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Are family-friendly organisations friendly for children? Navigating work, families with children, and discursive power use within organisations

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ABSTRACT

Organisations benefit from promoting a family-friendly approach and offering a variety of work-family practices, yet this understanding is not monolithic. A critical discourse analysis is applied herein to interpret the manners of talk and meaning-making around work and families with children and the constructions of (un)family-friendliness in organisations. Particularly, we focus on how the family-friendliness is connected with power configurations within organisations. Focus group research data were gathered from 32 participants in two companies (industry and service). Consequently, we introduce three discourses: (1) optimatisation, (2) leaning on the rules and (3) moral reasoning. These discourses highlight the variance and complexity of how family-friendly approaches are interlinked with organisations' power use. A more profound understanding of children is needed when theorizing and promoting family-friendly approach in organisations.

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Introduction

Increasingly, people are struggling to navigate the crossroads of work, family, and other care responsibilities (Kelliher et al., 2019). This realisation has caused organisations to consider family-friendliness in the workplace. While definitions of family-friendly organisations may vary (Li & Zhang, 2023; Moore, 2020), scholars largely agree that the term refers to the entire organisational culture embodying the work-family interface in which organisational support and family-friendly practices, such as flexible working hours, telecommuting (working from home), part-time work schemas and job-sharing options, are provided (Breagh & Frye, 2008; Li & Zhang, 2023; Powell, 2020). Despite these good intentions, creating a family-friendly organisation can be problematic, as it may cause a certain amount of backlash, such as inequality, stigmas, and impaired

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career prospects (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Magnusson, 2021; Perrigino et al., 2018; Stone & Hernandez, 2013). Family-friendly practices are not equally available to everyone (Heikkinen et al., 2021; Mescher et al., 2010), and parents are not willing to use them because of insufficient support from supervisors and colleagues, resulting in flexibility stigma (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Magnusson, 2021; Stone & Hernandez, 2013). According to the flexibility stigma, childcare intervenes too much with work, simplifying the role of children into negative. So far, we lack a profound understanding of how children are affected by the (un)family-friendly organisations – their parents' workplaces – and how such organisations design and implement family-friendly practices reckon with children (Kramer & Kramer, 2021; Krstić & Sladojević Matić, 2020; Magnusson, 2021).

In this study, we apply critical discourse analysis (CDA) to illustrate how organisations assign meanings to (un)family-friendliness. CDA enables us to interpret the ways in which talk and meaning-making are constructed around work and families with children and family-friendly practices in organisations. Furthermore, it makes it possible to study how such discursive practices are connected to power configurations within organisations (Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Mescher et al. (2010) have shown how work and family representations may be (re)produced by discursive power processes in organisations, for example how organisations control employees with assessment procedures by designing human resource practices strategically and building unpredictable career consequences with inflexible career paths. Thus, the discourses predominant in the extant literature on family-friendly organisations fluctuate as organisations strive to be family-friendly by creating power dynamics within organisations (Padavic et al., 2020). We question the underlying implicit discursive power processes that may privilege organisations and strengthen existing power structures (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). Therefore, we argue that discourse is constitutive – it shapes, enables and constrains possibilities for social engagement – and constructive, meaning it can be a culturally available tool within the range of social interactions needed to achieve certain effects for social maintenance or change (Fairclough, 2013). Hence, discourses in organisations wield much power over individuals. Similarly, individuals can claim powerful positions when confronting organisational discourses (Fairclough, 2013). This is evident in flexibility options that can either be family-friendly or performance-oriented (Chung, 2022). In the latter case, flexibility is used only to increase performance, creating unhealthy work cultures (Chung, 2022; Magnusson, 2021). Therefore, employers' unrealistic work expectations or supervisors' and colleagues' unsupportive attitudes might hinder how family-friendly organisations are built (Kossek et al., 2023; Moore, 2020; Perrigino et al., 2018). In their recent review, Kossek et al. (2023) show that the organisation and supervisors have a great control and power to regulate how organisational policies are used for employees' work-family integration.

By asking if and how family-friendly organisations are friendly for children, this article makes several contributions to the field. First, since families and employees increasingly need to juggle work and caregiving (Kelliher et al., 2019), we investigate how this debate accounts for children. Scholars have demonstrated that children are affected by the work organisations of their parents (Kavanagh, 2013), but nonetheless children are often white spaced or have a subaltern status in such discussion (Spivak, 1985/1988). We offer a more nuanced view of how discursive power processes within organisations may hinder or promote a work-family interface for parents with children. Second, a

more fine-grained understanding of family-friendly organisation in terms of children is needed (Krstić & Sladojević Matić, 2020). By increasing such an understanding from the child's perspective, the article does not just enhance the theory building, but also offers news understandings and insights regarding what is needed for working parents with children, both mothers and fathers, to manage the work-family interface and what organisations can offer to change underlying, implicit structures (Balan et al., 2023; Kramer & Kramer, 2021). Importantly, children and organisations are quite interconnected, which makes children's absence from the field of study perplexing (Kavanagh, 2013). Understanding these interconnections will help develop comprehensive and insightful research and refine effective organisational practices that consider children.

Finland, which provides the socio-cultural context for the study, is one the easiest countries in the world to combine work and family life, as it offers extensive societal support (e.g. high-quality early childhood education and care [ECEC] provided by the state) and extensive policies (e.g. paid parental leaves) that make it possible (Eydal et al., 2018; Statistics Finland, 2019). Our empirical setting targets two Finnish organisations identifying themselves as promoting family-friendliness. Finland is a Nordic welfare state that emphasises gender equality. In families and working life, then, a dual-earner/dual-carer regime prevails, with both parents working full-time and caring for children (e.g. Eydal et al., 2018). Generally, mothers' employment rate in Finland is high. In 2018, 77% of Finnish mothers worked full-time (Statistics Finland, 2019). However, Finland has low birth rates; the desire to have a child is low (Hellstrand et al., 2020). While the underlying reasons are complex, but one explanation Brinton et al. (2018) point out is that women in countries like Finland may delay wanting to have a child because of strong work-life social norms. Therefore, family-friendly organisations are, in practice, much needed in Finnish working life (Rotkirch, 2021).

This article proceeds as follows. First, it reviews and integrates research on family-friendly organisations. Second, it introduces the chosen discursive approach to power use in organisations in this context. A methodological approach follows, evaluating the data and research context and describing the analysis before presenting the empirical results. Finally, the main points of the results are discussed, and conclusions are drawn regarding their significance.

Family-friendly organisations: integrative research review

Under the family-friendly banner, the past 30 years have witnessed increasing academic research on work, families, and organisations. We conduct our integrative review by targeting the family-friendly organisation concept (for recent reviews, see Garg & Agrawal, 2020; Li & Zhang, 2023; Moore, 2020). The literature in this field can be divided into three streams. The first investigates how family-friendly organisations can reduce conflicting perspectives on work and family. The second evaluates family-friendly organisations from the perspective of culture with flexibility and related problems, including stigma and inequality. The third advances general understandings of how family-friendly organisations design and implement family-friendly practices.

The idea to create more family-friendly organisations began with the assumption that designing family-friendly practices would decrease conflicts between the workplace and employees with children (Glass & Fujimoto, 1995). Similarly, Burke (1997) and Kossek and

Ozeki (1999) have found that family-friendliness in organisations means mitigating work-family conflicts. Burke's research on how to reduce work and family conflicts has demonstrated that the most important organisational values include strong organisational support and supervisors who support balancing work with family. Kossek and Ozeki's (1999) review emphasised the effectiveness of adopting work-family policies concerning how to resolve work-family conflicts. Any conflicts between work and family roles tend to relate to higher turnover rates and care-related absences and lower levels of commitment to organisations and careers, reinforcing the idea that family-friendly organisations resolve work-family conflicts by offering practices ranging from flexible scheduling, telecommuting, and paid and unpaid parental leave to care benefits for dependents (young children and older relatives) (Allen, 2001; Glass & Finley, 2002).

Typically, family-friendly organisations give their employees greater discretionary control over working times and settings, which can signal that it is acceptable to share work and family challenges (Allen, 2001). Much of this research has also addressed the organisational change needed for employees to proactively negotiate with the employer to overcome work-family conflicts (Abendroth, 2022; Allen, 2001). At the managerial level, when supervisors are supportive, employees experience a subsequent reduction in daily work-family conflict (Goh et al., 2015). Most research on optimal solutions for work-family conflicts focuses on mothers of small children, while ignoring other groups of caregivers such as fathers and grandparents, from the discourse (Balan et al., 2023; Gatrell et al., 2013). This reasoning could potentially foster the perception that organisational family-friendliness is primarily intended for women with children, thereby framing the work-family interface as a women's issue. This could result in family-friendly practices being exclusively targeted towards mothers (Balan et al., 2023; Ferrer & Gagne, 2013). Theoretically, this approach reinforces issues pertaining to the personal control of time for creating family-friendly organisations. These challenges often involve balancing caregiving responsibilities with conflicting workplace tasks or roles. However, this approach tends to downplay the potential of organisations to drive social change towards a more family-friendly and inclusive environment (Hughes & Silver, 2020).

Another research stream has targeted family-friendly organisations from the perspective of creating a family-friendly culture and its impact on workers. Family-friendly culture has been defined as an organisation's shared assumptions, norms and values and its desire to support employees' work and family life balance (e.g. Thompson et al., 1999). Here, extension of the first research stream would suggest that employees are not expected to consistently prioritise work over family and their careers are not penalised because they participate in, for example, formal family-friendly programmes. However, this notion is quite paradoxical, and employees are not actually willing to use benefits if they fear negative consequences for their careers or that it will result in extra work for others (Callan, 2007; Veiga et al., 2004). Hence, this organisational mechanism may result in a flexibility paradox (Chung, 2022) and cause stigma (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019). Arguments about a flexibility stigma posit that rearranging one's work to accommodate care demands violates deeply held assumptions about what being an ideal worker means (Chung, 2022; Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Reid, 2015). It may mean that the gendered norms surrounding parenting particularly encourage mothers to adapt their employment to family demands. Therefore, it is important to address the penalties to career advancement associated with motherhood (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019).

The third stream of research recognises family-friendly organisations as those in which family-friendliness is not just communicated but implemented within the company by offering family-friendly practices to ease the work-family interface (Davis & Kalleberg, 2006; Garg & Agrawal, 2020; Greenhaus et al., 2012; Kossek et al., 2011; Mills et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2019). The main argument in favour of family-friendly practices is that such arrangements result in a win-win scenario, where workers are more productive and responsive and simultaneously can better reconcile work and family life (Garg & Agrawal, 2020). Despite the increasing variety and availability of such practices (Garg & Agrawal, 2020; Li & Zhang, 2023; Moore, 2020), the problem remains of how to effectively implement them, as some researchers have documented a declining desire by organisations to implement such practices in the past decade (Perrigino et al., 2018). Despite the mixed availability and usability of such practices (Heikkinen et al., 2021), researchers and practitioners have failed to adequately consider how the family-friendly practices may serve the best interest of the child and how children are affected by the practices (Krstić & Sladojević Matić, 2020).

In assessing the main ideas presented in prior studies, we have found an evolving understanding of family-friendliness from organisation- and work-centred perspectives, but a limited understanding of family outcomes, especially for children. Thus far, the debate on family-friendly organisations omits children and does not conceptualise children as stakeholders in their parents' workplace. This understanding also misconstrues the power process of organisations intertwined with meeting the social norms of work and family, with context specificity being important. Next, we explain organisations' discursive approaches to power use in our study.

Discursive use of power within organisations

Organisations make decisions regarding the utilisation of resources, technological developments and working relationships among people. Such decisions are promoted in organisational cultures where values and practices influence work and family life (Mumby & Deetz, 1990). Organisations are not merely human products that accomplish certain functions; they are sites of communicating and representing knowledge and differing interests (Deetz & Mumby, 2012). This view stresses that family-friendly organisations should be understood as consisting of competing, evolving discourses formed by organisational actors (Doorewaard & Benschop, 2003; Mescher et al., 2010). Such discourses may order people and objects and determine the ways in which an employee might act without disrupting the social order (Ahl, 2006). With this understanding, we critically analyse the discursive power configurations of organisations. First, access to specific types of organisational discourse is a source of power. Second, discourses can influence people, their knowledge, or their opinions, which can shape (some) people's perceptions about and actions regarding (Van Dijk, 2015) family-friendliness in organisations.

We build on Van Dijk (1993) by understanding social power as control, a way for one group (e.g. managers, mothers, fathers) to control other groups and their members (e.g. subordinates, children). Thus, groups may have power if they can control the actions of (members of) other groups. If control serves the interests of those who exercise power and is used against those being controlled, then abuses of power may occur. For example, negotiating greater flexibility can involve several power processes, whether

the aim is to spend more time with family or simply to enhance organisational performance (Chung, 2022).

Researchers are quite critical of the idea that organisations are ever truly pro-family (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Magnusson, 2021). Power processes are inherent to the flexibility measures adopted by organisations, as they are always reconstructed via certain moral obligations and social norms about work and family (Reid, 2015; Tienari et al., 2002). Family-friendliness becomes embedded within the ideals of a good worker, parent, or supervisor. Tienari et al. (2002) have noted that an organisation's employees are primarily evaluated by management concerning the ideal worker norm. From the perspective of power, an organisation's use of power is influenced by social norms and an ideal worker identity inconsistent with reality. The ideal is very much a masculine, static category that leaves little space for other ideals, such as disrupting the flow of work for family reasons or putting the family first over work. Gender also impacts family friendliness, as family-friendly practices are often designed only for women and motherhood, excluding men and fatherhood (Balan et al., 2023; Gatrell et al., 2013; Heikkinen & Lämsä, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2007; Tanquerel & Grau-Grau, 2020). If social norms are rarely disrupted entirely and continue to co-exist with dominant work-family discourses in working life, then organisational power configurations remain the same (Mescher et al., 2010).

With respect to family-friendly organisations, not all power use is as visible as the breaking of social norms. However, if the actions involved can be communicative, that is, if they reveal underlying discourses and discursive practices, then we are dealing with control over others (Van Dijk, 2006). In such cases, power can be exercised indirectly through controlling the discourse, for example through the controlling of syntax or rhetoric or taking critical turns in conversations (Van Dijk, 1993, 2006). Discursive power can also be exercised through linguistic surface structures, such as hesitation, pauses or laughter, or by controlling the context (Van Dijk, 1993). This can mean that, for example, unless leaders are providing a monologue, subordinates may react with their own communicative practices, thereby influencing the structures and context of leaders' communication strategies. The communicative actions of family-friendly organisations are also a tool for understanding the relationships between discourses and power configurations within an organisation and how they may result in unequal, unfair and unfriendly practices in the workplaces for parents and, ultimately, their children (Padavic et al., 2020).

Research has not problematised children's roles in organisations or taken a stand concerning the kinds of power structures that organisations might have at their disposal in relation to children (Kavanagh, 2013; Krstić & Sladojević Matić, 2020), despite certain exceptions concerning child labour (Woodhead, 1999). Kavanagh et al. (2009) have presented some interesting theoretical ideas on how organisations sideline children. The prevailing understanding emphasises that children have a subaltern position, echoing Spivak's (1985/1988) use of the term. According to Spivak, children's subaltern position is not just a classy term for being oppressed or silenced; subalterns are neither noticed nor heard, they have no authority or voices. In a discourse analysis framework, children are thus excluded from the discourse, and the discourse silences children through dominant discourses that leave no room for them. Thus, within the definition of subalternity as such there is a certain not-being-able-to-make-speech acts that is implicit (Spivak et al.,

1996, p. 290), which results from, for example, the structural exclusion of children from most formal work organisations.

We follow Kavanagh (2013) in seeing children as both the object of and subject to organisations. Most children are born in healthcare organisations. They are legally entitled to attend one organisational site, the school, and particularly small children spend much of their time in – and interacting with – organisations, such as ECEC, local sports club, or leisure centre. All these organisations are profoundly subject to organising logic, including the organisation of children and childhood. A Foucauldian twist on this view sees childhood as primarily about producing docile bodies for use in corporate working life (Fox, 1996; Kavanagh, 2013; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). For instance, Cooley (1987) provocatively argues that children are placed on schedules in school because of the corporate need for time-disciplined workers who can perform factory duties punctually and regularly. Yet, this meaning-making exercise is not always so obvious when practised by dominant organisational members; rather, it can occur through myriad taken-for-granted, mundane social interactions in everyday life, which might also occur quite often in (un)family-friendly organisations. A study of language use in the family-friendliness discourses of organisations can reveal how the attitudes, beliefs and positions of speakers and authors are represented in texts (Heikkinen et al., 2022). Discourses can have underlying meanings; identifying them can assist researchers in understanding the relationship of organisations with family life and society (Mullet, 2018). To this end, we see it as valuable to analyse how the discourses concerning family-friendly organisations are also affected by or affect children. Next, we explain the methodological approach of the article.

Methodological approach

This study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA), a methodology for analysing social phenomena that is qualitative, interpretive and constructionist, in which discourses construct and inform social practice (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Hence, the interviewees' language use is viewed as reflecting socio-cultural practices (Fairclough, 2001) instead of simply as output based on individual cognition. Discourses not only describe and construct social reality, they also act as a powerful force in organisational life to serve various ends, for instance to maintain the status quo or promote change. For this study, discourse is defined as a distinctive, internally coherent way of creating different versions of the world. Discourses are consequential and always (re)produced for particular purposes (Bloor & Bloor, 2013; Korobov, 2010; Nikander, 2012; Wetherell, 2003.).

Research context

The research context, Finland, can be characterised as promoting a dual-earner family model, equal parenting, and a fairly child-friendly society. The Finnish government has adopted a national child strategy that aims to ensure a family- and child-friendly society based on the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (Parliamentary National Child Strategy Committee, 2022). Finland has enacted several acts that support the interface with work and family, such as ECEC, school, morning, and afternoon care for small children, set working times, work security, and annual leaves and parental leaves to

ease parents' burden. For example, the regular working-time regime for all genders consists of eight hours a day, or 40 h a week (Working Time Act 872/2019). This type of working life, with the help of Finnish legislative policies,¹ has enabled mothers and fathers to maintain full-time careers, balance the responsibility for child-rearing and child-care, and share the costs of parenthood between the employers of both parents (see also Government Programme, 2023).

Peculiar to Finland at the societal level in terms of work and family integration are the nation's comprehensive childcare and early childhood education policies. Arranging childcare in Finland is seen as society's duty, unlike in many other European countries, where parents are responsible for organising childcare (Repo, 2004). Finland also provides unconditional access to ECEC services for all children before the start of primary school at age seven. Consequently, most children over the age of three attend public or private ECEC centres. Yet, some scholars have suggested that such strong state support might be one reason that Finnish work organisations have not been keen to develop family-friendly policies of their own (Eräranta & Kantola, 2016).

Empirical research data

The research data were collected as part of the developmental research project 'XX', funded by the XX (2019–2021). The project, which focused on family-friendliness in organisations, was coordinated by XX, which is a non-governmental organisation focusing on research, advocacy, and services with the aim of improving the well-being of people and human rights, and the organisation has trademark protection to grant the Family-Friendly Workplace Certificate for workplaces that fulfil the criteria for a family-friendly organisation. The data were collected in four focus group interviews, conducted in two companies selected because of their enthusiasm to improve their family-friendly and especially father-friendly policies. The focus group interviews were used as a data collection method to promote discussion about family-friendly organisational culture, practices, and policies, particularly about the parental role from a male perspective.

The focus group interviews aimed to evoke discussion and to prompt the interviewees to provide reasons for their arguments and talk about their shared knowledge about the topic at hand. Focus group interviews often help reveal more hidden practices and attitudes that extend beyond just the perspectives given in individual interviews (Bell et al., 2022). However, it is also possible that participants are not willing to talk as freely as they would alone with the interviewer, for example due to topics related to their personal life, something employers may not be willing to share with colleagues. Participation in the interviews was voluntary and participants were informed in advance about the aims and topics of the focus group interviews.

The focus group interviews were organised in a semi-structured format², and they covered how the interviewees combined work and parenting as well as organisational practices and attitudes regarding the work-family interface. The focus group interviews were conducted in the companies, and both employees and managers were recruited for separate focus groups. Organisation A is a conventional industrial company providing locally necessary services and has a high proportion of performing level employees. It is a male-dominant organisation with more traditional views on gender and family roles. Organisation B is an international service company, providing knowledge for national

and international clients with a high proportion of expert-and specialist-level employees from both genders. Employees at Organisation B along with their spouses, often engage in similar types of expert work. Consequently, they reported more shared parental responsibilities compared to their counterparts at Organisation A.

Participants were invited to the focus group interviews in collaboration with their organisations. Each organisation chose a contact person for the research project; this person put together the focus groups with the help of researchers. The focus group interviews were conducted in autumn 2019. The setting was organised in such a way that participants had a safe space to talk about the issues in question and share their various experiences. Participants for the focus groups were selected based on a variety of criteria. One such criterion was that they held diverse positions at various levels within the organisation. Another criterion was the group composition, which was intended to include individuals of different ages, genders, and those with children of different ages. The selection was also influenced by the length of their careers and the number of years working for the organisation. Practical considerations, such as the scheduling of the interviews and the work circumstances of each participant, also played a role in determining who could participate in the interviews. The first group included individuals from the managerial level. The respondents in the managerial groups ranged in age from 35 to 50 years. All of them were parents, with children spanning a wide age range, from pre-school age to adulthood. The second group comprised employees in specialist roles who had insights into organisations' operations in terms of formal guidelines and beyond. These respondents were generally a few years younger than managers. All of them were parents with children being on average some years younger than those of the managers. Since our research is based on socio-constructionism, according to which the meaning-making activities in the focus groups were both relational and anonymised, no information has been provided about the participants. The structure of four focus group interviews and their participants are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Organisational characteristics and participants in focus group interviews.

Organisation	Organisation characteristics	Organisation's family-friendly practices	Goals for organisation's family-friendly practices	Focus group interview participants	
(A) Industrial company, 200 employees, 82% males, 18% females	Traditionally male-dominant field; provides necessary services for local communities Traditional views about gender roles and family-friendliness	Distance work practices Family-friendly flexibility	To become a socially responsible employer and to create concrete instructions for employees and a positive atmosphere towards family leave (fathers particularly)	Focus group interview 1, managers: 1 woman, 6 men	Focus group interview 2, employees with specialists roles: 3 women, 6 men
(B) International service company, 650 employees, 50% males, 50% females	International consulting firm Family-friendly orientation	Distance work practices Family-leave mentoring	To improve managers' family-friendly attitudes and the organisation's active communication about family leave	Focus group interview 3, managers: 5 women, 4 men	Focus group interview 4, employees with expert roles: 3 women, 4 men

Research analysis

After carefully reading the transcribed data, we coded all the accounts in which participants discussed the intersections of their work and family lives using NVivo data analysis software. The coded accounts include both ideological stands and practical examples of family-friendliness in the interviewees' workplaces.

The analysis was conducted in three phases (see [Figure 1](#)). First, we sorted the data based on content and the themes discussed in the focus group interviews. As an analytical tool to better understand the organisational context informing the work-family interface, we utilised Voydanoff's (2001) categories of work, including structure, social organisation, norms and expectations, support, orientations and quality of work, and community and family characteristics. In practice, the categories helped us pay attention to meaningful parts of the data during the first phase of the analysis, when we identified similar thematic entities.

Second, we applied a critical analytical lens (Wodak & Meyer, 2015) to examine discursive resources and practices used in the participants' talk. The data sorted during the first phase were analysed at the discursive level. During the second phase, we evaluated talk about success at work and as a parent, organisational rules and regulations, and societal and social norms steering family-friendly practices in organisations. During the third phase of the analysis, we deepened the analysis and identified discourses with an emphasis on the CDA approach (Wodak & Meyer, 2015) to explore the organisational power of such discourses. Accordingly, three discourses were interpreted in terms of how the organisational use of power relates to the construction of family-friendly practices and what types of discursive resources are utilised when discussing the work-family interface and the family-friendly practices of organisations. As such, discourse is here understood as knowledge produced through social practices, different forms of subjectivity and power relationships, and the relationships between them (Weedon, 1987). Together with making visible the power processes within the organisation, we applied Davies and Harré's (2001) idea of positioning to evaluate how children are positioned in the

First ordering codes	Second ordering clusters of talk	Third ordering discourses and positions
Focus on content and meanings Organisation and thematisation of data following the ideas of Voydanoff's (2001) categories of work <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structure of work• Organisation of norms and expectations• Support orientations• Quality of work• Community, organisations and family characteristics	Focus on discursive resources and practices Reading and interpreting of data with critical analytical lens (Wodak & Myer, 2015) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Success at work• Being a good parent• Organisational rules and regulations• Societal and organisational social norms that steer family-friendly arrangements and practices in organisations	Focus on co-constructed family-friendliness in organisations and children's perspective Forming final discourses Deepening the critical analytical lens for discursive use of power (Wodak & Myer, 2015) and positioning of children (Davies & Harre, 2001; Kavanagh et al., 2009)

Figure 1. Description of the data analysis process.

three discourses concerning the organisation's power. We understand the positions as constructed in certain situations for certain purposes (Davies & Harré, 2001; Wetherell, 2003). In the next section, we detail the three discourses at the centre of our analysis.

Results

Optimising for family-friendliness in organisations: excluding children

The optimisation discourse builds on the idea that creating and maintaining family-friendliness in organisations is a constant process of optimising the responsibilities of work and family at the crossroads of organisational demands. This discourse was dominant in both organisations. The interviewees interpreted family-friendly as referring to the effort to optimally combine various life spheres, such as work, private and family lives, an effort which takes centre stage in the discourse for both mothers and fathers. Organisations offer family-friendly practices to provide employees with individualised and self-interested ways to optimise their work and family roles. Even though the options are constructed through discourse, the performance and success of the organisation must always take priority to maintain its prestige and reputation among clients and competitors. The dominance of work and career competition overwrites family in this discourse, which results in children's exclusion, reproducing a subaltern (Kavanagh, 2013; Spivak, 1988) position for them when constructing a family-friendly organisation.

The discourse mobilises an individual's responsibility over his/her work. It is communicated that only individuals manage their own careers and families. Regarding their flexibility, this discourse strengthens the idea that individuals are held accountable for their own flexibility with respect to the organisations – flexibility can be interpreted as competitively oriented and may lead to the always-on culture (Chung, 2022). An example was given by an expert from Organisation B:

The flexibility of your own work, which I think comes out quite well anyway, that you lead your own work and plan and so on, and I think that already at that stage so on. ... That is perhaps the message that would seem the only sensible thing to do

The illustration provided here stresses that in the working environment, the only sensible approach is to prioritise your work.

The discourse mobilises the use of family-friendly practices to achieve a better work-family interface, yet the underlying ideals of a worker who is primarily committed to the job (Tienari et al., 2002) are not questioned. The organisation can be interpreted as holding power over its employees in such matters. While the employee is granted the autonomy to manage their work schedules for improved work-family balance, the organisation ultimately holds the power. This is because the organisation gives workers a greater sense of responsibility and encourages them to focus more on work and work longer and harder to compensate for family time (Chung, 2022). This practice is quite evident when working hours or working remotely are accepted only '*so long as you perform and do the job*', emphasising that employees are authentic and professional if they can meet this requirement, which is ultimately discursively controlled by the organisation. Strikingly, this type of flexibility is only acceptable if it still benefits the organisation, with the

dominant discourse leaving no space to challenge the organisation's emphasis on performance. This finding was especially evident in the focus group for managers in Organisation B.

To the point that, if you do your job, then it's possible to come later and leave earlier and pick up the kids and do some of the necessary things later. But here, what you said, that in case of younger people, so it is a kind of gaining a certain level of trust and acquiring ownership of the work. First, not everyone ever succeeds. (Org. B, Managers)

As the quote indicates, a certain level of negotiation is involved, and trust plays a central role in acquiring this kind of flexibility within the organisation. This means that younger employees may not have achieved such a level of trust or, ultimately, ownership of their work to be awarded some flexibility, again making organisations' implicit power over family-friendliness visible in the discourse.

The discourse is premised on the organisation espousing (un)family-friendliness while creating a situation where this discourse supports the idea that the organisation views work and family as a well-balanced project of the self (Adamson et al., 2023), without the organisation and its management needing to take an active role. This is done via several discursive moves and rhetorical devices. Interviewees typically described the practices and efforts at creating family-friendliness as sacrifices by the employer. Organisations discursively blame parents and view parental duties as a burden. When talking about family-friendliness, the interviewees frequently mentioned that when on family leave, holiday, or weekends, when they were supposed to spend time with their families and children, the organisation still expected them to work more on being flexible by completing tasks and meeting the organisation's requirements.

The optimisation discourse excludes children by problematising them in terms of their parents' facing the problem of needing to find childcare in order to work more. An extreme example of the importance of prioritising work over children and being flexible in a performance-oriented way (Chung, 2022) is viewing children as both the object and subject of such organising efforts, which is highlighted in the following extract:

A colleague pumped up a mattress in the morning and got a tablet for the child and some videos. The father placed the air mattress here, and then he went to a meeting, and then he came back, and they went to the company restaurant for lunch and stuff. Someone walked past the office and looked through the office door. There was a pumped-up air mattress in the middle of the office floor, and [the person] asked if someone was already sleeping there. But it was the sick child who was sleeping on the mattress. (Org. A, managers)

Similarly, the discourse suggests that longer leaves by either women or men pose an insurmountable challenge for the organisation, nourishing the rhetoric of an irreplaceable worker. The work-centred talk at this point was slightly gendered, as interviewees noted that it is more acceptable for mothers to be away from work and caring for children than for fathers. Many studies have presented similar gender-related complaints (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Tanquerel & Grau-Grau, 2020).

In the discourse of optimisation, family-friendliness acknowledges the child's need for care, but as indicated in the quote above, the work is always prioritised. Children are excluded: they are perceived as an obstacle to work and reduced to the position of sub-alterns in this discourse. In this discourse, the child's best interests are typically omitted and certainly never prioritised, as demonstrated in the previous example. Such

exclusionary practices lead to children not being seen nor heard (Kavanagh, 2013). Another example from data given by one manager, when he sadly but ironically noted, ‘If a child is really sick, then it is a really efficient workday’. By this, he implied that the child is so ill that they are resting only in bed and unable to attend ECEC, but a bedridden child ensures an efficient working day for the parent. This is a typical example of competition-oriented flexibility, suggesting that the rise in flexible working cultivates a work culture where employees are expected to work all the time and everywhere and enhancing their work input to compensate for being flexible in terms of meeting the needs of their family (Chung, 2022). Evidently, the children are outsourced in this process of meaning-making, and the quality of the care or even the interaction between a child and caregiver is met with silence.

The interviewees understandably expressed the desire to be good parents, which affects their daily optimising act of meeting the needs of both work and family life. Nonetheless, the needs of organisations are always at the core. In the Finnish context, it is a common social norm that parents pick up their child from daycare by themselves, and traditionally additional childcare services have rarely been used. A typical example from Organisation B (experts) shows how the talk about optimising work and family does not account for children, silencing such discussion:

But there has been a lot of discussion about whether I will return (after maternity leave), and there has been immediate discussion about when I will be back, and they will organise these things so they will wait for me

Such an example shows that family leave is often discussed from the organisations’ and parents’ perspectives as a break from working life, while the child is marginalised in such talk. Subsequently, we introduce the second dominant discourse analysed in the data.

Leaning on rules for family-friendliness in organisations: projecting children

The second discourse, termed the leaning on the rules discourse, used to construct family-friendliness in organisations centres on the idea that family-friendliness in organisations is achieved by respecting and relying on common rules. This discourse emphasises the formal side of family-friendliness with reference to official rules and regulations at the national level, and the family-friendly practices of organisations fulfil these legal requirements. Essentially, when organisations adopt family-friendly practices, they rely on a specific rule without taking a personal stance or finding an individual solution. The need to combine life spheres, such as work, private and family lives, is marginalised in the discourse: it merely becomes a mechanical issue determined by society, and the rules are followed to ensure a proper work-family interface. Such talk centres on mothers. Following the rules can be interpreted as a good thing in organisations. However, the problem remains that the discourse leaves it to organisations to legitimise their passivity or the importance of the informal side of the organisation’s support of work and family, rendering the organisations and their culture a sidebar in the matter. Moreover, this discourse is constructed in both the studied organisations but appeared slightly more prominent in Organisation A.

The discourse elaborates on work and family as a mechanistic, pragmatic, and time-focused construction circumscribed by a range of simplistic ways to solve work-family

conflicts. This perspective becomes obvious in a quote by one of the technical managers at Organisation A. It can be interpreted that, in building family-friendly organisations in this field, the rules and regulations are mechanical and a bit harsh for colleagues. Gender roles are constructed in this discourse as largely traditional, and the stigma of motherhood as contributing to prolonged absences (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019) is presented as a threat in this discourse. Simultaneously, he distances his organisation from the general discussion by stating that it is possible to take maternity leave, but the attitudes are traditional and have an impact to work at this kind of technical field. As he put it:

I have also heard stories that women of a certain age are not hired when there is a risk of having four children and a cycle of maternity leave. This is a fact. In Finnish society, there is this debate, and I take it to the kind of companies where the entrepreneur's own money is at stake, so it can be a bit blunt in the discussion. But here, this thing is different, so in my opinion, my colleague can confirm this statement as wrong or right, so the fact is that women take maternity leave. I don't think it's that, but it may be there's more of an attitude that a man (does not) ... this is such an old-fashioned technical field. (Org. A, managers)

It is somewhat surprising that such a way of talking is authorised and justified in an organisation that promotes family-friendliness. The interviewees noted that, ultimately, Finnish laws and regulations make the work-family interface possible. Organisations choose to resort to official rules rather than disrupt or critically assess their work patterns and culture. This supports the findings of prior studies regarding the need to strengthen existing societal discourses around family-friendly organisations (Padavic et al., 2020; Tanquerel & Grau-Grau, 2020).

Role models for such measures, for example managers, serve as important gatekeepers, especially if they continue to take advantage of various family-friendly practices in their own lives (Goh et al., 2015). A manager in the focus group from Organisation B summarised it as follows:

Perhaps the best way to do this in a family-friendly way is to use the examples you see in the organisation and what they say about family leave, and there is a way of talking about it, and so on, so we have a positive model. As far as I know, all the men who have had a child have taken, like, family leave.

One interviewee mentioned that employees in Organisation B find 'it is easier to take leaves if the managers also take them'. The role of managers as exemplars of how best to negotiate the work-family interface has been noted elsewhere (Kossek & Michel, 2011).

The main steps taken to ensure family-friendliness in the studied organisation seem to occur because of the laws and regulations in Finland, not because of an active organisational support. Experts from Organisation A mentioned that their organisation decides arrangements for family leave, but only by relying on existing Finnish laws:

If you have a child, your supervisor will ask you how you plan to take family leave. And if you need it, then we'll work together. It has been discussed in advance, and the employee informs the supervisor there will be a baby at around such and such a time, so we make some arrangements. And then, of course, maternity leave is already in question, which will be a longer absence, so then they hire replacement. It is the type of task that is not just redistributed to others. A replacement is hired for maternity leave, but rarely is a replacement hired for paternity leave. (Org. A, experts)

This quote illustrates various aspects of how power is constructed within the work-family dynamics of organisations, and emphasises the extent to which children are projected as promoting family-friendliness in organisations. First, supervisor approval is required to utilize leave policies, following an informal negotiation process in the form of arrangements. While the above extract suggests that parental leave may certainly be granted, the need to find replacements or adopt job-sharing measures is gender-biased. This means that the organisations only seek solutions for women's absences, not men's, which can potentially lead to workplace conflicts. It also raises questions about equality and persons for whom such family-friendly practices are even available if organisations do not support fathers in these actions (Balan et al., 2023; Tanquerel & Grau-Grau, 2020).

The leaning on the rules discourse is paradoxical, as it makes visible this type of talk, which may result in Finnish organisations remaining inactive. Conversely, it mobilises legal standards. Despite these advancements, there is left only little space for organisations to develop and promote their own approach to family-friendliness. The leaning on the rules discourse tends to position children in terms of the right to childcare or the right for parents to take care of their children. Kavanagh (2013) says this means adults decide what is best for their children, and children are evaluated based on their rights and the extent to which such rights are guaranteed. The subaltern position of children is realised by projecting onto them and subjugating their needs to the experiences of parents who populate the organisations. Typically, the roles of parenthood and providing good care for one's children are mechanised in the form of official leave. Typically, neither the hesitance nor indecisiveness of parents to prioritise family time is ever mentioned when assessing the positive and cherished aspects of childhood. In this discourse, rules are constructed as a peak value of family-friendliness, as the organisations tend to offer family leaves for the sake of legality and opt out for doing voluntarily anything extra. This discourse relies on official laws and announcements, inadvertently discouraging organisations from proactively developing family-friendliness (Krstić & Sladojević Matić, 2020; Powell, 2020). Next, we introduce the third discourse identified in the data.

Moral reasoning for organisational family-friendliness: redeeming children

The moral reasoning discourse revealed in the data concerns the moral reasoning organisations use to justify family-friendliness. Consequently, when the interviewees reflected on family-friendliness, they noted that it is the right thing to do and that it is necessary to challenge existing social norms regarding work for the best interest of the children. The combining of life spheres, such as work, private and family life, are linked in the discourse to having a fulfilling life and satisfactory work. At its core, the discourse concerns finding acceptable ways to show concern for children in family-friendly organisations. However, compared to the other two discourses, this discourse mobilises morally acceptable ways to prioritise children over one's work and to find ways to manage work in a positive manner. In this discourse, choosing children over work is constructed as acceptable.

This discourse seldom appeared in the research data compared to the other two, but it is constructed in connection with the optimisation discourse in both organisations. Part of the moral reasoning discourse also involves integrating morally acceptable ways to challenge the power of the organisation at defining family-friendliness and increase the

role of family-embeddedness. The discourse seeks to redeem the proper place of children in the moral order – first children, family and then work. However, this discourse certainly does not go so far as to suggest that perceived negative attitudes or hostility towards children in organisations should be judged as morally dubious or unethical. Surprisingly, the interviewees did not touch on this issue in the discussions. To cite one concrete example of the importance of equality in the moral reasoning discourse: the interviewees discussed the opening hours of institutions, such as ECEC centres and schools. Organisation B experts pointed out how it is morally acceptable to leave work early to pick up a child from an ECEC centre or school. Another example about health-related visits to a hospital were also accepted as moral enough reasons to adjust the work schedule. Such levels of rhetoric seek to control the importance of work, weaken the image of the ideal worker and shape, and rebuild the boundaries between work and family.

This type of talk acknowledges that children's needs should be prioritised and met daily, and therefore, it promotes a more holistic understanding of children in organisations. However, it also highlights the complexity of understanding life situations in organisations. A dividing line between employees with and without children became quite evident during the interviews. The importance of this difference was illustrated in the interviews with managers from the Organisation A focus group in instances where they have needed to find replacements for workers in the case of illness. As one manager said:

So cases of illness are more difficult for the shift at work, when you may get a call. You've gone to bed in the morning, after the night shift, and then there's a call in the evening, and now the pattern changes, you've fallen ill, and now you have to do this and that, so it's probably the most challenging thing to be family-friendly in these kinds of circumstances.

The interviewees also believed that sharing the workload equally can be a problem, noting that family leave for one person often increases the workload for others. The moral reasoning regarding the redistribution of workloads was also related to moral statements about the subjective right to take family leave. Similarly, others stated that workers should not take family leave if it adversely affects their colleagues. This argumentation was left also as an open question in the data, and we feel that organisations must start to address it as an ethical issue to create more sustainable workplaces (Heikkinen et al., 2021).

The second aspect in the moral reasoning discourse concerned a sick-enough child, with the interviewees evaluating situations in which a child is sick and needs the constant attention and care of a parent. A particular feature of this discourse is that if a child required hospital care from healthcare professionals, the moral ordering is quite clear – the child comes first. In such situations, parents are, for instance, urged to put work decidedly on hold. This stance remains unchallenged by any participant or underlying structure. Peculiar to the moral reasoning discourse in Finland is the fact that children are equated with morality. In this discourse, children are positioned as a moral concern and part of the meaning of life. Ultimately, family-friendly practices should refer to using whatever means necessary to ensure that the child comes first. Unlike the first two discourses, this third discourse clearly constructs children as enriching one's life – a plentiful element that contributes to life satisfaction and work-life skills (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). A manager from Organisation B illustrated the point that children are important to life and that family-friendliness should be embraced in different types of life situations as follows:

I think we should go back to what I said earlier, that family is of course the one important corner, but we should raise the octave to the fact that it is life, and the reasons for absence and flexibility, the need for flexibility, can be many and varied.

The moral reasoning discourse regarding family-friendliness in organisations engages the organisation and all who work for it to put work into the context of life (Wittman, 2023). Thus, children are often put first in such discussions. However, different rhetorical strategies and ways of controlling moral reasoning are used to explain how and why children are important. Children are constructed as an important, exclusive group that makes family-friendly practices meaningful concerning the more general work-family interface. Table 2 summarises the key results Table 2.

The three discourses were present in both organisations, although the two organisations have different organisational cultures. Even though the interviewed experts and managers exhibited a strong commitment to work, they had a broad discursive repertoire to draw on when talking about why family is important in their life and why the organisation's success cannot come at the expense of a family's well-being. The data collected from organisations with an ongoing commitment to creating a family-friendly organisational culture reveals that such rhetoric is constantly being challenged in the work domain and that family-friendliness in organisations often still means that a family must be flexible in responding to organisational demands. Likewise, the data revealed that the organisational understanding of and concern for children are not well integrated into family-friendly practices. Next, we discuss our findings and draw conclusions about their significance.

Discussion, limitations, and conclusion

In this study, we applied CDA to illustrate how (un)family-friendliness has been discussed and given meaning in two Finnish organisations and how the discourses constructed organisational power use. This study contributes to the debates on family-friendliness

Table 2. Overview of results.

Name of discourse	Optimising for family-friendliness in organisations: excluding children	Leaning on rules for family-friendliness in organisations: projecting	Moral reasoning for family-friendliness in organisations: redeeming children
Core content of discourse	Organisation's success and performance is prioritised when constructing family-friendliness Performance-oriented flexibility emphasised	National and organisational rules are constructed as ways to build family-friendliness Rules are an external authority whose power exceeds the organisation	The moral reasoning for showing concern towards children is constructed as acceptable; family-friendly-oriented flexibility is attempted
Discursive use of power within organisations	Organisation controls and monitors flexibility for family if you 'perform' and do the work	Organisation is passive concerning power use; family-friendliness as a set of obligations and societally determined	Moral reasoning explains when it is acceptable to prioritise children over work; fluctuation in what is considered acceptable
How the child is positioned in discourse	Children are excluded and subordinate in relation to the organisation's performance and success	Children are projected to follow rules and regulations; the best interests of the child include ensuring their rights and caring for them in a mechanical manner	Children are positioned as a moral concern and part of the meaning of life; they are redeemed when there is a moral reason, such as a sick enough child

in organisations. Despite the good intentions of many organisations, the interviewees in this study as well as other scholars have lent critical voices to the discussion and exposed controversial aspects associated with family-friendly organisations, such as inequality between mothers and fathers, stigmas and illusions regarding flexibility and impaired career prospects (Chung, 2022; Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Magnusson, 2021; Tanquerel & Grau-Grau, 2020). Particularly, here, we contend there is a gap where children are concerned in these debates. We have also indicated how discourses about family-friendliness, even in organisations promoting themselves as family-friendly, can diverge. Hence, we have also demonstrated how discursive power processes work for or against family-friendliness and create other available realities while at the same time excluding some and privileging other discourses. This creates space and possible mechanisms for families with children to engage in the work-family debate, exposing how various family-friendliness measures may benefit organisations differently and even leave existing power structures stagnant or unquestioned (Bloor & Bloor, 2013; Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

Despite the persistence of entrenched power structures, it is valuable to make visible work and family representations in organisations. Raising questions about the success of family-friendliness in organisations, through communicative and discursive processes, offers new ways to reproduce family-friendliness organisations (Mescher et al., 2010). We identified three prevalent discourses. Here, we detail our theoretical and practical contributions. The dominant discourse mentioned by the interviewees was optimisation, which constructs family-friendliness in a manner that ensures organisational success and performance at the expense of truly considering the outcomes for children and families (see also Kramer & Kramer, 2021). Existing theories emphasise that the keyword for combining work and family is *flexibility*; however, the complexity of the discourse highlights how employees have different possibilities for flexibility depending on their position within the organisation and whether the flexibility is family-friendly or competition-based (Chung, 2022). In seeking to extend the current knowledge base, we can claim that flexibility is at the core of building family-friendliness in organisations, but notably children are placed in a subaltern position, excluded, and constructed as non-existent or irrelevant stakeholders with respect to such understandings of flexibility. Our results confirm findings presented in previous studies: we can say that children are continuously relegated to a subaltern position in organisational life (Kavanagh, 2013; Spivak, 1988), including within family-friendly organisations.

Our results are particularly illuminating in terms of an alternative discourse, the moral discourse, which aims to link family-friendliness with kindness and attempts to consider children first and foremost. However, even this discourse bumps up against boundary conditions that limit such attempts and thus can be criticised. First, family-friendly organisations offer few tools for working parents to better meet their children's needs. If flexibility is constructed from the organisational perspective, it often entails liabilities and constraints, such as a certain stigma set by the organisation or working environment (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019). Another important conclusion is that typically, the research participants did not question or challenge the organisation's power use. Organisational power in this context leaves firmly in place the assumption that if employees attempt to adapt their work and performance to meet their children's needs, if an employee leaves early from work for family duties, then the work still must be done despite the extenuating circumstances. This assumption remains remarkably enduring (see Mumby & Deetz, 1990). The

finding is also supported by previous studies (Magnusson, 2021; Spagnoli et al., 2021). The interviewees only raised questions concerning the moral discourse when prioritising a child's needs. They did so by invoking certain implicit expectations and norms, which are key ways that organisations hold power in this context. The perspective of power warrants more investigation. Typically, discourses tend to reinforce or fail to challenge the narrow, one-dimensional ideals imposed on employees and parents. These ideals often involve commending individuals for dedicating long hours to work and consistently prioritizing the organisation over family (see Balan et al., 2023; Tienari et al., 2002).

Future studies should focus on ethical considerations in the context of the work-family interface, which is most apparent in the form of the moral discourse. Questions about fairness and equality should factor into critically evaluating the self-centred and work-centred approach of organisations when developing and promoting family-friendliness (Adamson et al., 2023; Heikkinen et al., 2022). We argue that the moral discourse, in which children are considered more comprehensively, advances the discussion about how organisations and employees can legitimately approach children in the work-family interface (Krstić & Sladojević Matić, 2020). Hence, workplaces and managers (at different organisational levels) would benefit from considering the ethicality of their family-friendly culture. Managers must reframe current practices and attitudes (Kossek et al., 2023; Spagnoli et al., 2021) and understand that different employee groups must be better integrated in a way that accounts for changing family forms as a reflection of shifting social norms (Dumas & Perry-Smith, 2018; Garg & Agrawal, 2020; Kossek et al., 2023).

In practice, organisations need to adopt new understandings and critically reassess their perceptions about how best to construct a family-friendly organisation. First, it would be beneficial for them to design and implement benefits, practices and policies that help employees manage their work and home lives and prioritise children. Krstić and Sladojević Matić (2020) suggest that opportunities for future academic and practical explorations of the topic can be sought at the intersection of employees' attitudes and the views of the employees' children, which also must be piloted in companies. Second, sufficient understanding within the organisational culture about employees' lives outside the organisation would promote family-friendliness and encourage organisations to act in a socially responsible manner when considering children's future (cf. Heikkinen et al., 2021; Kavanagh, 2013). Third, it would be useful for organisations to rethink current work processes, systems, structures, and social norms to better determine which of them may cause unnecessary stress and which may decrease it by combining work and family more effectively. Sensing children's place in this process would be a great advantage when striving for sustainable working lives. To investigate how organisations can best realise such goals, appropriate research knowledge is needed about leadership and organisational structures. For instance, a deeper understanding of comparative contexts at the organisational and societal levels would enhance these research goals.

This study is not without its limitations. We analysed how family-friendliness is constructed from the standpoint of organisational power use, but more investigation is merited. Therefore, attention should be paid to the overall family-friendly culture of organisations, with an emphasis on supervisors and management providing equal, equitable treatment for all employees. According to the CDA principles applied here, the three discourses identified in this study are all socio-culturally available to meaning-making processes in organisations (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). As one interviewee mentioned, if other

family members had also been interviewed, the perceptions of family-friendliness would have differed from the views presented in the data. Perhaps the social pressure of a focus group interview steers some to follow the flow of speech at work, making it unlikely that the course of the conversation will focus more on children or the joy they bring. The minor emphasis on children in participants' interviews may stem from workplace settings where the interviewers channelled the talk in the direction of working life, not the private sphere, including children. If the interviews had been conducted in private settings, such as the participants' homes, the focus of the discussion and tone might have differed. While the approach adopted here has its advantages, it is important for researchers to remember that family-friendly discussions are often still limited to following the blueprint for an ideal worker (Dumas & Perry-Smith, 2018), omitting the diversity of life situations and how power is used in different types of organisations. Children could be better involved in research on family-friendliness in organisations. As proven in childhood studies, children can participate in all phases of research, from planning and implementing to evaluating the research (Powell & Smith, 2009).

We conclude that family-friendly only rarely means considering the perspective of children in organisations. Rather than merely seeing a dominant adult discourse imposed on children, we can start developing the ideas and practices of the discourse and translating them for both the adult and childhood worlds in research on family-friendly organisations (Kavanagh, 2013). We know that children are managed through management discourses (Cooley, 1987), but we need further theoretical lenses to incorporate the perspectives of children into other discourses and start to consider their experiences and contexts. We suggest that, for future sustainable working life, being a family-friendly organisation concerns responding to pressures from the social environment to organise the work-family interface and acknowledging and respecting the world of children, and striving to provide children with the best possible life. Caring for the next generation, in every sense of the word, is a valuable pursuit for all (Woodhead, 1999). Thus, an understanding of family-friendliness that incorporates children's perspectives with social responsibility is needed; family-friendliness in this respect should not be implemented minimally but should instead serve as a starting point and have legitimacy in signalling a socially responsible organisation.

Notes

1. Finnish family policies include a 40-day pregnancy allowance and 320 days of parental allowance, to be shared between the birthing parent and the other parent (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 13.1.2022). After family leave, both institutional ECEC services and caring for children under the age of three at home are partly covered by the state (Plantenga & Remery, 2009).
2. Examples of focus group interview questions: Have you taken parental leaves, and if so, what issues in your organisation affected your decisions? Does your organisation provide enough information about taking family leaves? How does the family-friendliness of your organisation affect your approach and commitment to the organisation?

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