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Household Governance and Time Allocation Structures and Processes of Social Control in Dutch Households

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Abstract

This article introduces the concept of 'household governance' and investigates empirical differences in governance practices among Dutch households. It stresses informal household rules and conflict-handling strategies of cohabiting couples as important means to govern daily time allocation. The leading question is to what extent the concept of household governance contributes to our understanding of the way households combine the demands from paid and unpaid work. Empirical analyses based on a sample of 809 Dutch cohabiting employees and their spouses (Time Competition Survey 2003) show considerable differences in the use of household rules and conflict-handling strategies among households. A linear regression analysis confirms that the demand to govern daily time allocation by means of household rules and conflict-handling strategies is influenced by the earner type of the household, household characteristics (e.g. the presence of children) and job demands (e.g. frequent requests for working overtime). In this context, the interaction of household demands and job demands plays a major role for the type of household governance that is used in the household. Moreover, we found characteristic differences in conflict handling between men and women.

Zusammenfassung

Ziel des Artikels ist es, Idee und Konzept der „household governance“ vorzustellen und empirische Unterschiede in den Steuerungspraktiken niederländischer Haushalte zu untersuchen. Zentrale Elemente des Konzeptes sind einerseits informelle Vereinbarungen von Paaren, um die Verteilung bezahlter und unbezahlter Arbeit zu regulieren, andererseits Strategien von Paaren, um interpersonelle Konflikte bei der täglichen Aufgabenteilung zu bewältigen. Dabei ist die Frage leitend, inwieweit das Konzept der „household governance“ zum besseren Verständnis darüber beiträgt, wie Paare die Anforderungen aus bezahlter und unbezahlter Arbeit vereinbaren. Die empirische Analyse basiert auf einer Stichprobe von 809 niederländischen zusammenlebenden Paaren (Time Competition Survey 2003). Sie zeigt deutliche Unterschiede bei der Nutzung informeller Haushaltsregeln und Konfliktbewältigungsstrategien bei den von uns untersuchten Paaren. Eine lineare Regressionsanalyse bestätigt, dass der Regulierungsbedarf der Haushalte dabei von der Haushalts- und Arbeitssituation der Paare abhängt, etwa dem Vorhandensein von Kindern oder hohen Anforderungen aus dem Erwerbsbereich. In diesem Zusammenhang ist das Zusammenspiel von Anforderungen aus der Haushalts- und Erwerbssphäre von wesentlicher Bedeutung. Darüber hinaus zeigen sich charakteristische Unterschiede im Konfliktverhalten von Männern und Frauen.

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1. Introduction¹

In the Netherlands, considerable debate has arisen, to what extent and why employees are working more hours than they would actually prefer to do. Recent studies on time use of Dutch employees document increasing hours for both, paid and domestic work (SCP, 1999: 208) and a growing perception of feeling rushed or crunched for time (Breedveld, 2001). In a large number of households one or even both spouses are not satisfied with their factual amount of working hours and the division of work in the household. Women would usually prefer to work more hours, while men are interested to reduce their working hours (SCP, 2000: 15; Plantenga, Schippers & Siegers, 1999: 109). Given these results, the question raises why so many households fail to realize their time preferences.

Available accounts on the combination of paid and unpaid work in the household are either emphasizing differences in comparative advantages between spouses (in terms of their earning potential or domestic skills), stress the importance of norms or role expectations in and outside the household, or focus on institutional restrictions for working hour transitions of spouses (e.g. labor market policies). Social control in the household has hardly been taken into account yet. This article wants to make a step towards closing this gap in existing research by developing and testing a theory of 'household governance'. We will do so by first introducing the concept of household governance and its theoretical background. Subsequently, we will investigate to what extent this new approach is able to contribute to our understanding of time allocation and the resolution of time conflicts in the household.

The core idea behind the concept of household governance² is that interdependent actors will 'govern' their ongoing transactions in two ways. Firstly, they will use agreements concerning desired household activities. Secondly, in order to reinforce these agreements and to avoid open conflict, household members will engage in conflict-handling strategies (see Pollak, 1985). While the concepts of governance and negotiation are quite common in organizational research and institutional approaches towards labor supply, they have not yet entered research on household time allocation. When we accept that institutional arrangements (e.g. labor market regulations) and governance structures at the work place (e.g. management strategies) are influencing the work performance of employees, it is hard to understand for what reason we should neglect the impacts of governance practices in the household sphere. This does not only draw the attention to direct effects of household governance but also on the interaction of governance practices in the household with governance practices of the work place(s) of the partners.

1 Thanks to Rafael Wittek and Arie Glebbeek from the University of Groningen, Jacques Siegers from Utrecht University, and Eckart Hildebrandt and Karin Schulze-Buschhoff from the Social Science Research Center Berlin for their suggestions and support.

2 Within the growing debate on 'governance' with its various accents and definitions, the term 'household governance' is rather used in the tradition of transaction cost theory (Williamson, 1985). Inspired by the work of Pollak (1985) it acknowledges that households (just like firms) face risks in exchange relations and aim to reduce transaction costs by efficient forms of governance.

In this article we approach the household as an institution of informal social control that governs the daily time allocation of spouses by household rules and conflict-handling strategies. Based on standardized interviews with 809 cohabiting employees and their partners differences in household governance are investigated. The article addresses two questions:

1. Why is it useful for our understanding of how people combine paid and unpaid work to take into account governance practices in the household?
2. In which way do Dutch households differ in these governance practices and how are these differences related to personal, household, and job characteristics of the spouses?

2. 'Household Governance': A Gap in Existing Accounts on Time Allocation

Three major research disciplines focus on household time allocation: Household economics, sociological research on work-family balance, and labor market oriented approaches.

Economic approaches explain between-household variations in time allocation by differences in the comparative advantage each spouse may have on the labor market (earning potential) and within the household (domestic skills) (Hallberg, 2001). Central to this economic approach is the idea, that differences in the relative prices of time, mainly determined by the earning potential of the spouses, are a basic determinant of household time allocation (see Van Dijk & Siegers, 1996). An increasing number of studies are also paying attention to additional restrictions like the institutional or social environment of the household and influences of the tax system (Kooreman & Wunderink, 1997; Grift, 1998). Finally, bargaining models have been introduced to the field. They make it possible to take into account conflicting utility functions of spouses by referring to differences in bargaining power and decision-making rules (Beblo, 2001).

Sociological accounts either focus on the impact of organizational arrangements at the work places of the household partners, or they emphasize the influence of norms and values in and outside the households. The first perspective assumes that incentive schemes and informal peer control at the work place push employees to spend more time on paid work (Clarkberg & Moen, 2001: 1119). In the second view, household time allocation is restricted by gender specific norms and role expectations that are learned during childhood socialization and controlled by sanctions of the social environment (Van der Lippe & Siegers, 1994: 110; Juergens, 2001).

Policy oriented approaches towards labor supply and household activities focus on restrictions on various institutional levels that influence (support or restrict) transitions between different employment states. The analytical concept of 'transitional labor markets' (Schmid, 2002) emphasizes the importance of different institutional regulations for the 'entry into employment, mobility between jobs, and life-course management of employment, including the combination of paid work in the formal labor market with other socially useful activities, such as education and caring' (Visser, 2003: 124). In this view, institutionalized 'working-time arrangements' on the national or the company level, in terms of a given working week, possibilities of (qualified) part-time work, work accounts, (parental) leaves, variable working hours, overtime, or 'unsocial' hours play a major role for labor market transitions, particularly with regard to gender differences in labor supply or in a life-course perspective (Schmid, 2002; 296; O'Reilly, 2003; see for the Netherlands Visser, 2003).

Yet, governance practices in the household are for a large part neglected by all these disciplines. As a consequence, it remains unclear how spouses organize and coordinate the daily distribution of various activities with each other and how they handle situations in which agreements with the partner are in conflict with the demands of paid work. Basically, there are three reasons to pay more attention to these forms of daily governance in the household.

1. The huge growth in female labor market participation and a more flexible organization of labor have complicated the division of work in the household (Frederiksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001: 254). Contrary to the rather simple division of work in traditional breadwinner households, modern households often became places where two working spouses have to divide various domestic tasks among each other and to integrate them with demands from two jobs (Gill, 1998: 5). As a consequence, the particular ways and means of spouses to distribute and coordinate tasks with each other and to deal with situations of interpersonal work-household conflict became more important for a successful organization of the household. This holds particularly true for forms of work organizations that are prone to blur the boundaries between paid work and domestic activities – i.e. when the firm requires a workforce that is highly ‘flexible’ in terms of around-the-clock availability and overtime work.
2. A number of recent, mainly qualitative, studies brought to light characteristic differences in daily household decision making, in terms of typical ‘interaction orders’ (Gill, 1998), ‘allocation rules’ (van der Vinne, 1998), ‘conduct of everyday life’ (Jürgens, 2000), or ‘boundary control’ (Perlow, 1998). A German study, for instance, coined the term ‘conduct of everyday life’ to describe the distinct ways of household members to arrange the practical tasks of their daily life (Projektgruppe ‘Alltägliche Lebensführung’, 1995). Three different types of ‘conduct of everyday life’ are distinguished: A ‘traditional’ type (‘everyday routine’) builds mainly on routines and habits as means to combine work and family life. A ‘strategic’ type (‘everyday organization’) is characterized by rational organizing and long-term planning of daily activities. Finally, a ‘flexible’ type of conduct of everyday life (‘everyday art’) is based on flexible arrangements and short-term decisions (see also Jürgens 2000; Eberling, Hielscher, Hildebrandt & Jürgens, 2004).
3. Some of these previous studies also show that differences in daily household decision making affect household time allocation, independently from household or work characteristics. The (Australian) study by Gill (1998) points out that different ‘management rules’ or ‘interaction orders’ in the household prove to be decisive for the success of the spouses to combine work and family life. The study concludes that competing work and household demands can be managed in a more efficient way when goals, roles and rules for household time allocation are handled in a flexible way (Gill, 1998: 195). The (American) study by Perlow (1998) investigates differences in household ‘boundary control’. In addition to control strategies of the firm (management), competing control attempts of employees and their spouses are taken into account in terms of ‘acceptance’ and ‘resistance’ towards the firm’s control strategies. Perlow’s study shows that employees work fewer hours when their spouses make strong efforts to maintain boundary control by resisting the firm’s claim on his or her partner’s free time (Perlow, 1998: 353).

These findings also highlight the central theoretical argument of this article: households are places of informal social control. Spouses make agreements with each other about the distribution and coordination of paid and unpaid work and they use strategies in order to reinforce these agreements in situations of conflict.

The importance of ‘governance structures’ for the work performance of employees has been considered in organizational research (see Williamson, 1985). But despite some rather sporadic attempts to apply this idea to the household sphere (see Pollack,

1985) structures and processes of governance in the household have not yet entered existing accounts on the division of paid and unpaid work in the household. If we think of households as places of shared production, where two spouses need to cooperate in order to share a life together and to cope with the demands of paid and unpaid work, the threat of unfavorable behavior of the partner or unfavorable influences from the household environment (like the work sphere) is always around. Just like organizations, spouses can use social control in order to prevent such unfavorable influences, to guarantee sufficient time for unpaid work or joint activities, and to avoid open conflicts.

In the following section, we will focus on two different types of governance practices in the household: informal household rules on the one hand and strategies to handle situations of work-household conflict on the other.

3. 'Household Governance': The Concept

The approach taken here starts with the assumption that spouses are in a situation of shared production. They are interested to achieve desired goals (like joint activities with each other, a career of one or both spouses, or having a family life) by cooperating with each other. In order to guarantee the achievement of such goals, spouses have an interest to prevent unfavorable impacts from the household's environment or unfavorable behavior of the other spouse. There are at least two sources for such threats to successful cooperation. First, spouses can have problems to arrange and integrate the separated activities in an efficient way (coordination problem). Second, they might have conflicting ideas about the desired 'product' itself and the time investment that is required from each spouse (cooperation problem).

In order to avoid possible hazards to household production or their relationship, household members can employ means to regulate their behavior on a day-to-day basis. The choice for a particular earner type (like the breadwinner model or dual earner ship) can be interpreted as a fundamental agreement of spouses with regard to responsibilities and priorities in the household which they impose on themselves (Moen & Sweet, 2003: 18). Given this basic arrangement, there remains a varying demand to govern the daily distribution of tasks by informal rules about the division and coordination of tasks and by strategies to avoid or handle interpersonal conflicts. We define household governance as the combination of such rules and conflict-handling strategies.

Informal household rules

Informal rules (norms) are one possible solution to cooperation and coordination problems between interdependent actors (see Thibaut & Kelly, 1959; Lindenberg, 1997). In order to guarantee that there is sufficient time for unpaid work and joint activities, spouses can make agreements about (a) the required time investment of each spouse, (b) the quality of desired outcomes, and (c) the coordination of the various activities. These three basic claims of household governance - quantity, quality, and coordination of activities - can also be found in the sociological household studies mentioned earlier (Gill, 1998; Jürgens, 2000; Perlow, 1998; Van der Vinne, 1998). Based on the findings of these studies, we distinguish four different types of informal household rules.

1. *Time claims*: To what extent do informal household rules claim a high investment into domestic activities from an actor?
2. *Quality standards*: To what extent do informal household rules claim high quality standards for domestic activities from an actor?
3. *Fixed responsibilities*: To what extent do informal household rules fix responsibilities for domestic activities for an actor?
4. *Fixed times*: To what extent do informal household rules claim fixed times for the performance of domestic activities?

For want of space, this article focuses on only two of these four kinds of rules: time claims and fixed times. Both rules aim to govern the boundaries and moments for paid and unpaid work. The more a household makes use of such rules, the more it establishes incentives for the daily time allocation of the spouses: We assume that conform-

ing to rules will be rewarded by the other spouse, while deviating from given rules is likely to cause negative sanctions. As a consequence, employees who are sharing rules with the partner will have an additional incentive to engage in domestic activities. When they work for pay they can easily come in a situation of competing demands and loyalties between the work and the household sphere. Their behavior in such a dilemma will not only depend on household rules but also on the strategies that are used by the spouse in order to resist respectively support high employer demands.

Conflict-handling strategies

Even the best rules and agreements are not able to prevent any kind of conflict of interest between spouses. Next to household rules, conflict-handling strategies therefore form a second important element of household governance. Here, we focus on strategies that are used in the household to handle time-based interpersonal work-household conflict: How do the spouses handle situations of competing employer and household demands?

A fruitful theoretical heuristic for modeling the use of conflict-handling strategies is the 'dual-concern model' (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993: 104-107; Janssen & Van de Vliert, 1996: 101-103). It assumes that the choice of a conflict-handling strategy is determined by two types of motivations: the degree of self concern and the degree of other concern. An individual will score high on both dimensions in situations of high interdependence with others, where both actors are interested in maintaining a functioning long-term relationship.

The 'dual-concern model' distinguishes five major conflict-handling strategies (Janssen & Van de Vliert, 1996: 101-102):

1. *Accommodating*: Reducing ones goal and giving in to the other party's goal.
2. *Compromising*: Reducing ones goal when the other party is doing so, too.
3. *Problem solving*: Trying to find a solution that matches both parties' goals.
4. *Avoiding*: Doing nothing (or as little as possible) to resolve the conflict.
5. *Forcing*: Trying to persuade the other party to reduce his or her goal.

Following the idea of household governance, we are first of all interested in strategies that are used by a spouse in order to resist high employer demands (overtime) that are imposed on his or her employed partner. A spouse, who resists the wish of an employee to comply to high employer demands (overtime), will at least complicate the goal achievement of this employee and increase the likelihood that he or she does not invest extra time into paid work. We assume that the spouses' resistance is low when he or she handles work-household conflict by '*accommodating*' or '*problem solving*'. In both cases the goal of the employee (working overtime) is not at question. Resistance will be somewhat higher when the spouse uses '*compromising*', since this conflict strategy claims at least partly concessions from the employee (working less overtime). In our opinion, resistance will be high when the spouse handles work-household conflict by '*forcing*'. In this case, the spouse is not willing to make any concessions and wants the employee to give in (not working overtime). The role of '*avoiding*' is hard to predict. It strongly depends on the conflict context. On the one hand, '*avoiding*' can express indifference of the spouse. In this case resistance would be rather low. On the other hand, '*avoiding*' can be a powerful strategy to repel attempts of the other party to change the status quo (Kluwer, 1998). In this respect, '*avoiding*' would complicate the goal achievement of the employee (Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993).

Given the outlined concept of household governance, the question raises to what extent and in which way households differ in the use of these governance practices. In the following we will present data on variations in informal household rules and conflict-handling strategies among Dutch households.

4. Differences in Governance Practices among Dutch Households

In this section we will firstly present a brief overview on our dataset and variables (4.1). Secondly, we will give an impression of empirical variations in governance practices among Dutch households (4.2). In the next section (5.) we will explore how these variations are related to key job and household characteristics.

4.1 Research design and operationalization

The analysis is based on a sample of 809 Dutch cohabiting employees and their spouses (Time Competition Survey). The data were collected in 2002/3 by the integrated research project 'Time Competition' carried out at the Universities of Utrecht and Groningen. Employees have been selected via 30 Dutch companies. In this respect the dataset is not representative for the Dutch population. The employees and their spouses were interviewed (separately) at home. In total 468 male and 351 female employees participated in our survey. The interviews were based on a standardized questionnaire. They contain a scenario for work-household conflict and a pre-coded time-use diary for one week.

Informal household rules

In the interviews, the employees and their spouses could indicate to what extent they are using household rules, which claim time or fixed moments for the performance of domestic activities.

Time claims were measured by four items that were asked to the employee: 'If you think about the situation of your household, do you have agreements with your partner...' a) 'not to work in the evening', b) 'not to work in the weekend', c) 'to be in time for dinner', d) 'not to be away all evenings'. For each item the respondents could answer with 'yes', 'not really', or 'no'.³

Fixed times (routines) were measured by four items asked to the employee: 'Are you doing the following activities on fixed moments? For example, a particular day and time for going to the supermarket?' a) 'shopping', b) 'cleaning', c) 'having dinner together', d) 'spending time together or with the family'. The answer categories were 'never', 'sometimes', 'regularly', 'often', 'always'.⁴

In order to get an idea to what extent these agreements are 'respected' by the employee, we also take into account the frequency of rule deviation. Rule deviation was measured by the following question that was asked to the partner: 'How often does it happen that your partner...' a) 'cancels an appointment you had together', b) 'comes home too late for dinner', c) 'can not do the household tasks that were agreed'. The

3 Cronbach's alpha for the resulting scale is 0,70.

4 Cronbach's alpha for the resulting scale is 0,62.

answer categories were: 'almost every day', 'one time or a few times per week', 'one time or a few times per month', 'a few times per year or less'.⁵

Conflict-handling strategies

In order to investigate how spouses handle situations of work-household conflict we used a scenario for work-household conflict. The employee and the spouse indicated independently from each other their reactions to the following situation: 'You have a dinner appointment with your partner for the next week. But suddenly it turns out that you have to work overtime on that evening. Your partner is very interested to have this dinner together with you, but you would prefer to work. What would you do in such a situation?' We are quite aware of the fact that this particular conflict situation ('time for work' versus 'time for each other') is not representative for the various conflicts that use to occur in households. A more exhaustive measurement of conflict handling would have to work with a number of scenarios that would take into account additional conflict issues like 'time for children' or 'time for household tasks'. However, we assume that our scenario brings to light characteristic differences in conflict handling among households. Moreover, the scenario that was chosen by us stands for a rather moderate conflict situation. Consequently, the reactions of the partners are less sensitive to socially desirable answers (as it would be the case when it was about 'time for children') and the partners cannot easily escape the conflict by using help from third parties (outsourcing of tasks).

The different answer categories were taken from Janssen's and Van de Vliert's operationalization of conflict handling. The respondents indicated on a number of five-point scales to what extent they would use each of the five conflict-handling strategies: 'forcing', 'accommodating', 'problem solving', 'compromising', and 'avoiding'. Each strategy was measured by four items (for the list of items see Janssen and van de Vliert, 1996). The result was a 20-point scale for each strategy. A score of 13 or higher indicates that the respondent is using this strategy. Each of the five scales has a Cronbach's alpha of at least 0,70.

Furthermore we take into account the frequency of work-household conflicts in the household. Therefore we asked the following question to the partner of the employee. 'How often do you have conflicts with your partner about the division of tasks in the household?' The answer categories were: 'almost every day', 'one time or a few times per week', 'one time or a few times per month', 'a few times per year or less'.

4.2 Empirical variations in household rules and conflict-handling strategies

In this section we investigate empirical differences in the governance practices of cohabiting couples. The question to be examined is: to what extent do the employees in our sample show differences with regard to the degree of regulation of household activities by informal household rules and the conflict behavior (resistance) of their partner in situations of work-household conflict?

5 These categories resulted into a rather weak scale with an Cronbach's alpha of 0,50.

Variation in household rules

The fact that time routines are widespread among Dutch households (SCP, 2003: 140) is also confirmed for our sample. Two out of three employees have fixed dinner times with the partner or their family. Half of the employees in our sample report to have fixed moments for spending time with the partner or family, or to have fixed shopping times. Compared to these three activities, cleaning (the house) is less often performed on fixed times. Only a quarter of the employees has fixed moments for cleaning.

Table 1: Households with fixed times (routines) for different activities (in %)

'Often or always doing things on fixed times (time routines)...'

having dinner together (with partner or family)	65
spending time together (with partner or family)	49
shopping	47
cleaning	23

(n=809)

A considerable number of households in our sample combine several of the four time routines. 30% of the employees have fixed times for at least three of the four mentioned activities, another 29% have fixed times for two of the four mentioned activities. Only 17% are not using any of the four time routines.

Agreements with the spouse to have sufficient time for domestic activities (time claims) are less common in our sample. One out of three employees has a clear agreement with the spouse to be in time for dinner or not to be away all evenings. Only a minority of the employees reports to have agreements not to work on weekends or on evenings.

Table 2: Households having clear agreements for different activities (in%)

'Having a clear agreement with the partner...'

to be in time for dinner	37
not to be away all evenings	33
not to work in the weekend	10
not to work in the evening	8

(n=809)

Almost 50% of the households do not have any of the four mentioned agreements. More than a quarter reports to use only one of them, while only a minority has two (16%) or even three (8%) of the mentioned four agreements.

One third of the partners in our sample report to have at least once a month a discussion with the employee about the division of tasks in the household. The same number reports that the employee is once a month (or even more frequent) not doing the domestic tasks that were agreed. In almost 30% of the households the employee is at least once a month coming too late or not coming at all for dinner. Only a minority of

the spouses reports that the employee is regularly calling off appointments or not able to look after the children.

Table 3: Households where the employee is deviating from agreements (in %)

‘At least once a month...’

not doing the household tasks that were agreed	34
coming too late (or not at all) for dinner	29
calling off an appointment with the spouse	10

(n=809)

not able to take care of the children	14
---------------------------------------	----

(n=464) only employees with children (living at home)

The combination of the first three items gives us an idea of the total size of rule deviation in the investigated households. It turns out that in the majority of the households (52%) agreements are for the most part respected by the employee, while in more than 20% of the households two out of three agreements are regularly violated by the employee.

Variations in conflict-handling strategies

In our scenario for work-household conflict, where the employee intends to work overtime, while the partner wants him or her to stick to a joint dinner appointment, the majority of the spouses are willing to accept the wish of the employee. The two most cooperative conflict handling strategies (low resistance) – ‘accommodating’ and ‘problem solving’ – are chosen by 41% and 71% of the partners. Since the partner can combine different strategies at the same time the percentages do not have to sum up to hundred percent. Soft resistance by ‘compromising’ would be exercised by 41% of the respondents, while only a minority of spouses would try to hold their ground (strong resistance) by using ‘forcing’ (10%). This share is even smaller than the percentage of respondents that would avoid a confrontation and do nothing to solve the conflict (‘avoiding’).

Table 4: Conflict-handling strategies used by the partner (in %)

Handling of work-household conflict by...

problem solving	71
compromising	41
accommodating	41
avoiding	16
forcing	10

(n=809)

When we take into account combinations of strategies we see that the use of ‘problem solving’ plus ‘compromising’ is the most frequent combination (21%), followed by

(solely) 'problem solving' (14%), 'problem solving' plus 'accommodating' (13%), and (solely) 'accommodating' (10%). In total, these four patterns of conflict handling 'cover' almost 60% of the existing combinations reported by the partners. And again, we see that cooperative forms of conflict handling are dominant. This clearly indicates that the majority of the partners have high concern for the wish of their employed partners to work overtime.

5. Explaining Differences in ‘Household Governance’ by Household and Job Influences

The variation in household governance that we found for our sample confirms that households differ considerably in the way they try to govern the boundaries between paid and unpaid work. In this section, we explore to what degree key job and household characteristics can explain these differences in household governance.

5.1 Expected impacts of household and job characteristics

Basically, we expect that a high demand to regulate household activities (due to the household situation) will increase the spouses’ need for governance practices, while external constraints (due to the job) will restrict the opportunities for households to apply governance practices. Accordingly, we can derive two basic hypotheses.

Firstly, the presence of household rules and higher resistance in situations of work-household conflict can be interpreted as a reaction to a high demand to regulate household activities (*regulation demands*) given by the household situation (e.g. presence of children or dual-earner ship). Thus, we expect that they will increase the need to regulate household time allocation by institutionalized agreements and lead to higher resistance of the spouse towards unexpected employer demands.

Hypothesis 1.1: The higher the demand in the household to regulate activities of paid and unpaid work, the more the household will use informal household rules.

Hypothesis 1.2: The higher the demand in the household to regulate activities of paid and unpaid work, the more the spouse will resist high employer demands (imposed on the employee) in situations of work-household conflict.

Secondly, the household environment (first of all the job) can establish *restrictions* (e.g. unpredictable work schedules), which complicate the use of household rules and make it difficult for an employee to refuse high employer demands. The stronger these restrictions, the more difficult it is for the spouses to regulate household time allocation by informal rules and the less it will be possible for the partner to resist high employer demands (imposed on the employee).

Hypothesis 2.1: The more limited the opportunities of the household to regulate activities of paid and unpaid work (due to job restrictions), the less the household will use informal household rules.

Hypothesis 2.2: The more limited the opportunities of the household to regulate activities of paid and unpaid work (due to job restrictions), the less the spouse will resist high employer demands (imposed on the employee) in situations of work-household conflict.

In order to test these hypotheses, we focus on a number of key household and job characteristics that are likely to increase the *regulation demands* respectively restrict the *regulation opportunities* in the household.

High regulation demands due to the household situation

Regulation demands emerge from the composition and circumstances of the household. Two factors will play a major role as a determinant of household governance: the earner profile of the household and further household characteristics like the presence of children or the duration of the relationship. With regard to the earner type we distinguish four different earner types according to the contractual hours of the spouses: breadwinner households (15%), one-and-a-half earners (54%), dual-earners (22%), and half-and-half earners (9%). The boundaries between these types are: 33 hours per week (or more) for a fulltime position, less than 33 and more than 7 hours per week for a part-time position, and 7 hours or less for 'not working'. The category of the one-and-a-half earners was split up in one-and-a-half earners (I) with the employee working fulltime and the partner working part-time (31%), and one-and-a-half earners (II) with the partner working fulltime and the employee working part-time (23%). Moreover we controlled for sex and the highest educational degree of the employee.

As mentioned above, the choice for a particular earner model can be interpreted as a fundamental agreement about the division of paid and unpaid work in the household. This choice is of great importance for the regulation demands in the household. While the breadwinner model is already representing a clear agreement on the division of paid and unpaid work in the household, responsibilities and priorities are less clear in households with two working partners. Furthermore, these households have to cope with competing demands from two jobs and will therefore face a higher demand to prevent conflicts and to govern the daily distribution of tasks by additional agreements. Thus, we expect that households with two working partners will (a) employ more agreements (time claims) and fixed moments (routines) for domestic activities, and (b) show more resistance (of the partner) in situations of work-household conflict.

Furthermore, we expect that the regulation demands in the household will depend on the following three household characteristics:

- The *presence of children*: Childcare is time intensive and requires a high degree of reliability. As a consequence, we would expect that households with children will have more rules and show more resistance (of the partner) towards high employer demands.
- The *duration of living together in a household*: It takes time to figure out an efficient way of governing the daily distribution of tasks in the household. As a consequence, we expect that spouses, who share a household for a long time, will have more household rules at their disposal and will have less reason to execute control (resistance) in situations of work-household conflict.
- *Expectation of sharing a household in the future*: When the spouses have established their relationship by marriage they are more secure about a joint future. Thus, they will be more willing to institutionalize their daily activities by household rules. In order to maintain a good relationship in the future they will be more willing to solve conflicts by cooperative conflict-handling strategies.

The analysis takes into account possible interaction effects. Because regulation demands are in general higher in households where both partners are working we expect that the mentioned three household characteristics will have a higher impact in two-earner households than in breadwinner households (interaction effect). Furthermore, we control for sex and the highest educational degree of the employee.

Restricted regulation opportunities due to job constraints

The type of job that one or both partners are doing forms an important constraint for the household. The following three job characteristics will be a restriction to the use of household rules and resistance (of the partner) in situations of work-household conflict: *a high demand for overtime, irregular working hours, and low time autonomy*⁶.

A job that has one or more of these characteristics will make it more difficult for the spouses to stick to agreements on domestic activities. As a consequence, we expect that such households will have less household rules and apply a more flexible modus of time allocation. For the use of conflict-handling strategies we would expect a twofold pattern. The more demanding the job of the employee the more difficult it is to stick to agreements with the spouse. As a consequence, we expect that the spouse will be less inclined to resist to high employer demands (imposed on the employee). If the spouse has a demanding job it is more difficult to compensate deviating behavior of the employee. Thus, we expect that the partner will to a higher extent resist in work-household conflicts.

Here again, we expect that the mentioned job characteristics have a higher effect on households where both partners work. These households are assumed to face a general higher level of regulation demands. As a consequence, restrictive job characteristics will be decisive for the opportunities of these households to cope with these demands by using household rules and resistance towards high employer demands (interaction effect).

5.2 Analysis: Effects of household and job characteristics

Analyzing variation in household rules

In order to evaluate to what extent the presence of household rules is influenced by job and household characteristics we summarized the use of agreements (time claims) and fixed moments for domestic activities in one construct for the presence of household rules. This new variable consists of eight items and has an alpha of 0,65. A separate factor analysis confirms that this variable provides a good measurement for the presence of rules in the household. By means of a linear regression analysis we investigated in which way the presence of household rules is related to household and job characteristics. According to our expectations, the choice for a particular earner model plays a crucial role for the control demands in the household. Therefore, we do not only look at main effects of the selected household and job characteristics, but also investigate their effects for the five different earner types (interaction effects). Since we have to cope with a rather large number of interaction effects we will only report significant interactions (see table 5). Interaction effects that are not contained in the tables are not significant.

6 *High job demands* are measured on a five-point-scale by the frequency of overwork by colleagues in a similar function. 'How often does it happen that colleagues in similar functions in your department work overtime on evenings and in the weekend?' *Irregular working hours* are measured by the question: 'Do your workdays usually end on the same time?' *Working time autonomy* was measured on a five-point scale by the following question: 'Who determines mostly the begin- and end times of your work: Is it you or someone else?'

The linear regression analysis shows (see table 5, column 1) that only ten percent of the variance is explained by the selected household and job characteristics (plus control variables for sex and education). However, the F values confirm that the model fits the structure of the data and a number of the expected effects are significant.

Surprisingly, the earner type of the household has no direct influence on the presence of household rules. This result does not support *hypothesis 1.1* respectively does not confirm a positive relationship between high regulation demands and a high presence of household rules. Apparently, the use of agreements and fixed moments for domestic activities does not depend on the earner model of the household and the resulting regulation demands. Neither is there a significant direct effect of children, marital status, and the duration of the household. Household circumstances and the resulting control demands do not have an effect on the use of household rules. In this respect, the presence of household rules seems to be more a question of different household styles, preferences, and skills than a result of high control demands due to household circumstances. That personal characteristics matter here is also indicated by the fact that higher educated employees are to higher extent reporting to have rules in the household.

Several job characteristics have a significant impact on the presence of household rules. When the employee has a job with irregular daily working hours it becomes more difficult for the partners to apply household rules. This partly supports *hypothesis 2.1* respectively confirms a positive relationship between good regulation opportunities and a higher presence of household rules. The effects of a high demand for overtime and high time autonomy differ with the earner type of the household (interaction effect). Compared to breadwinner households, households with two working partners use more household rules when the job demands a lot of overtime. Breadwinner households already have a clear and simple agreement about the division of paid and unpaid work in the household. As a consequence, they need fewer rules when the job of the employee demands a lot of overtime. In households where the partners have to cope with competing demands from two jobs, a high demand for overtime is increasing the need to regulate daily time allocation by further rules.

While breadwinner households use more household rules when the employee has a high degree of time autonomy, households with two working partners just do the opposite and use fewer rules. Apparently, breadwinner households are more likely to use their time autonomy for regulating daily activities by routines and fixed agreements. In households with two working partners, where control demands are in general higher, time autonomy seems to ease the combination of paid and unpaid work. Consequently, the partners use fewer rules and choose for a more flexible modus of decision making.

Analyzing variations in conflict handling

The analysis shows that all selected household characteristics and a number of job characteristics have significant effects on the conflict handling pattern of the partner (see table 5, columns 2-6).

The use of conflict-handling strategies by the partner is clearly affected by the duration of the household. 'Young' households are to a higher extent facing a demand to cope with conflicts (more 'problem solving', less 'avoiding') and resist to unexpected employer demands (more 'compromising' and 'forcing'). This pattern is in line with our expectations.

Table 5: Linear regression analysis: effects of household and job characteristics on the use of household rules and conflict-handling strategies

	Household rules	Accommodating	Problem solving	Compromising	Avoiding	Forcing
Earners type^a						
Dual earners	0,204	-0,258*	0,048	0,037	-0,034	0,096
One-and-a-half earners I (employee fulltime)	0,190	-0,271	0,166	0,048	-0,078	0,058
One-and-a-half earners II (partner fulltime)	-0,014	-0,218	0,139	-0,028	-0,075	0,060
Half-and-half earners	0,211	-0,215	0,153	0,016	-0,080	0,075
<i>Household characteristics</i>						
Children	0,017	-0,216*	0,027	0,034	0,028	0,025
Duration of the household	0,011	-0,021	-0,121**	-0,107*	0,108*	-0,118**
Married	0,027	-0,113	0,445**	0,018	-0,053	0,006
<i>Personal characteristics</i>						
Sex employee (female) ^b	0,019	0,267**	-0,091	-0,189**	0,154**	-0,141**
Educational degree employee	0,126**	0,038	0,028	-0,039	-0,062	-0,031
<i>Job characteristics</i>						
High demand for overtime (employee)	-0,228**	0,032	0,038	0,040	0,003	-0,005
High demand for overtime (partner)	0,013	0,053	-0,030	-0,043	-0,034	-0,043
Irregular working hours (employee)	-0,193**	0,057	-0,249**	-0,097**	-0,032	-0,063
Irregular working hours (partner)	0,015	-0,038	-0,035	0,001	-0,004	0,021
High influence on working times (employee)	0,286**	-0,002	-0,011	0,012	0,018	-0,009
High influence on working times (partner)	0,090*	0,053	0,037	0,003	-0,003	-0,033
<i>Interaction: earners type * high demand for overtime (employee)</i>						
Dual earners* high demand for overtime (employee)	0,053	.	.	.	.	.
One-and-a-half earners I* high demand for overtime (employee)	0,201	.	.	.	.	.
One-and-a-half earners II* high demand for overtime (employee)	0,258*	.	.	.	.	.
Half-and-half earners* high demand for overtime (employee)	0,237*	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Interaction: earners type * high influence on working times (employee)</i>						
Dual earners* high influence on working times (employee)	-0,308*	.	.	.	.	.

	Household rules	Accommodating	Problem solving	Compromising	Avoiding	Forcing
One-and-a-half earners I* high influence on working times (employee)	-0,399**	.	.	.	.	.
One-and-a-half earners II* high influence on working times (employee)	-0,160	.	.	.	.	.
Half-and-half earners* high influence on working times (employee)	-0,350**	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Interaction: earner type * children</i>						
Dual earners* children	.	0,145*	.	.	.	.
One-and-a-half earners I* children	.	0,210	.	.	.	.
One-and-a-half earners II* children	.	0,135	.	.	.	.
Half-and-half earners* children	.	0,045	.	.	.	.
<i>Interaction: earner type * married</i>						
Dual earners* married	.	0,010	-0,204*	.	.	.
One-and-a-half earners I* married	.	0,106	-0,391**	.	.	.
One-and-a-half earners II* married	.	0,094	-0,371**	.	.	.
Half-and-half earners* married	.	0,191*	-0,280**	.	.	.
<i>Interaction: earner type * irregular working hours (employee)</i>						
Dual earners* irregular working hours (employee)	.	.	0,284*	.	.	.
One-and-a-half earners I* irregular working hours (employee)	.	.	0,270*	.	.	.
One-and-a-half earners II* irregular working hours (employee)	.	.	0,204*	.	.	.
Half-and-half earners* irregular working hours (employee)	.	.	0,107	.	.	.
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	0,100	0,067	0,030	0,056	0,026	0,024
F	4,787**	3,325**	2,014**	3,938**	2,332**	2,208**
n	786	744	746	745	741	746

^a Reference category: one earner household (breadwinner).

^b The partner is male, with the exception of 24 gay couples.

* p < 0,05, ** p < 0,01.

Source: Time Competition Survey, 2003

When both spouses are working, the partner is to a lower extent 'accommodating' than partners in breadwinner households. Competing demands of two jobs are apparently reducing the willingness to make concessions in work-household conflicts. This confirms our expectations, although we do not find any significant positive effects for a higher level of resistance towards unexpected employer demands (like 'compromising' or 'forcing'). Furthermore there are no significant differences among households with two working partners.

The partner is to a lower extent 'accommodating' in work-household conflict when children are present in the household. As expected, children are increasing the control demands in the household and reduce the willingness of the partner to comply with unexpected employer demands. Contrary to our expectations, the combination of two jobs and children (interaction effect) does not lead to higher control demands and the use of stricter conflict-handling strategies.

Married partners are to a higher degree reacting to high work demands by 'problem solving'. This relationship is particularly strong for breadwinner households (interaction effect). Again we find our expectation confirmed that partners who expect their relationship to endure have a higher interest to solve conflicts in a way that does not harm their relationship ('problem solving'). Married partners in breadwinner households have a stronger interest to find such a solution than married partners in other households. This is surprising at first glance but probably resulting from the fact that married couples in the breadwinner model represent the traditional way of sharing a household where a lifelong relationship forms an important element. Summing up, there is quite some evidence for *hypothesis 1.2* respectively for a positive relationship between high regulation demands on the one hand and more resistance of the partner towards unexpected work demands on the other.

Among the selected job characteristics we only find an effect for irregular working hours. Thus, *hypothesis 2.2* on the positive relationship between restricted regulation opportunities on the one hand and less (room for) resistance of the partner on the other is only partly confirmed by our data. When the employee works irregular hours, the partner's resistance towards unexpected employer demands decreases. In line with our expectations, a job with irregular hours constrains the opportunities of the household to avert unexpected employer demands (less 'compromising').

Furthermore, we find a strong influence of the spouse's sex. Male partners are more willing to make concessions to the wish of their employed wife to work overtime ('accommodating') than do female partners with their employed husbands. Compared to female partners, male partners show less resistance in work household-conflicts (less 'compromising' and 'forcing') and rather try to avoid a conflict. In order to assess whether this difference is caused by the particular conflict issue – having dinner together – we also looked at the conflict-handling patterns of the employees. According to the situation sketched in the scenario, the employees strive for overtime (while the partner wants to have dinner together). But again we found that male employees are more willing to avoid a confrontation and to make concessions to the wish of their wives to have dinner together, while female employees are to a higher extent claiming concessions from their husbands ('compromising').

6. Conclusions and Discussion

This article introduced the concept of household governance and investigated empirical differences in the way cohabiting partners are combining the demands from paid and unpaid work. Our approach emphasizes informal household rules and conflict-handling strategies as important means of households to 'govern' daily time allocation.

The analysis of a sample of 809 Dutch cohabiting couples shows considerable variation in the way households attempt to govern the boundaries between paid and unpaid work. The empirical results warrant the conclusion that research on time allocation, labor supply and work-life balance has to gain a lot from paying closer attention to the determinants and consequences of governance practices in the household. It is quite evident that different governance practices of households have an impact on the availability and flexibility of employees for demands of paid and unpaid work. A considerable number of employees is confronted with rules for the daily time allocation in the household in terms of agreements and fixed times for the performance of domestic activities. Likewise, many of them also have to face strict conflict-handling strategies which their partners use to prevent or sanction deviations from these rules. Although the analysis showed that cooperative strategies prevail in our sample, a significant number of spouses actively resist high employer demands (overtime). By taking into account differences in these governance practices we might thus identify important additional restrictions, which moderate - support or restrict - impacts of organizational control or institutional regulations on the labor supply of employees.

Moreover, the data show that the type of household governance is shaped by a number of household and job characteristics. Originally, we expected that the earner type of the household (dual-earner ship) and other household characteristics (like the presence of children) would increase the household's demand to regulate household activities by informal rules and increase the partner's resistance in situations of work-household conflict. For the impact of job characteristics we expected that restrictive job circumstances of employees (like a high demand for overtime) would complicate the use of informal rules in the household and reduce the partner's resistance in situations in work-household conflict. Our analysis shows that this basic model is in some respects too simple. It turned out that the impact of household and job characteristics on governance practices of households is of a more complex nature. Based on our analysis we can draw four main conclusions:

1. *The household and job situation does not account for much of the variation in governance practices of households.*

Whether spouses attempt to regulate household activities by informal rules and whether they resist unexpected employer demands (overtime) is only to a limited extent influenced by the given household and job situation. The selected household and job characteristics do not explain much of the total variation in informal household rules and the conflict behavior (resistance) of the partner. Thus, there might be evidence that the spouses' choice of governance practices in the household is rather influenced by individual dispositions, preferences or capabilities (e.g. educational degree) than by household and job circumstances. If this holds true, varying governance practices of households constitute a rather independent factor that could account for variations in

time allocation patterns of employees independently from the given household and job context. However, though the explained variance is low, we do find empirical evidence for influences of household and job characteristics.

2. *Differences in household governance do not simply depend on the household situation or the job situation but on the interplay of the household and job situation.*

The selected household characteristics do not have a direct impact on the presence of informal rules in the household. Neither do they account for much of the given variation in conflict handling: only when the partners have children or when they are not yet living together for a long time, the partner's resistance towards unexpected employer demands (overtime) is stronger. Yet, whether or not spouses react to unfavorable job circumstances by strong regulation of household activities (informal rules) strongly depends on their earner model. When both spouses are working, regulation demands in the household are in general higher. A job with a high demand for overtime is making the combination of paid and unpaid work even more difficult in these households. As a consequence (and in contrast to breadwinner households), spouses in two-earner households increase the regulation of household activities by informal rules.

A high degree of time autonomy on the other hand helps to cope with demands from two jobs and makes household rules less important. In breadwinner households, where the distribution of responsibilities for paid and unpaid work is rather simple and clear, restrictive job circumstances do not increase the need for more household rules. Nor do these households refrain from household rules when they have a high degree of time autonomy.

3. *Job constraints are not only a restriction to governance practices in the household; they also increase the need for stronger regulation of household activities by informal rules.*

The interplay of household and job characteristics that we found for our sample also changes our view on the role and impacts of job constraints. Originally, we expected that job characteristics of the spouses will constitute important constraints for the use of rules and conflict-handling strategies in the household (regulation opportunities). This was only confirmed for irregular working hours. Irregular working hours restrict the use of household rules and make it less likely that the partner resists to unexpected employer demands (overtime). A low degree of time autonomy and a high demand for overtime do not have such a restrictive effect. In two-earner households, where regulation demands are in general higher, a high demand for overtime is even increasing the need to regulate household activities by informal rules. These households react to high employer demands with a higher degree of regulation. The same holds for a low degree of time autonomy. When time autonomy is low, two-earner households use more informal rules for the distribution of household activities; when time autonomy is high, they tend to refrain from household rules and choose a more flexible modus of distributing activities in the household.

4. *Considerable gender differences in conflict-handling: Stronger resistance of female employees in work-household conflicts; more accommodating and avoiding of male employees.*

The conflict behavior in the household strongly depends on the sex of the spouse. Male spouses are more likely to accept the wish of their employed wives to work overtime

and to avoid a confrontation. Female spouses are to a higher extent claiming concessions from their employed husbands. This calls for an explanation. Since we know that women usually spend considerably more time on unpaid work and less time on paid work, they might be more sensitive to attempts of their husbands to strengthen this unequal division of work in the household. Furthermore, our data show that men deviate more often from agreements over domestic activities. In this respect, the conflict behavior of female partners might also be a reaction to frequent rule deviations of their employed husbands. Apparently, men are quite aware of this fact, too. On the one hand, they are not willing to intensify the unequal division of work in the household and concede in situations of work-household conflict. On the other hand, men handle work-household conflicts to a higher extent by avoidance strategies. We know from existing negotiation research that avoidance strategies can be powerful means to defend the status quo of the unequal division of work in the household (Kluwer, 1998). In this respect, avoidance strategies used by the husbands might be an important restriction to a more equal division of work in the household.

Summing up, there is quite some evidence that household governance is a useful concept to investigate and explain differences in the way households combine paid and unpaid work. A fruitful next step in a research program on household governance would be to model to what extent variations in household governance affect time allocation patterns of employees. In this context the interaction of household governance with the job and household demands of spouses might offer a new explanation for variation in time-allocation patterns and perceived feelings of stress and time famine. It would at the same time raise the question whether and when governance practices in the household help spouses to realize their time preferences and under what conditions they rather constitute additional constraints and become a source for stress and time famine.

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