www.getfacts.com) allowed us a peek at the emotional intensity and volatility that surround working for a network marketing organization. An Amway distributor defensively responded to someone who mentioned that distributors do not spend much time with their kids:

I have a baby with severe medical problems, and I have no problems having nurses or family come sit with my little boy for a few hours while I attend a meeting. I WILL NOT NEGLECT MY SON, SO DON’T IMPLY THAT PEOPLE WHO ARE IN AMWAY NEGLECT THEIR CHILDREN. You get to spend more time with your children than going out everyday to work an 8–9 hour a day job, now don’t you? And then the time you spend on laundry, housecleaning, dinner, family meetings, going to store after store to find what you need, HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU REALLY GET TO SPEND WITH YOUR KIDS? (emphasis in the original)

³ Although our focus is on emotional ambivalence, we recognize that ambivalence has emotional, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations (Freud, 1950/1920; Sincoff, 1990). We also recognize that these manifestations can become intertwined in practice (Pratt & Barnett, 1997). For example, behavioral vacillation or paralysis can result from extreme emotional ambivalence. Given the nature of our data, however, we chose to concentrate primarily on the emotional manifestations of ambivalence.

⁴ We use pseudonyms throughout this paper in order to protect the identities of our informants.

Our data provide considerable evidence of ambivalence toward work among network marketing organization members. Moreover, distributor practices—such as selecting people with families and frequently reminding them of work-family conflicts—likely exacerbate such ambivalence. For such ambivalence to generate commitment, however, other processes must be activated.

Transforming Ambivalence toward Work

If family is valued above work, and work for a network marketing organization is interfering with family time, how does such an organization resolve this conflict in a way that engenders commitment among distributors? We suggest that it transforms ambivalence into commitment via two mechanisms: (1) “making workers into family” practices, and (2) “bringing family into work” practices. Specifically, we argue that these practices help ensure that members will be committed to network marketing organization distributing as a way of working through their ambivalence and work-family conflicts.

Making workers into family. Making workers into family practices involve the formation and management of positive familylike dynamics within a network marketing organization by instituting mentor-protégé and quasi-filial relationships within the organization’s structure. Amway, Mary Kay, and Longaberger distributors at all levels are encouraged to have mentors and to mentor others. They are also encouraged to varying degrees to be supportive of other distributors.

At Amway, mentoring is institutionalized in the tenth of cofounder DeVos’s “16 credos of compassionate capitalism”:

We believe that before we can succeed as a compassionate capitalist, we must have an experienced mentor to guide us. Therefore, we need to find someone whom we admire who has already achieved what we want to achieve and ask that person to help us reach our goals. (DeVos, 1993: 183)

At Mary Kay, consultants are encouraged to seek help from other members of their unit, from what the *Mary Kay Consultants Guide* calls their “network of support”:

In joining Mary Kay Inc., you become part of a warm, supportive, and caring network committed to helping you realize your dreams. This network begins with your recruiter, Director, and the other consultants in your unit. Each of them, in the go-give spirit, stands ready to match her time with your effort. (Mary Kay Inc., 1994: 2–3)

Critically important is that the mentoring be done through repeated personal contact. Mentoring norms, however, differ in the three network marketing organizations studied here. At Mary Kay, given its emphasis on women being good wives and mothers, local mentoring is strongly encouraged and local units are asked to “adopt” consultants who belong to distant units as part of the “go-give spirit.” This recommendation can be difficult to enforce, however, given that the compensation system makes it most attractive to mentor solely within one’s commission-generating network. Longaberger does not have a prescribed mentoring standard, while Amway encourages mentoring primarily within one’s own network and asks distributors to travel as required. All three companies, however, reinforce the value of mentoring with expressions such as “you are in business for yourself, but never by yourself.” A subtler underlying message throughout the mentoring process is that distributors never cease to need assistance from those above them. As such, mentoring relationships continue even if distributors achieve financial success.

One way in which mentor-protégé and quasi-filial relationships are imbued with familylike dynamics is through the use of family labels. Distributor networks, for example, are often called “extended families” or “family trees”; and within such networks, family relationship labels (parent, child, brother/sister, grandparent) are used. The use of family labels is pervasive, but its intensity varies by salesperson and organization, as the comments below, each made by an interviewee in the respective organizations, illustrate:

They call it a family . . . the Longaberger family. They like to think of everyone as part of their family.

If I sponsor a brand new person, I have to nurture that person in the very beginning. . . . It’s a totally new experience, like being born so they don’t know what they’re doing, they don’t know what to expect. (Amway)

When we are at Seminar they do talk about . . . you know, we have to meet with our family . . . that would be my director, her director, her director, as far back as we can go. (Mary Kay)

We believe that the use of familial labels can influence the schemata and scripts that distributor-managers bring to their network marketing organization relationships, and consequently how they behave toward one another. Specifically, labels influence how members categorize their relationships to social groups (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997) and as such can influence those parts of their identities that are based on group membership (that

is, their social identities). Recruits to these organizations often, for instance, wished for and enacted familial roles in their relationships. As one Longaberger consultant noted when referring to her unit director, "It would have been nice if she had been more of a big sister to me . . . she could have really been more of an encouragement and more of a trainer." Similarly, an Amway distributor noted of a distributor father figure, "I gave up hunting with my father because I wanted to hunt with Ivan" (his "upline Diamond," a high-ranking person in his distributor group).

In addition to using family language, all three network marketing organizations often emphasize that distributing can be a source of strong and meaningful friendships. The Longaberger Web site, for example, highlights new friendships as a key benefit of becoming a Longaberger distributor:

Discover New Friendships—Talking to friends about things you know and care about is easy. That's what makes Longaberger so easy to talk about—even if you're not a public speaker or veteran salesperson. Longaberger Consultants are unique because they learn from and support each other, building relationships that are lasting and strong.

As well as mentioning the familylike ties noted above, Mary Kay and Amway distributors also noted that many friendships can be made via distributing. Whether they were positioned as family ties or as friendships, distributors' business ties were infused with familylike dynamics by the network marketing organizations.

Bringing family into work. Several network marketing organization practices that were observed involved physically or psychologically integrating a distributor's family with his or her work. Although there has been little follow-up on her initial observation, Biggart noted how these organizations involve family in distributors' work:

The separation of the public sphere of work from the private sphere of domestic life is a strategy for managing tensions between two powerful, commitment-seeking units. Although work organizations cannot make employees give up all outside commitments . . . they can require that employees leave their families behind when they walk through the door. . . . [Network marketing organizations] employ a radically different strategy for controlling the tension between work and family: *they manage the family*, making its powerful emotions and social unity serve organizational ends or actively manipulating the pull of family ties. (1989: 71)

We found that these organizations, especially Amway and Mary Kay (see Table 1), attempted to "manage the family" by instructing distributors to

make family members (and friends) parts of their businesses. As noted above, we refer to these family management tactics as bringing family into work practices. A clear example of such tactics is the almost universal network marketing organization practice of asking distributors to focus their initial sales and recruiting efforts on family and friends and to persist with such efforts until that source of recruits and customers has been exhausted (e.g., Biggart, 1989; Grayson, 1996). Subtler but also often-used techniques involve the blurring of work and nonwork relationships in ways that do not involve direct recruitment. Amway, for example, encourages distributors to draw their spouses into business activities such as deliveries and book-keeping, even if they are not selling and recruiting directly, so that distributors do not have to be "married singles." Mary Kay also encourages spousal involvement. Before recruits join officially, spouses are often interviewed by recruiters and asked if they are willing to support their partners' efforts; they are later asked to show this support by providing childcare and performing domestic chores while the consultant attends company functions. Spouses are also encouraged to attend Mary Kay annual meetings, where special seminars are organized for them.

Another bringing family into work technique is setting business goals in the company of other family members. At Amway, sales goals are translated into "dreams," or visions of what distributors want to attain (Pratt, 2000a), and distributors are encouraged to involve spouses and children in their goal setting or "dream building." One distributor, for example, commented on how involving her young son in dream building ended up creating a constant source of reminders to remain focused on the business:

So Pat [my son] always asks us how many points we have, and how long it will be until we are direct, and how long it will be until we are Diamond, and can he get a Nintendo—when we are at this level and can he get this.

Some Amway distributors even use a book, *When Mommy and Daddy Go Diamond*, to explain to their children why they must often spend time apart from them.

Mary Kay and Longaberger consultants are also encouraged to make their dreams and goals (and progress toward those goals) visible to their families, even if the family members did not participate in their goal setting. Prominently displayed goal posters and progress charts are common in consultants' homes, and both children and spouses are made aware of, and encouraged to comment on, the

consultants' progress. Spouses and children under these circumstances become guardians of the consultants' goals and encourage their pursuit.

In all three organizations, distributors' family members might become psychologically linked to their network marketing organization work, even if they were not physically engaged in it. Very important is the fact that the organizations encourage distributors to work hard and become successful so that they will be better able to provide for their families. Such encouragement often takes the form of "success stories" whereby financially successful distributors talk about the joys of spending more time with their children. On the Amway tape *This Is Where You Don't Need an Ad Pack*, a distributor declares publicly that network marketing organization success has allowed him to spend more time with his daughter:

The best part [about distributing], really, absolutely, without hesitation is doing what you want to do every day. How many of you can get excited about that concept? [Crowd claps and cheers]. Eat breakfast with your children. . . . Do whatever you want to do. I go out on the swing set with my little girl and we sing our favorite song, "I love you, you love me."

In this distributor's estimation, network marketing is the means to better family life because of more time spent together. The *Mary Kay Consultants Guide* makes a similar point, with "A career is a means to an end—a means by which you can provide comfort and security for your family" (Mary Kay Inc., 1981: 1958). In Longaberger, the idea of network marketing organization work leading to better family life is woven into explanations of how distributors' efforts ultimately translate into the Longaberger theme "Quality of Life—As you define it for yourself."

In all instances, such propositions can be categorized as means-end myths, since they lay out a causal logic that reconciles what appear to be conflicting goals promoted by network marketing organizations: working hard as a distributor and spending more time with family (see Abravanel [1983] for a discussion of similar myths). In the ideal progression posed by network marketing organizations, hard-working members will eventually make enough money from selling and from the sales commissions of recruits to retire from their nondistributing jobs. Given that most selling and recruiting occurs during evenings and weekends, this level of success would allow distributors to spend more time during weekdays with their children. Such success would also let members determine which evenings and weekends to work. The catch, of course, is the sacrificing of many eve-

nings and weekends, which would otherwise be spent with family, long before retirement becomes possible.

Combined with the making workers into family practices, these bringing family into work practices transform work-related ambivalence into productive work for the organization—and, we will argue—into powerful commitment. At a general level, work of any type is consistently posited as both a means of support for, and a barrier to enjoying, one's family. Network marketing work, however, is positioned to help members channel their ambivalence in two ways. On the one hand, practices that make workers into family give both married and single distributors a sense of belonging to a family. Working in a network marketing organization allows distributors to spend more time with their "organizational families." Conversely, practices that bring family into work allow the distributors to work and spend time with their "real" families at the same time. Together, the two practices allow members to partially satisfy their needs for simultaneously satisfying work and family demands.

Because much of a distributor's time is spent away from both family and other organization members, such a blurring of work and family boundaries provides only a short-term solution for work-related ambivalence. Facilitating a longer-term and more satisfying solution, these practices also give members a means-end logic that further binds them to the organizations: the more successful you are in your network marketing organization, the more you can live off your sales commissions, and the more time you can spend with your real and/or organizational family.

Taken together, these practices are akin to the "aggregation strategies" used to manage multiple identities. Pratt and Foreman (2000) argued that multiple identities, like work and family role identities, can be managed in several ways. To determine how they should manage multiple identities, people must ask whether all identities are valuable and whether they are compatible ("have synergies"). Aggregation is the appropriate response when both the value and the compatibility of identities are high. It involves retaining and linking identities through an ideology, value system, or cognitive framework. In network marketing organizations, both making workers into family practices and bringing family into work practices highlight the importance of these life domains. Moreover, by blurring work-family boundaries, these practices increase the perceived compatibility of the two domains. Beyond partially blending work and family activities, these practices further bind work and

family together through means-end myths that state that while work in a network marketing organization may be a short-term impediment to spending time with one's family, it is at the same time the only real path to achieving greater participation in one's family.

In sum, work-related ambivalence is transformed by blurring work-family boundaries and by providing a plan of action for ultimately resolving a distributor's ambivalence through hard work in her or his network marketing organization. Both of these processes bind workers tighter to their organizations and facilitate motivated action.

Relationship-Based Commitment in Network Marketing Organizations

When analyzing how distributors talked about their commitment to network marketing organizations, three themes became clear. First, members' commitment had a strong behavioral component. Individuals did not talk about being committed to their organizations *per se*. Rather, they were committed to *distributing*. In our study, committed members sold products, sponsored new members, went to functions, read or listened to organizationally sponsored materials, and so on. This emphasis on behaviors as a sign of commitment is promoted by the network marketing organizations themselves. Conversion theorists distinguish "verbal" from "total" converts (Lofland & Stark, 1965). We similarly noted that true commitment in these organizations involves more than just talk—it involves follow-through as well. Therefore, distributors talk more about being committed to "distributing" or to "building a business" (actions) than about being committed to Amway, Mary Kay, or Longaberger as companies. As noted in the quote below, commitment to distributing is often described in terms of one's actions:

I listened to hundreds of tapes, read numerous recommended books, attended functions that required me to drive 1,000 miles one way, listened to many numerous successful speakers. I contacted hundreds of people and showed about 100 plans. . . . Because of the location of our house in Kansas, where we moved about 3 months of being in the business, every call I made on Sunday to check people's interest was long distance, and the average meeting I did was always about 30 or more miles from my house. . . . I put positive messages all over the house and posted dream building pictures all over the refrigerator.

Second, the reasons for these commitments to distributing involved relationships. Given that these organizations are comprised of distributor

networks, it is perhaps not surprising that we found relationships as essential to network marketing organization commitments. Because of the importance of relationships, we refer to members' commitments as *relationship-based commitments*. We distinguish between two types of relationship-based commitments to distributing: those primarily based on relationships to other members, and those primarily based on relationships to nonmembers. As noted in Figure 2, our analysis suggests that making workers into family practices leads to commitment based on relationships with other distributors, while bringing family into work practices lead to commitment based on relationships to nonmembers (such as family).

Third, our analysis showed that each of these commitments was associated with different combinations of positive and negative emotions. To illustrate, there were times when members described their commitments in terms of excitement and love, but at other times they used terms such as fear and guilt. These findings echo the argument of Brickman and colleagues (1987), who suggested that individuals can alternate between experiencing positive and negative "faces" of commitment. They argued that the difference between these two faces is captured in the difference between "wanting to" (positive face) and "having to" (negative face) engage in a behavior (Brickman et al., 1987: 6–7). This double-edged aspect of commitment explains why some commitments are experienced as joyful and intrinsically motivated, while others are experienced as obligations and extrinsically motivated. (For an extensive discussion of the positive and negative faces of commitment, see Brickman et al. [1987: 2–12].) In network marketing organizations, the observed commitment of distributors had this dual nature.

Taken together, behaviors, relationships, and emotions were inexorably intertwined when it came to members' commitment to distributing. As a result, we found that normatively separating attitudinal from behavioral commitments—as is commonly done in studies of commitment—did not adequately capture the nature of members' attachment to these organizations. As discussed below, relationships provided members a rationale for commitment, and the nature of the relationships provided the commitments with unique emotional coloring. However, all commitments were expressed in terms of engaging in organizationally relevant behaviors.

Relationship-based commitment via network marketing organization members. Through practices that make workers into family, distributors can form strong bonds with other members. Thus,

they become strongly committed to distributing via their work-related relationships. The positive face of such commitment was expressed as love and affection. Consider, for example, an Amway distributor's talking about qualifying for Pearl so he can golf and spend time with his mentors:

Right now, a good example, Bob and Bonnie and all of their Pearls, Emeralds, and Diamonds were in Bermuda last week and the only way you can qualify for that trip is to be a Pearl. So, I'm mad and they go on a golf trip every spring and I'm mad because I like to play golf so I want to be with them because I like them, they have heart.

This distributor's commitment to distributing comes, at least in part, from his feelings toward Bob and Bonnie. Commitment to distributing because of a network marketing organization relationship is also seen in the decision of a Mary Kay distributor to remain active even though the business is no longer being appropriate for her lifestyle:

My director was diagnosed just three and a half years ago with terminal brain tumor . . . it could be one year, two years, six months, two weeks; it could be any amount of time. But I just feel like, I can stay as an active consultant on her rosters, help her maintain that directorship with a minimal investment on my part.

We found many similar expressions of affection as motives for commitment in interviews and network marketing organization publications in which distributors shared their stories in letters and testimonials.

Our analysis further suggests that although commitments to others were most often expressed in terms of love, they were also sometimes expressed in terms of guilt. As implicitly illustrated in the Mary Kay quote above, there is a fine line between love and guilt. Distributors often experienced guilt when they did not "live up" to the expectations of other distributors, especially their mentors. A further illustration is one Amway distributor's answer to the question of whether she ever felt guilty for not building the business: "I feel it all the time . . . everyone I know who is not building the business feels guilty for not doing so." A Longaberger distributor expressed a similar sentiment: "When I started with the company I had already quit my full-time job and hadn't started my part-time job. I felt guilty for not producing like I should have."

In our data, guilt appeared to be the inseparable flip side of love. And both emotions were tied not only to relationships, but also to distributing. To begin with, distributors would never have experienced these distributor-distributor relationships—

and the positive and negative emotions they engendered—if they had not been members of network marketing organizations. Thus, the very act of distributing kept these relationships active and made distributors vulnerable to these feelings. However, through making workers into family practices, the act of distributing became both the means of expressing love *and* of resolving guilt. That is, commitment to distributing allowed distributors to resolve conflicting emotions toward their organizational "families" by ensuring that both the positive and negative emotional valences associated with distributing relationships led in the same direction: toward building a distributorship.

Relationship-based commitment via nonmembers. Commitment to distributing also stemmed from relationships with nonmembers, such as bonds to family members and other individuals whom a distributor wanted to help. This type of commitment seemed to stem primarily from practices that bound distributors' career goals with personal ones (the bringing family into work practices). In the following comments from a husband and wife team, their commitment to distributing is bound up with opportunities to use the business to help themselves, *as well as* their family and their friends:

Zack: Gina [his wife] went ballistic! It was amazing, and I don't mean that in a negative sense. She was thrilled!

Gina: We were both pretty excited about it. . . . I saw not only how it could help us because we need the money, but how it could help mom . . . and everyone that I thought of like our friends Pat and Cathy and Ned. Ooh! This would be so good for them . . . that's what got me so excited about this.

Similarly, a Mary Kay consultant talked about how much she enjoys "working with other women and hopefully helping some people who don't have the same good feeling about themselves to discover some things they can do."

As noted in the quotes above, when commitments were expressed in terms of how they could help nonmembers, individuals generally expressed genuine excitement about distributing. But at the same time that many distributors were excited about the opportunities that network marketing organizations provided, they were also uncomfortable with actually building their businesses. As discussed earlier, success in these organizations demands selling and recruiting, both of which place one at risk of being rejected. Furthermore, the companies encourage approaching friends and family first, which is problematic since the use of existing social networks to provide business con-

tacts violates relational norms and places a distributor at risk of losing valued relationships (Grayson, 1996). One Mary Kay consultant discussed her fear about selling products to church friends:

My first episode was to approach people and hand them a lipstick sample, ask them about their experience with Mary Kay, and offer them a facial. I was a new consultant and was encouraged to do this with friends and family—people I know—to let them know I was now selling Mary Kay. I chose to do this at church and was very anxious. I procrastinated as long as I could and even stuttered when talking.

Similarly, a Longaberger consultant told us, “My first year, my fear was losing friends, and I made it my motto not to force Longaberger on them. I remember friends becoming consultants and acting as if they expected me to be their best customer.”

Fear of rejection inhibits action. However, in all three of the network marketing organizations studied here, concerns about being rejected are not denied; rather, they are seen as part and parcel of being a successful organization member. Just as guilt is the flip side of love, fear is the flip side of excitement. As before, these conflicting emotions are bound together by the act of distributing. Distributing potentially allows one to help others, and to be rejected by them.

The experience of fear, however, was far less likely than the experience of guilt to have been transformed into an impetus to build a network marketing organization business. In fact, only in Amway did we find evidence that fear was transformed into a committing force. As one distributor noted:

There’s two kinds of goals. One is you’re driven by fear or anger—the guy laughs at you and you say “I’m gonna build this just to show him up” or the boss said you’re out so [you say] “I don’t need him.” Crisis, that’s fear—[such as] we’re not gonna eat tomorrow. Any of those will drive some people to do something. . . . But then we talk about the better way to achieve is to set a goal that you want so badly that you’d do anything legal to get it. So then it’s not a crisis driven if it’s goal [dream] driven.

This quote shows two ways in which feelings toward nonwork relationships can be transformed. First, fear of losing friends becomes changed by making the loss of friendship into a challenge and motivator: “I am going to show those friends that they were wrong to reject me by becoming successful.” What was once a force inhibiting action becomes an instigating force. Second, fear that one’s own family will not be able to eat also transforms fear into an initiating force.

These fear transformation techniques were not as prevalent among Mary Kay or Longaberger distributors. Rather, these organizations (as well as Amway to some extent) had what we have termed “fear reduction” scripts. Distributors were often reminded of ways to reduce the fear that they felt when selling products and sponsoring others. Mary Kay consultants, for example, use an acronym, “F.E.A.R.: False Evidence Appearing Real” (Mary Kay Inc., 1984) to undermine fear-generating beliefs. Likewise, Longaberger distributors are encouraged to reframe their recruiting efforts as something that is less threatening:

Some people have reservations about sponsoring because of fear of rejection. It is up to us to inform others of what Longaberger has to offer. So, if you take the attitude you are just educating someone, sharing your enthusiasm, and then asking if they would like to be part of the fun, money-making adventure, what do you have to lose? (*Your Success*, July 1997)

The goal here does not appear to be to make fear into an initiating force for behavior, but to neutralize its role as an inhibiting force. In effect, these organizations transform ambivalence into commitment by attempting to neutralize the negative emotion of fear, thus leaving “excitement” as the primary motivation for action. However, distributors also suggest that a further step is needed—one must engage in the act of distributing to discover how groundless one’s fears actually are. Our stuttering Mary Kay distributor, for example, later told us that on her second or third attempt a prospect responded with an immediate order because she was already a Mary Kay user. The distributor concluded that taking action and achieving a positive outcome helped reduce her fear. Again, the positive and negative emotions that are grounded in a distributor’s relationships but are activated by distributing ultimately become “resolved” by the individual’s engaging in more distributing behavior. Thus, fear transformation and fear reduction scripts supplement means-end myths and other bringing family into work practices that serve the commitment generation process.

Reducing Work Ambivalence

In addition to these fear reduction scripts, we found other examples of practices that lessened—rather than transformed—the influence of negative emotions embedded in members’ commitments and helped maintain the commitment process. Incorporating these “ambivalence reduction” catego-

ries into our model helps provide a more complete view of how the commitment process is managed within network marketing organizations.

As noted in Table 1, there was evidence from all the data sources regarding the harvesting and maintenance of ambivalence. What varied across the three organizations was the presence of ambivalence reduction practices. We briefly review these practices here. Given that the practices appear to have committed members as their targets, we argue that they serve to maintain commitment. Specifically, we argue that they serve as a safety valve that strengthens the effectiveness of ambivalence transformation practices by ensuring that negative emotions that have not been transformed are lessened and that positive emotions are strengthened.

Conflict neutralization recipes. Conflict neutralization involves providing distributors with concrete practical suggestions for managing conflicting demands; these suggestions are often accompanied by clever sayings that rationalize them. Mary Kay, for example, offers context-specific ways for its distributors to maintain a caring wife and mother image, while cutting corners for the sake of the business:

I remember one of our consultants telling me what she did when she got home and didn't have anything cooking for dinner. She'd throw an onion in a pot of boiling water, and it would smell like something good was cooking for dinner. Her husband would come in a few minutes later and that wonderful aroma made him feel a good meal was under way. In the meantime, she'd have time to pull something out of the freezer. While some people might not appreciate what she did, it kept her husband happy—and that's all that really mattered to her. (Ash, 1981: 75)

Hundreds of similar prescriptions, delivered as admonitions and anecdotes, were shared frequently in published sources, at meetings, and in one-on-one coaching sessions between recruits and mentors. For example, distributors in Amway are often told that their children will not mind if distributing keeps them away from important days like birthdays and graduations because “children are flexible.” Distributors are further encouraged to be like children, flexible enough themselves to celebrate important events on alternate dates.

Equally abundant are the sayings used to rationalize the prescribed behaviors mentioned above. Some sayings are one-liners that may not have originated with network marketing organizations but have become part of their lexicon, such as “Don't spend dollar time on penny jobs,” “Handle each piece of paper only once,” and perennial variations

on “God first, family second, job third.” Other sayings are company-specific, such as Mary Kay's oft-quoted “P&L means *people* and *love*.” Each of these sayings helps members reduce conflict by helping them prioritize or otherwise meet competing work and family demands. And frequent encounters with sayings such as these in multiple contexts (meetings, events, publications) keep them fresh and accessible to a salesperson's mind, ready for application in relieving work ambivalence while retaining its energizing dynamics.

Buffering practices. Buffering, which refers to managing distributors' immediate environments so that they are protected from negative sources of influence (and negative emotions), has two related steps. The first step involves actively seeking out positive influences, be they from personal contacts or published media. To illustrate, the network marketing organizations sought to facilitate positive interpersonal relationships through sales meetings and company functions, and they advised distributors to have frequent one-on-one meetings with recruits and mentors, at which heavy doses of positive imagery should be shared. In fact, distributors were encouraged to spread their enthusiasm to others. As Mary Kay Ash noted, “We often say, ‘If you had a bad week—you need the sales meeting. If you had a good week, the sales meeting needs you!’” (1981: 40).

Buffering also involves managing distributors' passive environments and nonorganizational activities so that they are more “positive.” As mentioned earlier, Mary Kay and Longaberger consultants are encouraged to put up “goal posters,” which serve the dual purpose of encouraging selling and recruiting activities and reinforcing excitement about the business. All three of these network marketing organizations also advocated putting up pictures, signs, and even Post-it notes containing inspirational phrases throughout one's house. A favorite among Mary Kay consultants was to use their first initials to create positive self-describing monikers (for instance, the Courageous, Capable, and Cute Celia Davis), which they used to introduce themselves at sales meetings and product demonstrations, and which many also displayed prominently in their homes. Recruits were further encouraged to spend their free time reading inspirational company-sanctioned books and listening to training and motivational tapes.

The second step in buffering involves social isolation or encapsulation (Pratt, 2000a, 2000b). Distributors are told to distance themselves from people or activities that do not support the business. They are openly encouraged, for instance, to avoid

contact with extended family members⁵ and friends who are either generally negative and critical or who would “steal their dreams” by specifically making fun of the business. As one Mary Kay salesperson told us, “If your [extended] family is negative, love ’em, have a quick cup of coffee, and move on to the positive people.” This sentiment was echoed by a distributor interviewed by Grayson (1996: 335) who stated, “I have some friends who will not go out with me when I wear the badge . . . and so, it happens that I stopped seeing them.” Similarly, members are also encouraged to avoid all media sources of negativity, such as newspapers, radio, television, and movies. If distributors do use the media, they should emphasize educational and inspirational shows (classical music radio, public television, and so forth). In short, buffering served to help turn attention away from the negative face of commitment and to focus attention on the positive.

Dream renewal. In addition to practices focused on managing the negative face of commitment and preventing it from overwhelming the positive face, we found one set of practices designed to sustain the positive: dream renewal. Dream building involves the setting of sales goals with mentors or family members. If done properly, it creates a dream or vision that is linked to member and non-member relationships toward which network marketing organization members channel their efforts. As different aspects of this dream are achieved or nullified by circumstances, however, new dreams need to be created and linked to network marketing organization activities to sustain the positive face of commitment. Organization members whose vision involved their children’s college education, for example, need new dreams once the children graduate. Likewise, members who envision a new house or new car (such as Mary Kay’s well-known pink Cadillacs, awarded to distributors on the basis of their numbers of active recruits and sales volumes) need renewed dreams as these material goals are reached. In at least one organization, Amway, we found strong evidence for dream renewal practices (see also Pratt, 2000a), starting with then-CEO Richard DeVos’s (1993: 191) advice to a distributor:

When a dream comes true always replace it with a bigger dream. And those big dreams will keep you alive and excited for the rest of your life.

At Mary Kay, dream renewals are often focused on car upgrades, since the Pink Cadillac Program is actually a multilevel reward system. Dream renewal can also be done in other ways. One of our key informants transferred into a local Mary Kay chapter from another community and was struggling to keep her dream of receiving her “red jacket” alive. (Red jackets are awarded to star recruiters with at least three active recruits.) Her new director invited our informant to participate in the red jacket meetings for the local chapter, even though she had not yet achieved star recruiter status, and the display of confidence reenergized her pursuit of that dream.

Weakened or Failed Commitments

At times network marketing organizations fail to maintain the commitment of members. Using an engine metaphor, we argue that ambivalence serves as fuel for commitment. When fuel is absent, or not in the right mix, commitment suffers. Such problems occur when negative feelings become too high—or too low—relative to positive feelings. The latter became an issue when harvesting failed. The former seemed largely due to failures in ambivalence transformation and reduction (see Figure 2).

Failures in harvesting. There was only one case in our interview data where commitment to distributing waned because members were not ambivalent about work. This case involved an older couple, close to retirement, who allowed themselves to be sponsored by their son and daughter-in-law in order to help the younger couple make money. With grown children, the older couple did not feel the need to build a distributorship in order to spend more time with them or to provide for their basic needs. They quickly concluded that simply buying some Amway products now and then was enough to satisfy their obligations to their children. As a result, they did not experience work-family conflict, or ambivalence about work, and they consequently did not talk about or “enact” high commitment to distributing.

In addition to this interview case, we also found some indirect support in our archival and observational data for the idea that too little ambivalence leads to weakened commitment. Network marketing organizations warn both prospects and members not to become “too satisfied” in their work, and to be willing to get out of their “comfort zone” (see also Pratt, 2000a). As one distributor noted, “If

⁵ It is important to emphasize that “extended family” does not include immediate family members (spouse and children) but only more distant relatives (such as aunts and cousins). The network marketing organization view is that familial obligations are almost exclusively to immediate family members, who are never avoided (see Pratt, 2000a).

people are satisfied—no matter how miserable their life is—I don't want them. I can't do anything for them." The older couple described above would be considered to be "too satisfied" and as sticking to their "comfort zone." If ambivalence is nonexistent, or if it dissipates, commitment is likely to wane before any other commitment-generating practice can take effect, and a harvesting failure occurs.

Failures to reduce and transform ambivalence. More common to the breakdown of commitment in our data was the failure of ambivalence to be transformed into commitment. This often occurred when network marketing organizations could no longer reduce or transform ambivalence. Such failures can occur in both the bringing family into work and the making workers into family practices. With regard to the former, failure to reduce and transform rising work ambivalence was poignantly illustrated by one of our Mary Kay contacts. Here, not only did the distributing opportunity fail to provide enough income to allow her to spend more time with her kids, but in addition this failure became overwhelming as family obligations increased:

On the one hand, one of my reasons for becoming involved with Mary Kay had become a reason for quitting, and that is the kids. . . . I wanted to be able to provide them opportunities to learn and grow in whatever areas they wanted to pursue . . . and I did not want the kids' interests to be held hostage by family finances. . . . I found that their involvement in these activities also demanded time, and that those demands came into direct conflict with my Mary Kay responsibilities . . . the women who are likely to purchase Mary Kay cosmetics from me are primarily people who work outside the home, and the easiest time for them to attend demonstrations and place orders is in the evening. That happens to be, however, when practices and competitions are held for most of the kids' activities, and they needed my involvement in those areas of their lives as much if not more than they needed my financial contributions to their activities. My commitment was always to the kids' welfare, and I found that the commitment that was well served by joining Mary Kay evolved into something that was better served by abandoning the business.

Similar failures occurred in making workers into family practices. Sometimes it involved the failure to create or maintain familylike relationships with mentors and other distributors. As one Amway distributor noted, he never felt that he was important to his upline mentor: "I probably could have been a very successful Amway distributor . . . if somebody could have recognized me . . . if they saw something in me—that maybe I had some potential." A similar breakdown contributed to the defection of

one of our Longaberger informants, who during the last interview revealed that she "was not working the business because it did not meet my emotional needs any longer." This was the same consultant who had wished that her director had been more of a "big sister" in earlier interviews. Given the personal changes occurring in her life at this time (her youngest daughter graduating and her eldest getting married), the implication was that Longaberger had stumbled in serving as a family in her times of need.

Familylike relationships can also dissolve because of breakdowns in interpersonal relationships. These changes can derive from occasional conflicts or from a more permanent change, such as the death of a mentor:

My way of doing one last good deed for the fellowship [the informant's label for the network under her director] was to remain involved for as long as Yolanda, my director, needed me in order to retain her post. As you know, she was terminally ill with cancer, and had been struggling to hold her organization together as her health has declined. . . . My duty to my Mary Kay friends was to help sustain their leader. . . . It is something I needed to do—remain on active status—which involved placing \$600 orders every three months, even if I was not really building the business, so that my director could remain a director as long as she needed to be. . . . Yolanda died in November 1999, and within the next eight months I terminated my official role as a Mary Kay consultant.

Our data show that commitment in network marketing organizations can weaken and fail. This occurs when work-family conflict and work-related ambivalence cannot be generated, as well as when distributor ambivalence cannot be managed. As noted above, commitments are susceptible to externalities such as changes in life circumstances, and to other events (like conflicts) that may alter relationships. Avoiding commitment failures, therefore, is a significant challenge to these organizations.

DISCUSSION

Our research suggests that organizations can help their members manage the work-family interface in ways that affirm the importance of members' families, while also increasing their commitment to their work. Our data suggest that network marketing organizations recognize that work-nonwork conflict exists and seek to sustain and use members' ambivalence about having to spend time away from their families while working—that is, to *harvest* ambivalence. We also found that the studied organizations engaged in practices that allowed

members to *transform* ambivalence about work into productive commitment within the organizations via the creation of *relationship-based commitments* that were fostered by (1) building strong interorganizational bonds (making workers into family practices) and (2) using nonwork bonds (bringing family into work practices). Taken together, these elements constitute a proposed model that explains how one type of organization whose members are not physically colocated, the network marketing organization, engenders commitment, and why these attempts both succeed and fail. This model expands theory in the areas of commitment and the work-family interface. It also has implications for management practice.

Our research extends and enriches researchers' understanding of commitment, especially commitment in distributed organizations like network marketing organizations, in a variety of ways. First, our model focuses on organizational practices and why they engender or fail to engender commitment. Whereas commitment has long been a concern among organizational scholars, relatively little attention has been given to organizational practices that have a direct influence on commitment (see Meyer and Allen [1997] as a notable exception) and even less has been given to the careful management that organizations need to use to sustain commitment. Moreover, our research suggests that commitment—especially commitment arising from ambivalence—is not an outcome that can be generated and stored. The commitment expressed by the network marketing organization members we studied, which is critical to their organizational success, existed at the confluence of positive and negative aspects of network marketing organization work, in the ambivalence that this confluence creates. Commitment in these organizations is dynamic: it is renewed frequently and can deteriorate if left unattended.

Second, our data suggest that connections to work and nonwork others are critical to network marketing organization member commitment. Few members of these organizations expressed a strong commitment to the companies or their interests. Rather, they expressed commitment to their own marketing organization activities, and they used their relationships to justify these commitments. Distributors worked hard because of their children, spouses, grandchildren, and other family members. They also worked hard because of their mentors and coworkers, who depended on them for part of their own income from these businesses, and who had already invested time and energy in helping the interviewed distributors. As long as such relationship-based commitments remained high, net-

work marketing organization members were motivated; but if work and nonwork relationships became and remained troubled, it became difficult if not impossible for them to sustain member commitment. Clearly, the importance of relationships may be exaggerated in distributed organizations, as these organizations consist of little else but relationships (and perhaps ideology). However, researchers have long posited that work relationships are central to commitment in traditional organizations (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972), and a recent review suggests that these relationships play a social support role (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Moreover, little research has looked at the influence of *nonwork* relationships, or at the different ways (beyond support) that both work and nonwork relationships can influence commitment. Extending recent work on attachment and job embeddedness (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001; Mitchell & Lee, 2001), we have shown how links with both work and nonwork others play a critical role in retaining organization members and how careful management of these relationships enriches and deepens member commitment.

A third contribution comes from a more detailed articulation of the emotional aspects of commitment revealed in network marketing organizations. In particular, we link feelings of emotional ambivalence to the creation and expression of work-related commitment. We found that how people *feel* about the positive and negative aspects of work can energize the commitment generation system. Love, excitement, fear, guilt—these are part and parcel of commitment in network marketing organizations. The coexistence of these conflicting emotions, and the accompanying need to make them coherent, are strong motivators. They provide the energy behind distributor implementation and pursuit of the strategies and goals the network marketing organizations recommend. Commitment emerges from our research as a dynamic force in which emotion is a key driver. This view of commitment stands in stark contrast to other treatments of commitment in organizational research, according to which it is a relatively detached calculus of costs and benefits. Even affective commitment has generally been described as more cognitive than emotional, and researchers have tended not to measure specific feelings, beyond, perhaps, vague feelings of happiness (see Meyer & Allen, 1997). Although we do not argue that ambivalence transformation is the *only* way to produce commitment, we do argue that emotions, and their management, may play a key role in some forms of commitment, especially relationship-based commitment.

We understand that the interplay between com-

mitment and ambivalence has been noted elsewhere. Merton, for example, noted this: "Ambivalence leads to the amplification of commitment so that converts adhere to the new faith more strongly than born members" (1957: 295). Moreover, Brickman and his colleagues (1987) discussed in detail how commitment involves the binding of positive and negative elements—that is, the transformation of ambivalence. They saw commitment as an important stabilizing force for action (see also Salancik, 1977). In the face of the competing forces inherent in ambivalence, commitment becomes necessary if an individual is to avoid vacillating behavior or paralysis. However, though the connection has been made before, we have enriched and deepened researchers' understanding of how ambivalence can lead to commitment. We have borrowed from Brickman and colleagues' (1987) largely intrapsychic treatment of commitment formation and shown how specific organizational practices, such as bringing family into work, making workers into family, and other aggregation practices, can aid these internal dynamics.

We have also developed Brickman and colleagues' notion of the "two faces of commitment" in further detail by demonstrating that these faces can be associated with different sets of emotions (excitement and fear; love and guilt) and still be effective. We feel that this emphasis on the two faces of commitment is important for organizational scholars. It helps illustrate how the same concept can be used to describe those who feel trapped in their jobs as well as those who love their jobs. It further suggests that the same person can feel both of these "faces" over time, while retaining his or her attachment to work. Our linking commitment with specific emotional pairs may also raise new measurement issues, and our conceptualization may even shed light on existing conundrums in the commitment literature. For example, the connection between love and guilt in commitment may help explain why commitment scales based on members' obligations (normative) and those based on their positive regard (affective) are often so highly correlated (Meyer & Allen, 1997): they may simply be measuring two sides of the same coin.

Fourth, our research contributes, and hopefully will renew, interest in the behavioral aspects of commitment. As noted here, commitment in network marketing organizations is ultimately expressed in terms of action. Much of the work on behavioral commitment (that is, binding an individual to a particular course of action) has been confined to laboratory research (Kiesler, 1971). Moreover, field research has largely been limited to studies of retrospective rationality, and the results

of these studies have been mixed (Meyer & Allen, 1997). We feel, however, that it is important to not discard the behavioral aspects of commitment.

Our data suggest that separating attitudinal and behavioral aspects of commitment may be difficult to do in practice and may weaken the explanatory power of this rich concept. At least in relationship-based commitments, ties to work and nonwork others become the motivation for an individual's continuing a course of action. Specifically, the emotions surrounding these relationships become the dynamic force that ultimately finds expression in behavior. To focus just on the behaviors might lead one to conclude an "escalation of commitment" effect is primarily at play in network marketing organizations—especially for unsuccessful distributors. Taking this perspective would lead one to predict that a distributor who is unsuccessful but who has spent a lot of time and energy distributing will continue to work in order to justify this "bad" investment. However, such a focus would likely fail to suggest that the dissolution of relationships is a key driver for commitment failure.

Alternatively, focusing just on the cognitions or emotions of commitment glosses over why organizations develop commitment in the first place. It is not to create "groupies," but to create a motivated and loyal workforce. In network marketing organizations, behavior becomes the means through which ambivalence is resolved: one must work hard to create a large salesforce in order to retire and spend time with one's family. One cannot resolve commitment by merely thinking one's way out of ambivalence. Behaviors and attitudes are inseparable in these relationship-based commitments. Although we believe that commitment research has advanced considerably by separating attitudes and behaviors, and by dissecting different foci and types of commitments, we wonder if the continuing fragmentation of the commitment concept may result in diminishing returns. Perhaps new efforts to reintegrate disparate findings may be fruitful (for similar efforts in the literature on turnover, see Mitchell et al. [2001]).

The current research also contributes to managerial practice. Few issues are as fundamentally divisive and emotionally charged as the issue of managing work and family lives. Moreover, few people would question the devastating impact that mismanaging this relationship can have on employee morale, motivation, and productivity (e.g., Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Hall, 1972). In response to such threats, organizations are increasingly taking active roles in helping members to manage the work-family interface, seeking to ameliorate the

negative effects of work-family conflict (e.g., Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). This research enriches understanding of why certain work-family practices may or may not succeed.

Although one must be cautious about overgeneralizing from one study, this research suggests that the practices utilized by network marketing organizations may be beneficial to organizations that attempt to manage similar workforces, including distributed workers, employees with low perceived exit barriers, and part-time or contingent workers who may have other primary commitments. Current trends suggest that the number of organizations that employ such individuals is increasing (Belous, 1989; Pfeffer & Baron, 1988). It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the practices used by network marketing organizations are not very different, and may even be less extreme, than current practices in other types of organizations. Consider the attempts of some companies to *transform work into home*. Useem (2000), for example, discussed "new company towns" where organizations provide facilities for child care, banking, shopping, dry cleaning, personal grooming, and other activities related to home life at the workplace. Other organizations seek to *transform home into work*, by facilitating telecommuting and other ways by which employees can work at home. What sets network marketing organizations apart, however, is that these attempts to break down barriers between work and family are not "side bets," but are instead the core of how these companies do business. Their work-family practices are not afterthoughts for network marketing organizations, but have instead been woven into the ideologies that move them forward, and in that way their full commitment-generating potential has been tapped. The success of these organizations in generating commitment suggests that they manage these practices well. We did not explore a topic that should be examined in subsequent research, however: the costs and benefits of such practices for organization members' well-being.

This research further suggests at least three critical conditions for making work-family practices work. First, a rationale or philosophy for how work and family should interrelate must be stated. In network marketing organizations, family is viewed as being "all good" while work is deemed a "necessary evil." However, this is not the only way such conflicts can be depicted. For example, work and one's family can be framed as equally "good." Or both domains can be shown to have both positive and negative elements (that is, both evoke ambivalence). Family might even be depicted as an obligation that an organization member one escapes

through work (although this stance is likely to alienate most workers). What is important in network marketing organizations is that they are clear about how work and family interrelate, and they have built practices to resolve this conflict that are based on this depiction of that interrelationship. These same practices may not be as successful in organizations where work and family have different patterns of valence attached to them.

At a more general level, simply ignoring workers' families, or simply providing services (such as in-work daycare) without advocating a work-family philosophy may not be as effective as having a coherent strategy for how workers with families should consider these two life domains. While some organizations may eschew getting as involved in managing work-family issues as network marketing organizations, making an organization's stance on these issues clear may facilitate member attraction and retention (Schneider, 1987). We further suggest that aggregation strategies, which are attempts to bridge work and family identities, may better facilitate commitment than strategies that try to segment the two identities, as the latter fail to take advantage of potential synergies between them (Pratt & Foreman, 2000).

Second, network marketing organization practices reveal the importance of managing nonwork factors in influencing commitment. Perhaps ironically, strong commitment in network marketing organizations is largely the product of members' love for their families. Thus, managing nonwork relationships through such practices as bringing family into work are viewed as both legitimate and effective for building commitment. These practices are in stark contrast to those that have figured in much of the work on commitment, which has focused exclusively on how the management of *work-related* factors produces organizational commitment (Matthieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Third, and more controversially, network marketing organizations' practices make work-family conflict work for these organizations by emphasizing the importance of family. The organizations readily admit that work-family conflict is unavoidable and manage work ambivalence by positioning themselves as being in favor of family. Many organizations attempt to sell work-family practices as a means of making employees more productive and thus better workers. In contrast, network marketing organizations position their practices as ways to make their workers better parents or spouses. Whereas the former may unintentionally position family as a burden an organization member should overcome in order to spend more time at work,

network marketing organizations position their work as the means whereby members can spend more time at home. "Family-first" practices may be especially appealing to those who are not intrinsically motivated by their jobs, thus suggesting a noneconomic way to commit and motivate individuals who are low in "growth need strength," or who have jobs that are not enriched (Hackman & Oldham, 1979). The studied network marketing organizations in part handled the difficulty of lack of intrinsic motivation in the work by acknowledging that the tasks of selling and recruiting were unglamorous and emotionally difficult, but justifying their importance as a "means" to a desirable "end"—helping one's family. Even among intrinsically motivated workers, though, such work-family practices may help reduce mental distractions, such as the negative emotions that employees who spend a lot of time away from their families can experience.

Finally, our research shows that an organization need not adopt all of these practices to gain commitment. As noted in Table 1, Longaberger employed fewer of the practices noted here than did the other two companies, and it did not seem to evoke ambivalence or commitment as profound as those found in Mary Kay and Amway. However, they were able to engender some commitments. This observation suggests that these practices may have a cumulative effect. As Randall (1987) noted, organizations need to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of strong, moderate, and weak commitments.

Conclusion

Organizations are continually looking for new ways to foster commitment and to help workers manage the interplay of the work and nonwork life domains. Network marketing organizations provide one model of how to manage these issues simultaneously: They transform what is often considered a liability to worker motivation into a system that drives commitment. We hope that future research will continue to explore these and alternative means of establishing relationships between an ever-changing workforce and its employing organizations.

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