



# Working Parenthood: How to create a roadmap supporting challenges at the work floor

Sustainable Development Goals & Gender Equality and exchange of good practices

My name is Joyce Knappe, founder of Pro Parents; a Social Enterprise focused on bridging career and private life. We deliver parenting programs via employers to support working parents in a high performance environment.

## I am a child & parenthood therapist and a business and organizational anthropologist

SLIDE 1 text:

***no problem can be solved by the same level of consciousness that created it. We must learn to see anew***

I would like to start with something rector Dymph vd Boom said yesterday:

*"We need change- also bottom up change. Change does not only come from policy makers"; **my story is about both.***

And about my own EMPOWERMENT: making an identity shift from academia, being a **social policy analyst**, to being a **social entrepreneur**

I must warn you a bit: there's a famous line about organizational anthropologists:

**"Letting an anthropologists into your organization is like switching from black and white TV to Color TV instantly" it's a completely different view."**

So, we have made a two-generation program that supports soon to be parents and working parents at the work floor. We focus on health and wellbeing of both parents and child. We did this together with employers, parenthood experts, parents and the UvA.

### How did we end up doing so, and why?

We wanted to make such a program for years and years; since this is a lacuna in policy and practice. Ever since I started working in 1999 at the local Bureau Jeugdzorg.

I reasoned "why isn't there a course for parents?"

### Like getting your drivers license. Learn life skills. In this special intensive phase in life.

And I am not the only one who sees this lacuna in theory and practice for years. Several ministries and the Netherlands Youth institute have done research on the needs of young parents and there is an increase in our divorce rate. Especially couples with young children under the age of four.

And more or less by coincidence we happened to found out it was much easier to track attention from the business sector than it was to do so within our own healthcare sector. Not that we haven't tried. But the sector is going through big changes of decentralization in the Netherlands, so it is very



difficult to create something new, especially on the prevention side of health. Instead; there focus is - and off course needed - on the curative part.

But don't we all know that it is much more cost efficient and morally right if we start at preventing divorce and home violence? This starts with solid strong general prevention.

I don't mean in Dutch "vroeg signalering" detect early problems in a premature stage:

NO I mean invest in LIFE SKILLS

**From the perspective what parents need.**

Being a parent and having a baby starts at going to the midwife –who focuses on the belly

And direct after birth in the Netherlands, parents have "kraamzorg" –who focuses on nurturing/feeding and monitoring the growth of the baby.

**WE all know how to make a baby... who knows how parents are being made?**

Where do parents get their life skills? Like bridging career and private life. Does this come naturally?

Or is it true we should primarily focus on surroundings: RST Resources Services Time?

- Is this sustainable? Is this empowering people?-

In a minute I come back to the program and our case.

**First I would like to check if we have a good clear understanding on what it means to be a parent? And what life skills they need and what enables them to bridge career and private life?**

In order to really think about and understand what nice policies parents need; **-from us –the policy makers-** what can we do to enable them to have the work life they want?

**Because this is what we are working on these days: the Amsterdam Action Plan**

**With the ambition to enable parents to have the work life they want and empower both genders; so they can work, life and take care of their children.**

So, now in the end of these 2 days we need to **convince ourselves that we really know what parents need.** And to know what they need we need an in-depth understanding of what does it **truly mean to be a parent: and to work.**

What do there lives look like, what do they need? If we know this we can decide:



## How to make policies with impact!

### SLIDE 2 train

First let me take you back to my own experience being a working parent. And zoom in what it really and truly means to be in the shoes of a working parent? And in the end I come back to our case.

*It is December 2010 –holiday winter season-, my son is 1 and my daughter is 2- we are at the “spitsuur of our lives” a few days after ‘Sinterklaas’ and I am standing at a train station to go on the train to Paris. I am a policy analyst working on an international comparative research project on parenting policies and I am on my way to present the country report of the Netherlands I have been working on.*

*And I am not feeling OK, ‘Sinterklaas’ - worst time always for parents - kids are “mental” and my son has a fever and I am on the train station... **crying**. I call my husband:*

*“Look this is obviously not working, I feel so bad, our son is sick, I feel like a bad mother what on earth am I doing, why are we doing this to our selves? I am coming home, right now.”*

*My husband says to me; look you feel like ‘shit’, I know and you are exhausted because of this ‘Sinterklaas’, but why exactly do you want to come home? I said; “Because, Gilles is sick- and I am a child therapist and should know better, his ‘attachment’ at this age and so on”.*

*So, my husband says; look, for the record, your mom is with him, he has a fever yes, but he is sleeping... so if you come back, you will find him sleeping, ok? I know you feel bad, it will take an hour or so and in that time clear your head, by taking a breath, ok?”*

### Well what have we just learned?

What do we hear and feel? We hear struggle, with lives most difficult challenges –finding a new life rhythm being a young family; having a career.

We hear a proud and doubt strategy – I wanted to go and wanted to stay at the same time- this is identity trouble; my self-esteem is under fire;

who am I as A PERSON, what kind of a person am I???

And we **hear a supportive matrix**: practical help in childcare: my mom was with my son, taking care of his fever.

AND support from my partner: especially in terms of emotional wellbeing. And I had concerns about my son’s wellbeing and our relationship in terms of bonding. Does he still know I’m there for him.



SLIDE

## So in Dutch we say a “combinatieklem” is a mixture of so many levels

1. Self-esteem
2. Practical care arrangements for the child and
3. Emotional support and
4. Has a strong focus on both wellbeing of parent and
5. Wellbeing of the child
6. And the relationship of all interconnected attachments in the family

Renata referred yesterday to “stronger intergenerational bonds” revealing we are actually talking about emotional wellbeing of people.

**As promised: I would like to tell you what we discovered via one of our ‘cases’ developing this program for parents at the work floor.**

Make note that this today is a preliminary presentation: we have had about 120 parents in our program so far; in various group and individual pilots. The program has not yet been fully matured in terms of evidence based, but it has been build up based on scientific theory:

Now back to our case:

**We set up Public- Private collaboration together with Bain & Company summer of 2014: we surveyed the needs of parents and translated these into a one of our first pilots in February 2015.**

Bain is a strategy-consulting firm, with 50 offices worldwide it is a ‘High Performance Organization’ extreme working hours, high performance discourse, working abroad etc.

### SLIDE Bain survey

What I need to explain –and this is why I am very thankful for Bain- that we had such a difficult time to ‘crack the case’ of bridging career and private life.

**And we all know it still is- otherwise we would not have needed these two CONFERENCE days.**

Looking at these output from the survey; they did an analysis; and presented 6 slides with output

1. Age of the children
2. Employee position in the company
3. Struggle topics
4. Etc.



And we were sitting in a meeting and Bianca one of the partners said to me 'if we look at these slides from a employee perspective we could offer them a time management course and a "learn to say no course"; but what about feeling guilty?'

And we started looking at **the question behind that question** what does feeling guilty mean? And how can we approach this?

1. **Self-esteem** (notion of alarmed self- am I making the right choices)
2. **Practical care arrangements for the child** and (who has guidance over your child; how much and many do I want and need to allow others near my child?)
3. **Emotional support** and what does this mean in terms of trust?
4. Has a strong focus on both **wellbeing of parent** and (what do you need in order to feel good about yourself)
5. **Wellbeing of the child** (is it save, in trusted guidance you can rely on?)

What do we see: a lot of complex emotions of being a parent. An ambiguous vulnerable mixture of being a parent trying the bridge career and private life

So what we did at Bain & Company we have changed perspective:

We questioned: what does a working parent look like?

#### SLIDE SOLDAAT

This is what a working parent looks like: it does not apply to all.

But still: the notion of not being there, in crucial times of life. Make note these circumstances influence all stakeholders on the level of health and wellbeing: the father, the mother, their child, the field operation of the father, his colleagues, and their mission.

So we looked further:

First: let's have a look at the definition of Parenthood by van der Pas:

A PARENT IS A PERSON WITH **AN AWARENESS OF BEING UNCONDITIONALLY AND PERMANENTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR A CHILD**

#### Our **KEY LEARNING I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU IS THIS:**

**The importance of narratives, framing the discourse use of words to give meaning to our ambition.**

**Having a clear perspective when it comes to work life balance for parents is crucial!!**

**Look because:**

#### SLIDE PERSPECTIVE

**This is one of my key learnings I want to share with you today:**

LET'S TOGETHER CHANGE PERSPECTIVES and discover where our narratives lead us:



**Parenthood:** is not a role, but a lifelong 24/7 ethical relationship. It's permanent; it doesn't cease if the child is not there (daycare, sleepover, adopted, grown up).

**Child rearing:** is a role, which can and must be taken by multiple people (teacher, babysitter, grandparents).

**Employee:** role and function tied, not 24/7 ON/OFF occupational/professional development linked with identity (who you are).

**Gender:** not a role, but a 24/7 lifelong social construction/ position.

Permanent, self-image, linked with role expectations and preferences

We can talk about the same subject in so many ways and still think we are talking about the same and –if we don't look out- have a complete different understanding: in Dutch we say: "communicatie is zo dicht mogelijk langs elkaar heen praten."

### **SLIDE** new idea's

My recommendations based on our learning's I would like to share with you:

First; mentioned yesterday several times: the need for REFRAMING and change perspective:

1. Reframe that we are actually talking about **HEALTH and HAPPYNESS**: we have learned yesterday about the strong correlation between health of the baby and the length of maternity leave and today I would like to add the importance of **enabling the parent to feel happy and healthy**
2. Second suggestion to frame the health and happiness ambitions of the SDG's in **concrete outcome's like the RETURN ON INVESTMENT when we invest** in health- like the HEALTHY LIFE YEARS rapport suggests or in Dutch we say "rendement van geluk"

### **SLIDE** Healthy Life years

I would like to finish with one last notion:

Annabel Crabb mentioned in her book:

**"The obligation that working parents FEEL is precisely this:**

The sense that you need to perform at work as if you do not have kids, while at the same time having the feeling that you need to raise your children as if you do not have a job."

I hereby would like to finish with my last statement:

**SLIDE** Working Parenthood is not a gender Issue; because work life balance for parents has only very little to do with gender equality



My concrete recommendations on what needs to be done when we leave this conference are the following three:

1. **Look at the question behind the question:** working parenthood is a **sense making process**. **People seek to find purpose and meaning** in order to work, live and take care of their children and live happily ever after. Working Parenthood needs to be addressed as such: it is gender neutral.
2. We need policy making that focuses BOTH on RST Resources Services Time AND on programs that EMPOWER people: prepare new couples at transition to parenthood and working parents seek to reflect on the choices they are facing. And live happy and healthy lives. We have an **Empathy Deficit** so there is a need to invests and enable programs that Empowers People!
3. Embrace the circular economy: where both policy making and grassroots initiatives of social entrepreneurs can strengthen the true innovation.

**Thank you for your attention.**