Desperately seeking sustainable careers: Redesigning professional jobs for the collaborative crafting of reduced-load work

Ellen Ernst Kossek[a],[1],[*], Ariane Ollier-Malaterre[b],[1]

[a] Purdue University Krannert School of Management, Rawls Hall- office 4005, 100 S. Grant Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2076, United States of America
[b] School of Management (ESG), Université du Québec A Montréal (UQAM), Case postale 6192, succursale Centre-Ville, Montréal, Québec H3C 4R2, Canada

A B S T R A C T

Reduced-load (RL) work, a flexible customized form of part-time work in which a full-time job is redesigned to reduce the hours *and* the workload while taking a pay cut, can enable sustainable careers. Yet previous research suggests mixed results, with RL work facing implementation hurdles such as insufficient workload reduction, and stalled careers often adversely affecting women and caregivers. This study, therefore, focuses on the implementation of sustainable RL work and sheds light on key issues under-examined in prior studies: 1) the job redesign tactics that supervising managers implement to reduce workloads, and 2) shared responsibilities at the job and organizational levels. Drawing on the literature on sustainable careers, work redesign, and job crafting, we analyze 86 qualitative interviews with managers who experimented with RL work, HR experts, and executives in 20 organizations that were early adopters of RL work. We identify differentiating and integrating work redesign tactics that either reduced or reshuffled workloads. Next, we propose a three-stage process of collaborative crafting of RL work, in which employees, managers, and employers share responsibilities to strengthen the work redesign tactics and manage cultural expectations to support RL implementation. We provide implications for future research and practice.

"The culture in the field is one of long hours, hard-working, around-the-clock pressure. *Where does the work go* is a big issue because you can't always go out and hire somebody."

"I believe one of our biggest challenges is successfully *bridging the gap between policies that are "state of the art" and actual use and implementation of these policies* in the face of real business challenges."

(Two Managers of Reduced-Load work)

Many professionals may need and desire to reduce their workloads to craft a sustainable career and remain happy, healthy and productive (De Vos, Van der Heijden, & Akkermans, 2018) while fulfilling other life aspirations (e.g., elder and child caregiving, school, new career paths). Working voluntary part-time hours is a common practice around the globe.[2] In professional careers, part-

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time involves the scaling back of a full-time to a reduced-load (RL) job, where work is redesigned to reduce hours *and* workload with a pay cut (Lee, Macdermid, & Buck, 2000). RL also benefits organizations (Kossek, Ollier-Malaterre, Lee, Pichler, & Hall, 2016).

Yet research indicates that RL arrangements can face implementation problems, as often the workload is not reduced commensurately with the hours and pay, creating frustration and overwork (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008). RL also may curtail career development, promotion, and networking opportunities; marginalizing individuals and stalling careers (Dick, 2010; Durbin & Tomlinson, 2010; Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2017).

Using a sample of 20 organizations in North America, the purpose of this article is to address these issues by developing theory on sustainable RL work arrangements in order to 1) shed light on how professional jobs can be redesigned in order to effectively reduce workloads, and 2) identify collaborative crafting roles across the implementation stages of RL work. Sustainable RL arrangements are defined as those where a supervisor perceives the job can be effectively managed, and the incumbent experiences an ongoing reduction in job tasks that match pay and hours, while continuing in their career.

Drawing on differentiation and integration theory (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967), our first goal was to identify *work redesign tactics*, defined as the supervisor's actions taken to reduce the employees' workload (e.g., reduce the number of clients assigned; reallocating job tasks). Next, building on the perspective of a sustainable career as being co-crafted by employees and employers (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015; Veld, Semeijn, & Van Vuuren, 2015), we identify implementation stages and collaborative activities conducted at the job level and organizational levels to enable a sustainable RL arrangements. We identify three stages of collaborative crafting, i.e., the informal and ongoing process by which employees jointly develop work practices (Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009).

This study provides an important lens for understanding the implementation of new work forms and roles that support sustainable careers. First, it contributes to the career flexibility literature by identifying work redesign tactics that reduce workloads which has been less studied than time (flextime), or space restructuring (telework). This contribution matters as workloads remain a core challenge for professional occupations (business, law, consulting, academia) where full-time job status, long work hours, and face time are associated with productivity and career commitment (Powell & Mainiero, 1999). We also contribute to sustainable careers theory (e.g., recent developments proposed by De Vos et al., 2018) by framing the implementation of RL work, as an important way of working sustainably. We identify organizational actors' roles, explaining how collaboration across implementation stages strengthen job redesign tactics, and support revised cultural expectations in professional jobs.

1. Literature review

Three research streams shed light on the implementation of RL: studies on RL work arrangements, job redesign theory, and collaborative job crafting.

1.1. Reduced-load work

Part-time work arrangements involve an ongoing reduction in the *time* spent working (e.g., 20 h a week) and the *number of days* spent working (e.g. compressed workweek) (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). RL is a specific type of part-time work that reduces the workload of professional jobs and challenges historical norms that associate career advancement with uninterrupted full-time work. For instance, a corporate sales manager with a portfolio of ten products might retain eight, while taking a 20% pay cut. Or a corporate lawyer on a partnership track that typically handles five main clients keeps three with a 40% pay cut. RL is defined as the scaling back of a full-time job where work is redesigned to reduce the hours or days *and* a portion of the workload with a pay cut, while still progressing in a career. RL work is enacted through customized arrangements with a manager to reduce workloads.

RL work is important to study because it is one of the few flexible work forms that prompt organizations to quantify the parameters of a full-time load and experiment with tactics to actually reduce workloads. RL work matters for individuals and societies because being able to reduce one's workload while staying on a career track is an important asset to build careers that are sustainable (Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio, 2014). Such careers evolve over time throughout the individual's life-span, and encompass aspirations at work and in other life social spaces (De Vos et al., 2018; Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). Reducing one's workload, as an alternative to overwork or opting out of the workforce, supports sustainable careers by fostering well-being, work-life balance and family satisfaction (Kossek et al., 2014), subjective career success (Akkermans & Tims, 2017), and ongoing career advancement (Kossek et al., 2016).

Previous research on the role of RL work in sustainable careers has had two streams. One stream focuses on the individual view and suggests that downshifting (Schor, 1999) and customized careers (Valcour, Bailyn, & Quijada, 2007) where one can voluntarily work less while maintaining job security fosters health, happiness, and productivity in the long-run (de Hauw & Greenhaus, 2015). Often drawing on samples of women with families, studies typically examine the career outcomes of flexibility i-deals[3]—the individualized work arrangements that individuals strike with their managers and organizations (Hornung et al., 2008). A second research cluster takes an organizational view. One seminal study examined organizational learning and the extent to which requests for RL triggered changes in the corporate culture and in career paths (Lee et al., 2000). While some employers transform in order to learn from RL requests—known as the transformation paradigm, many remain in accommodation and elaboration approaches that maintain the status quo (Lee et al., 2000). Other studies analyzed rhetoric on supporting RL work, which is driven by managers'

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[3] Flexibility i-deals are one form of i-deals. For a broader discussion of i-deals see Rousseau, D.M. Idiosyncratic psychological contracts: Are flexibility and consistency mutually exclusive? *Organizational Dynamics*, 2001, *29*, 260–273.

dependency on skilled employees, by institutional pressures to accommodate women, and by perceived organizational benefits (Klein, Berman, & Dickson, 2000). This stream of research documented the under-utilization of RL work due to a lack of managerial and organizational implementation support (Powell & Mainiero, 1999), as well as cultural norms that consider full-time work throughout a career as the only way to achieve career success (Blair-Loy, 2003). As Kossek et al. (2016) note, supervisors play a key role in approving, constructing, and managing the arrangement; their trust and creativity are essential to challenging career routines. Although a recent study documented that implementing workload reduction is often done through unauthorized collaborative job crafting (Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2017), little work has examined managers' roles in devising informal tactics to reduce workloads, nor analyzed the responsibilities of stakeholders in the process of collaboratively crafting sustainable careers. We extend prior RL research (Lee et al., 2000) by focusing on the implementation issues of (1) reducing the workload while ensuring collaboration, and (2) ensuring career sustainability despite professional norms discounting part-time employees.

1.2. Redesign tactics to reduce workloads: Differentiation and integration

RL work creates work-redesign demands as it calls for rethinking how to organize work tasks to manage RL professionals who are embedded in work units with other professionals that work full time. RL redesign requires the simultaneous demarcation of the boundaries of jobs at the same time as enacting the linking of RL jobs to other full-time jobs. Organizational design theorists (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967) referred to these two processes as the differentiation and integration processes by which labor and behavioral attributes in complex organizations are organized (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). While Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) wrote from an organizational view, later theorists built on this literature to discuss boundaries and linkages at the job design level (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Our review of the organizational and job design differentiation and integration literature suggests two main substantive challenges that managers encounter as they manage the redesign the work for incumbents they supervise.

The first RL challenge, "the formal differentiation of labor", involves segmenting tasks into subsystems that reflect particular requirements (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Katz and Kahn (1978) referred to this process as role differentiation, the differentiation of the explicit and implicit expectations that others have of individual job roles in the organization. Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1991) later referred to this as established job tasks. Implementing RL work, therefore, requires the manager to be more explicit in workload allocation and to quantify the specific responsibilities of a particular employee. Clearly demarcating the boundaries of RL professional jobs is particularly challenging because full-time professional workload requirements are often undefined due to "emergent job tasks"—new tasks that organizations regularly take on in order to respond to new customer or environmental demands, or improve processes (Campion, Mumford, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). Professional work is never truly "done" as one demonstrates excellence and career commitment by taking on more work when needed, such that demarcating "role making" is a constant cycle of "role taking," that is the eager acceptance of new work tasks opportunities as they develop (Graen & Scandura, 1987).

Without a clear differentiation of role tasks to reduce workloads in ways that foster role clarity and reduce ambiguity, job stress and role conflict are likely to increase (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In order to avoid role overload, design theory suggests there needs to be some coordination of effort of the RL job's enactment with other jobs. This challenge, referred to as "integration", involves the "process of achieving unity of effort among the various subsystems in the accomplishment of the organization's task" (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, p. 4). Job design theorists refer to integration as task interdependence, which is the way in which one's job tasks relate to other members' job tasks to create a whole and meaningful job output, such as a service or product (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Integration also involves managing the timing and ordering of work handoffs either from one member to another. Implementing RL work triggers managers' re-reflection on how workloads are distributed; their coordination to span boundaries between team members, internal and external clients; and options for reducing the load. It may necessitate the disruption of current job integration systems and adaptation to new routines.

1.3. Collaborative crafting to ensure sustainability

The differentiation and integration imperatives imply that RL requires job redesign. Yet persisting RL implementation challenges suggests that neither the employee nor the manager is likely to unilaterally conduct job redesign in a sustainable way. Indeed, managers are not alone in redesigning jobs; on the contrary, employees and especially those who are managers and professionals often have some latitude to craft their jobs physically, cognitively and relationally (Wrezesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

In the case of RL work, job crafting can occur not only at the individual level but as social interaction, a phenomenon termed "collaborative crafting" (Leana et al., 2009). Thus, we use the lens of collaborative crafting to examine the informal process (Leana et al., 2009) by which employees, managers and other stakeholders in the organization jointly develop work practices. When it involves supervisors and employees, collaborative crafting has been referred to as "relational coordination", which is a mutually-reinforcing process involving managerial and employee communication and relationships pertaining to task integration (Gittell, 2002).

Managers likely perceive risks from experimentation. If the work does not get done, they are still held responsible for results. RL work also has the potential to challenge existing managerial and subordinate status differentials and alter social dynamics, as it opens the door for subordinate discussions on what is a "reasonable workload" and on control over work processes. Such interactions on workload reflect the socially-constructed ways in which individuals construe a job, which are determined not only by the objective characteristics of the job but also subjective features (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). In many countries, "ideal worker" norms that are historically grounded in male breadwinner and female homemaker gender roles prevail (Benschop, Van den Brink, Doorewaard, & Leenders, 2013; Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013). In these countries, work-life support is seen as a privilege rather than a right

(Mescher, Benschop, & Doorewaard, 2010).[4] Individuals who work flexibly can be stigmatized (Williams et al., 2013) and face inequality in career outcomes (Kossek, Su, & Wu, 2017). In addition, individuals who reduce their hours may be deemed less devoted to work (Blair-Loy, 2003). Moreover, clients may feel they are not getting as much support if assigned to a RL employee. Likewise, coworkers may feel that the RL person is not carrying their weight. To avoid career penalties for their users, managers of RL employees need to manage expectations stemming from the prevailing social schemas of work devotion for professionals (Bourdeau, Ollier- Malaterre, & Houlfort, 2019).

Thus, the *social space* (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015) in which RL work is initiated and implemented is crucial in understanding its outcomes for employees (i.e., reduced stress; sustainable career involvement), managers (i.e., an efficient team's division of labor and social climate), and organizations (i.e., talent retention, client views of performance). The collaborative crafting lens enables this multi-level analysis and the exploration of our two central research questions: 1) How are jobs redesigned to reduce (compared to reshuffle) workloads? and 2) What is the collaborative process that makes RL work sustainable?

2. Method

2.1. Overview

Given that RL work has been more prevalent in some Western Europe countries (Yerkes, Standing, Wattis, & Wain, 2010) than in North America,[5] where the sample for this qualitative study was drawn, a brief background survey was conducted on the current state of RL practice at North American employers, recognized as leaders in experimenting with flexible work practices. (See the Appendix for a findings' summary.) This integration of mixed methods is consistent with a growing social science approach (Creswell, 2003). The study and our literature review, suggested that key implementation challenges remained. These results enabled the design of a qualitative study in 20 firms that were early adopters of RL work in the U.S. and Canada.

2.2. Sample

In order to examine the under-investigated issue of RL implementation and ensure that the research phenomenon of interest would be highly visible, an organizational sample that might be considered as involving "extreme cases" (Eisenhardt, 1989) of early innovators of North American RL adopters was chosen. We drew on a sample reflective of research on the diffusion of organizational innovation (Rogers, 1962), and evidence that early adopters play a key role in shaping mimetic pressures for the adoption of new work practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). We studied firms that were early leaders in experimenting with RL work using referrals from previous RL studies (cf. Lee et al., 2000) and recommendations from North American corporate work-family Roundtable members, and Working Mother Best Employer lists. We ensured that our sample included a minimum of two companies from a cross-section of industries. These included financial services, high tech manufacturing, professional services/consulting, hospitality, pharmaceutical, and consumer goods. A majority of the firms (55%) had over 50,000 employees, about half (52%) of which were women. In these organizations, long hours for professionals and managers ranged from working 45 to 60 h or more per week. The sample was designed so that in each firm, at least 3 interviews were conducted to cover these 3 roles: an HR manager with responsibility for HR policies, a senior executive, and managers with experience supervising reduced load employees (from 1 to 4 supervising managers per firm) for a total of 86 semi-structured interviews. Table 1 shows a break out of the number of interviews across industries to show our data sources. The interviews were conducted over two years by a team of experienced researchers, who all held doctorates and were experts in career and organizational research.

2.3. Interview and analytical approaches

Managers were asked to discuss their experiences with managing employees on RL; they discussed 68 cases of RL work, of which 13 were job shares, such that 81 employees were considered. Of these employees, 95% were women, 50% were managers with direct reports and 50% were individual contributors. The average workload in these cases was 70%. A majority of the interviews were conducted on-site or by phone or Skype and taped with permission. We asked managers questions such as "How did you approach reducing the actual workload?" Questions to HR experts and executives pertained to their view of RL work and their views of organizational implementation issues. Each interview was about an hour, transcribed verbatim. The interviewers each took in-depth field notes and wrote up a detailed reflective memo after each interview within several days (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The research team also held retreats and conference calls to discuss key findings and triangulate themes. A theme had to be mentioned in at least 2 firms to be considered for inclusion. After the data were collected, a co-author who is an expert in flexible work implementation joined the team and independently analyzed the transcripts, which led to further reconciliation meetings and our final coding themes.

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[4] There are variations across countries in the extent to which work devotion is emphasized and the ideal worker is expected to be fully available, which impact social norms (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). Part-time and RL work are more widespread in the Netherlands than in North America (Yerkes, 2009); yet even in these more favorable contexts, women are majority users and there are gaps between policies and lived experiences (Yerkes et al., 2010).

[5] The voluntary part-time labor participation rate (less than 35 h a week) is 14.1% in the U.S. (Dunn, 2018); 15.6% in Canada, 20.3% in the UK and 34.8% in the Netherlands OECD, 2018).

Table 1
Data sources - interviews.

Industry	Number of companies	Number of manager interviews	Number of HR interviews	Number of executives interview	Total number of interviews by industry
Professional Services	**4**	8	4	4	**16**
Financial services	**3**	6	3	4	**13**
High Tech Manufacturing	**6**	14	6	6	**26**
Pharmaceuticals	**2**	4	2	2	**8**
Consumer Goods	**3**	7	3	3	**13**
Hospitality	**2**	5	2	3	**10**
Total	**20**	**44**	**20**	**22**	**86**

The bold numbers reflect totals for each column or row.

Specifically, we used a modified grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).[6] We first did open coding of the transcripts in order to identify first-order codes on a range of work redesign tactics, as illustrated in Fig. 1, which shows the structure of our data. Next, we did an axial coding of the data (Locke, 2001) pertaining to work redesign tactics as (a) reducing workload or not, and (b) consisting of a differentiation or an integration tactic (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967), until we reached categorical saturation for higher level codes. Next, we conducted another iterative review of the data to identify and analyze collaborative crafting processes. We coded roles and responsibilities in the employee-manager relational coordination level (Gittell, 2002), and at the contextual level of the organizations.

Last, many of the first-order codes contained some indications of time or implementation steps, referring to actions that occur at early stages (e.g., agreeing on the fact that a specific job was a fit for RL redesign) and actions that take place at later stages (e.g., using success stories to embed RL sustainably in an organization). Therefore, we organized the shared roles and responsibilities in a processual way to reflect the three stages that emerged from these mentions of time. As shown in Fig. 2, these three stages were: (1) RL exploration, (2) RL implementation, and (3) Sustainable career embedding.

3. Findings

3.1. Differentiation and integration tactics to reduce (or reshuffle) workloads

Our first research objective sought to understand the job redesign tactics managers used to implement RL work. Fig. 1 shows key themes of differentiation and integration tactics; and their workload impact in terms of workload reduction or workload reshuffling. Differentiation tactics treated the RL employee as a specific isolated case (i.e., assessment of the job to scope it and eliminate tasks; creating a new less than full-time position from scratch). Integration tactics, on the other hand, implemented the RL within the broader context of other stakeholders (e.g., team members, clients) such as via job shares, cross-training, and ensuring client coverage during days off. While some tactics were actually reducing workloads (numerical reduction in projects or clients, reducing face time demands, prioritizing and customizing work to align with skill strengths), others were simply reshuffling work (delegating to others, using the manager as a backup, cascading overflow to replacement hires). We present the tactics along these two axes of analyses: differentiating and integrating tactics that reduced versus reshuffled the workload.

3.1.1. Differentiating tactics that reduced the workload
The most common differentiating tactic that reduced the worked load and was mentioned in nearly one-third of the cases was *to assess and scope the job differently* than other similar professional jobs by identifying whether tasks could successfully be taken out of the position. A manager explains the later:

"I think you really have to look at the position. You do want the person to be successful. I think you have to think about it hard. if for some reason a reduced schedule doesn't really fit with the job they're doing, then you have to have an honest conversation about whether it really is going to work. Because it's not fair to them to reduce their schedule and then either create a position that they won't be successful in, or won't feel that they're being successful in."

A common way to cut tasks was to reduce the number of clients or projects. For example, if a typical load for a scientist at a medical equipment manufacturer was four research projects, a research scientist at a 75% load would have three projects instead of four research projects assigned. Or if most professionals worked five days, an individual at 80% load worked four days. These different configurations often were associated with lesser demands for face time meetings and availability for calls and quick email responses, particularly during scheduled days off.

A second differentiating tactic reducing workloads involved *job differentiation by being selective about the types of jobs* managers restructured. In some companies, managers only attempted to reduce the load for noncore jobs (e.g., no external customers, only staff responsibilities, long or few deadlines). Managers in these firms often perceived the workload in core jobs (e.g. revenue generating, direct customer contact, supervisory jobs) as impossible to reduce. But most of these same managers did perceive ways to restructure

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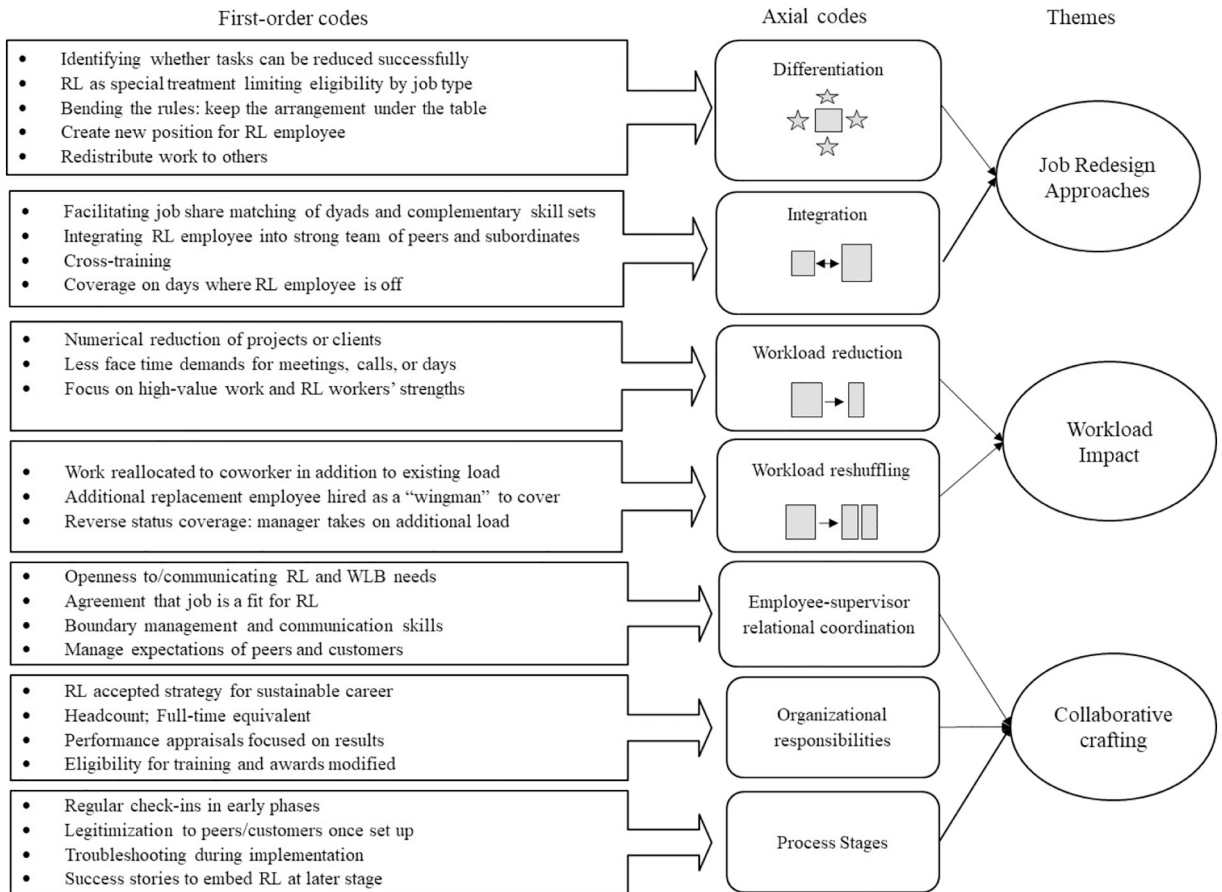[6] For a list of all interview questions see Appendix in (Kossek et al., 2016).
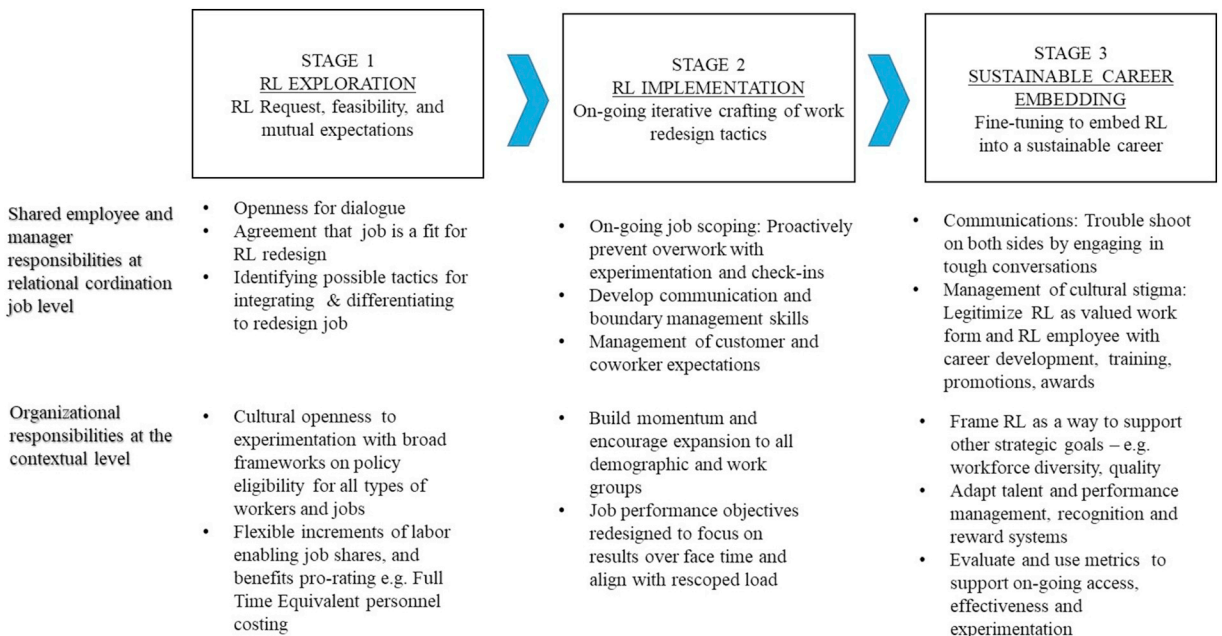
Fig. 1. Structure of data thematic codes.

Fig. 2. Collaborative crafting stages of sustainable reduced-load work.

noncore jobs to actually reduce workloads. In one marketing company, a senior manager said he was only willing to implement RL work for "downstream" jobs involving marketing established products. He would not attempt redesign for upstream jobs, those developing a new product brand and taking it to market. Yet upstream jobs were a key career stepping stone, a critical experience needed to advance in this firm. Tactics, such as these that differentiated noncore jobs as the only ones suitable for RL restructuring had the consequences of individuals being segregated to career paths at risk of going nowhere.

A third differentiating tactic that had the potential to reduce workloads related to *bending the rules* to avoid rigidity. This could involve breaking human resource or other administrative rules often under the radar. Managers using these tactics often saw administrative rules as "thin or fluid" boundaries that they could experiment with or shift as mutually beneficial. One story of how bending the rules had benefits for both company and employee involved a senior manager who fine-tuned an arrangement for a high talent senior Tax Director. She had first let the Tax Director work 75% then 60%, but then the individual was still working many more hours than she was being paid for and wanted to work; so ready to quit. Instead of allowing this high potential employee to leave, the supervising manager cut a deal where she formally told HR the pay was 60% load, but only expected the Director work a 50% load. The informant explained:

> "She works, kind of however much it takes to get the job done. But the big risk is that you're not working fifty, you're getting paid for 50%, but you're really working 75%. And we've addressed that. That's why she's at 60% now because she was working way more than a 50% schedule, so we bumped it up, basically her pay, to a 60% to recognize that she wasn't really working 50%, she was working more than that."

This manager ended up nominating the Director for the firm's most prestigious employee of the year award. The employee won a trip around the world on which she adopted her first child. She won the award for finding how to use an arcane tax law to save the company millions of dollars. Bending the rules for a high talent hard working employee and giving her a workload facilitating her ability to be creative and focus, benefited both employer and employee.

Another example of getting around rules comes from a manager who was frustrated in how his firm computed people to manager ratios to "count" his RL worker:

> "As just another manager, in terms of the ratios that you get measured on sometimes. But—the people to manager ratios… It is just sort of a thorn. It is an aggravation. You have to sit down and go justify it over and over again, you know. But if things are really, really tight, then you do kind of get pushed to the edge…. for all those reasons, it made sense for me to combine that group with the other one and get people off my case."

A fourth differentiating tactic involved *creating a new less than full-time position from scratch.* This happened during downsizing when a manager had to lower headcount or labor costs and instead of laying off, found volunteers to move to 80% or 60% load. Other managers created new positions ad hoc in order to attract or keep talent. The latter can require a willingness to identify miscellaneous job tasks to amalgamate. A senior market research manager described configuring a 60% workload for a very valued senior manager in her group of 19. "Sarah" had come back 80% after her first child, but after her second wanted to go to 60%. She found this difficult because it's harder to make "regular jobs" at Sarah's management level fit three days:

> "It's not easy just to create a job, so it was difficult. Sort of the *stars have to align* a little bit because it's not like money comes out of thin air. There was sort of like half jobs here and there that I ended up being able to put together, with other changes and leaves… it's a lot of negotiation with a number of different people. The biggest challenge was to make sure the scope of the role was sufficient for her to retain her management level of compensation, so she wouldn't have to take a demotion into it. I kind of added two roles in here because I needed to make the scope big enough, broad enough. By sort of switching the role around that had sort of one middle manager to one more junior manager and one more senior manager, it gave more skills to the role, because now you could have somebody that could really lead and somebody could really 'do,' which was better than somebody sort of halfway in between."

3.1.2. Differentiating tactics that reshuffled the workload

A differentiating tactic that did not attempt to reduce the workload aimed, instead, at *redistributing work to others within the team.* As the example below illustrates, this tactic differentiated the RL workers by limiting the RL schedule to 24 h a week and preventing their overwork. But ironically, this attempt resulted, in some cases, in the workload being redistributed to the full-time workers in the team. A manager supervising an IT team leader at a pharmaceutical firm referred to reshuffling work from a RL employee to peers as solving the problem of "Who does that extra five hours?" in the work unit. She elaborated:

> "I sat down with her (the RL worker) and we worked through what, what were some things that I wanted her to have on her plate… I figured out what, with the amount of time that she has, what is it that we could move off to another team. I have six other team leaders. So, there was *some workload shuffling* there. I think the bottom line is, is that we came up with what appeared to be a good workload for her. And so I am constantly in our one-on-ones, I meet with her every other week, and in our one-on-ones, we talk about her stress level, we talk about her workload, and we, we constantly talk about whether or not the reduced workload is still working. I just recently went through and pulled something off of her plate that, um, that was taking a lot of time that didn't need her specific skills or attention. And I moved that to another team leader."

We now turn to integration tactics, starting with the ones that reduce the workload.

3.1.3. Integrating tactics that reduced the workload

Integrating RL work with other flexibility forms, especially job share, was the most common integrating tactic. Some of the most positive stories in our sample included well-coordinated job share situations, which effectively reduced workloads. More than half of these cases involved two individuals in one position each working three days a week (60% and 60%) with at least one day of overlap. An illustrative example of integrating tactics emerging from our data is a job share redesign involving a demanding core job with two people each working 60% load is provided by a pharmaceutical company sales director. The manager had a seriously under-performing sales district (ranked last in the country: 42nd out of 42 districts) for which he was trying to figure out how to improve results. He tried to entice a high talent manager with the caliber of skills he really admired and needed to improve performance to come and take the job after maternity leave. She said she didn't want full-time work, but wanted to work RL, and would he consider a job share proposal? The Sales Director went to his boss to persuade him to try out the proposal, and given the stellar reputations of the proposed job sharers, the executive said he would try it (even though his own wife had worked a strained job share). The company had nothing to lose. The Sale Director explained an integrating timing (working common days) tactic used to support RL:

"They had complementary traits. One was in sales training. One was in human resources. One was an experienced manager. The other worked in managed care…that would represent that combined management team…when we looked at how we were divided, I remember…(the senior exec)..saying "Well, that's not what I expected… the thinking was we'd have someone work Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday morning and then Wednesday afternoon, Thursday and Friday." (but) They both work Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Wednesday morning... by doing that, from the point of view of sales, the most productive time is during the beginning of the week where the reps have all the latest information… that way the whole team is up and running… fully engaged, & when you have meetings"

Research team interviewer: What happened Wednesday afternoons?

"They work Monday, Tuesday in the field with the sales reps. Wednesday they're in the office, Wednesday afternoon they're essentially done, but they're always available to check voicemail."

By structuring the job to have a heavier load at the beginning of the week, the workload was redesigned to match the rhythm of the core job's and sales department's work processes, fitting the flow of sales work. The sales managers made it clear they wanted set days off so they could arrange steady child care. Yet they were willing to check email and take some calls on the days they were officially off, which suggests the need for on-going collaborative crafting, which we elaborate on in the next section. They each supervised six of the twelve subordinates, reducing the span of control. They took turns going to the annual sales meeting to represent the district, with one manager focusing more on financial aspects and the other on HR (suggesting integrated task differentiation). These two managers took their sales district's results from being last in the country to first in one year, all while supervising the firm's most diverse sales team.

Most job shares had splits of 60–40% or 50–50%. The two professionals integrated as a single entity with a common resume, phone, and email. A contrasting yet equally interesting job share tactic had fluid semantic boundaries on how a "partner" and "job share" were viewed. One company had a "job share without a partner", a situation defined as when you have a job share with two people sharing a position in terms of labor costing, but the positions are really different and operating independently. An example was a pair in employment benefits, where two people are each working half time on two very different benefits initiatives.

A second interesting integrating tactic reducing workloads related to *improving the flow of recurring work processes to focus on value-added tasks and then drawing on these principles to assign jobs tasks to the RL person as one would a full-timer.* A VP of Finance at a major medical manufacturer supply company explained:

"The process of managing work-life balance for me it isn't really any different than a forty hours' employee or a thirty hours' employee. When you start with a team that's all forty-hour employees, the first thing you think of is I don't want these people working nights and weekends. And my goal is to structure the workflow and the team's interaction so that we're not having people in on Saturday, there's not a lot of voicemail traffic over the weekend, not a lot of night work… when you switch the paradigm and say now I have a thirty hours' employee in the mix, it really just changes the definition of the problem. Now it's I don't want somebody working Thursday afternoon, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday."

He continued to explain how this involved analysis of the entire unit's workload and flow:

"First you try to take recurring processes and make them as efficient as possible and for people to understand what everyone else is doing well enough to get that through. And then all you have left is managing the ad hoc thing, which takes some management. So you have to be thinking "I can't really spring at 11:00 on Thursday morning this request on so and so because I wouldn't spring it on somebody at 4:30 on Friday night."

Having supervised RL directors and professionals for a number of years, the VP was able to integrate this knowledge and learning about "the way I manage the people and the way we, we *load* the organization from a work perspective" to be able to redesign work processes. This entailed better planning for improved workflow and coordination for the entire finance unit. Prior to his arrival, the unit had been notorious for long overtime hours with people working all night at the end of each quarter under no clear work process:

"Now we have a very disciplined timetable now in terms of when people have to submit data to corporate and how we process data. We had team meetings, the people themselves started to see the opportunities to do things differently, they were very motivated not to work weekends and nights. So I really empowered them to make the changes. I can only tell you that I facilitated the process. The actual decisions were theirs."

3.1.4. Integrating tactics that reshuffled the workload

Integrating tactics that reshuffled the workload made sure the RL position had back up coverage by assigning the existing load to someone else, who could be a coworker, an additional person hired in the team, or the manager himself or herself. One such tactic was by *integrating the job into a team of strong peers or subordinates*. Here are two examples from two different informants:

"We have built a team around her (the Stock director) to be able to help cover her work when she's not here on Fridays and we have a board meeting coming up; you need to have a great team manager a team leader."

"(My department) has a team of real estate lawyers that have worked together for years, so while jobs not identical they can make judgment calls if a person is not in, and can call the RL person if it is an urgent issue."

Cross-training was a second integration tactic that redistributed the workload when the RL employee was off:

"There are two different aspects when you say cross-training: "The first thing is getting people to realize where one person was affecting another person's job. So many times people were doing their jobs with blinders on... the second was somebody would say 'you know, I'm really crunched for time during these four hours', the person next to them would say 'you know what, I'm not really very busy at that time. And that's something I'd like to learn. Why don't we get together and let's see what we can do'".

Such cross-training served a double purpose of preparing co-workers to take on the additional load when the RL employee was off, and to use RL as an opportunity to motivate and develop the other employees in the team. Thus, reshuffling the load was not necessarily a negative outcome if redistributed to employees with slack and availability.

A third integration tactic that redistributed the load involved *reactively managing RL overflow work by having the* manager take it on, spreading the work across internal workers or hiring a temp at the last minute. Having a manager cover subordinates' unfinished tasks when they are not at work has been referred to as "reverse status staffing." It runs counter to principles of work-life privilege for managers in higher hierarchical roles, as managers often take on the onus of workload shifting demands (Kossek, Rosokha, & Leana, 2019). When asked who picks up the RL workers' 20% load, a supervising director overseeing many lawyers at a large rapidly growing hospitality firm answered:

"Good question.…that's one of the challenges of people on part-time or reduced hour schedules. It does have to get picked up… that doesn't necessarily mean that somebody is doing 20% more. It may mean that the same job takes 20% longer. And…that some portion of it…more.. work gets sent out. So there's a true trade-off in cost…but if we are saving 20% of the salary….that… means we have dollars to pay someone, an outside lawyer to pick up some of that work."

The director mentioned that a larger workgroup size facilitated spreading the workload:

"…philosophically we've tried to be flexible. It's easier when you have more people because you can 'spread.' If that person isn't available, and you have two other people who can be there on a day when that person's not here if they're on a reduced schedule, then there's coverage and it's easier to do. When you have fewer people, it's not that you don't want to accommodate the need, it can just be more difficult."

3.2. Collaborative crafting of Reduced-load work for sustainable careers

The above tactics we have identified were embedded in a collaborative crafting process that aimed at strengthening the work redesign tactics by managing workload over time and at managing social expectations of the RL employee to ensure that the career was sustainable, by working with peers, clients, and leaders. The first locus of collaborative crafting that emerged from our coding was employee-supervisor relational coordination, and the second was the organization. Our data suggested the crucial role of time in initiating and embedding RL work, leading us to model the process in three stages: (1) RL exploration, (2) RL implementation, and (3) Sustainable career embedding.

3.2.1. Stage 1: Reduced-load work exploration

Actions described as critical in the first stage of the process related to exploring whether RL was feasible in a given job and organization. At the job relational coordination level, three main responsibilities of employees and managers emerged for the first stage: openness for mutual dialogue, agreement that the job was a fit for RL redesign, and the identification of job redesign tactics, which we discussed above. The first responsibility was openness. About 35% of managers viewed it as their role to assist employees when they request help in finding more balance, and to take responsibility for the structure and allocation of work in such a way that all employees can have a life outside work. About three-fourths of the managers indicated that they responded very positively to initial conversations with employees and wanted to support requests. The openness, however, depended on whether the position was collaboratively crafted between the employee and the manager (84% of our cases were new RL jobs established in partnership), or inherited by the manager (16% of our cases). When the RL was inherited, the employee had to socialize the manager on how RL works, and the manager and employee authority dynamics were reversed as the employee was leading the way in which the arrangement is crafted. During this first stage, it was easier for employees and managers to collaborate on redesigning the workload when both parties felt there was some flexibility and opportunity for dialogue on both sides regarding how to craft and manage the RL.

The second shared responsibility at this stage was to collaboratively select positions for discussion that "fit" RL work and to scope the jobs accordingly. This meant that the workload needed to be predictable and quantifiable. Jobs that had many deadlines and face to face contact five days a week were not a good fit, while those that involved individual contributions or project work with deadlines that were known in advance were a good fit. Nearly two-fifths of managers (39%) stated the importance of scoping RL jobs right to align pay with the reduced load, which meant finding creative ways to eliminate pieces of the work or to combine tasks in the case of job sharing. Managers stated scoping involved customizing the position to the employee and to the job and not using a one size fits all

approach. Previous managerial exposure to RL facilitated employees' and managers' interactions at this stage: 3/4 of the managers who were initially open to discussing a RL had prior experience managing RL work with two or more arrangements.

Turning to data from the executives and HR experts' interviews, these actors indicated that leaders and the HR unit could support the collaborative crafting of RL work in two main ways. First, by providing cultural openness in policy enactment and eligibility, and second, by using a costing approach that focused on flexible increments of labor and not just total headcount. Cultural openness was deemed more important than formal policies: managers asserted that formal policies were irrelevant in 33% of the cases, and played a critical role in the negotiation of the RL work arrangements in only 37% of the cases. A common theme from interviewees was the importance for the employer to provide a broad framework on RL work as an accepted tactic for a sustainable career, rather than a rigid policy. As an example, the organization had principles that the pay cut and hours should be commensurate with the workload reduction rather than specifying amounts in advance. It was also important, in the interviews, that HR and leaders supported the idea that RL work would be possible across a range of jobs, career stages, core jobs, and demographics (e.g. both men and women). In over half the firms (55%), participants reported that having individuals working RL was seen as "normal and common" in their organization.

Second, a tangible organizational responsibility for RL work related to how headcount and benefits were costed. Using Full Time Equivalent dollars (FTE) rather than a headcount of "bodies" structurally enabled managers to have the flexibility to manage their total pool of compensation for salaries, however they saw fit. FTEs enabled firms to adjust billable hour expectations appropriately. In contrast, budgeting on headcount only made managers more reluctant to grant a reduction in hours as they worried that they might not be approved for a new replacement next year and have a smaller budget. Allowing benefits to be pro-rated and training dollars to be distributed, regardless of employment status was another policy enabler of the collaborative crafting of RL as it allowed the position to be discussed for possible adoption.

3.2.2. Stage 2: Reduced-load work implementation

The second stage pertained to actions taken to further proof and stabilize the agreements and tactics set up in the first stage. We identified three main responsibilities that were shared between employees and employers at this stage: on-going job scoping to proactively prevent overwork, the development of boundary management and communication skills to make the work redesign tactics work, and the management of customers' and coworkers' expectations. First, our interviewees mentioned challenges that have been well established in the literature on professional work, such as ambiguous job expectations, lack of finiteness, tasks being added in a position's scope over time with few, if any, taken away (Blair-Loy, 2003). They pointed out that these challenges were heightened with RL work as the threat that was most frequently brought up was when the job incumbent ending up working more than what had been agreed. Thus, a key responsibility shared between the employee and the manager at this stage was to proactively prevent overwork, i.e. longer hours than has been contracted for the pay, and also avoiding work intensification, i.e. working very intensely a full-time load in a part-time hour's situation. The cases most likely to be characterized by the supervising managers as working well for both the employee and the firm (over 60% of the cases) often had the manager and the employee regularly checking in and having periodic discussions to prevent the unfair bargain of the RL worker agreeing to part-time pay in return for full time work. Another way that managers and employees who partnered actively addressed overwork was to combat cultural pressures to increase job scope. A common theme managers stated was that employees had to be firm in crafting how they enacted RL such as understanding their own work limitations and not overcommitting to work beyond the assigned load. Many managers stated that they supported this goal by not assigning work that was heavier than the RL agreement. Managers also noted that employees needed to take ownership to make sure they were backed up with personnel or resources so that projects were completed on time. Managers then were able to support the RL by aligning resources such as employee backups with the job load and adjusting deadlines. Exceptions were critical deadlines where the employee had to work more than the RL bargain in one week and therefore was "flexible on flexibility" (Kossek et al., 2016). Then managers sometimes compensated the additional hours in time reduction the following week, signaling respect of the initial agreement.

A second shared responsibility theme pertaining to implementing an RL job involved managers and employees both developing personal skills in role boundary management and communication. Employees needed to actively strive to develop boundary management skills to prevent work from spilling over their other life roles, for instance by communicating and coordinating with peers and with their manager. Likewise, managers also engaged in increased coordination, communication, and redirecting of the RL worker to focus on needs and priorities. This could require considerable effort and fluidity on the managers' and employees' parts to constantly communicate and re-size the job boundaries appropriately, as a manager stated:

"Sizing the job is a *moving target*, and you have to keep working at it to find the right arrangement. People have to stay in touch with voice mail and email to be sure there's nothing critical or time-sensitive."

All of these tactics helped reduce cultural ambiguity by forcing more explicitness on load expectations. This collaborative crafting practice sometimes transferred over to become culturally embedded for full-time workers. For example, one company now explicitly states that "full time" professional work is 50 rather than 40 h a week.

The third shared responsibility related to managing customer and coworker expectations and adapting to changing business conditions. The cases that managers deemed to be the most successful seemed to either involve making sure there was clear coverage on the day the employee was not working and framing RL as a client benefit (e.g., "we have assigned two people to support you"), or alternatively making sure that the arrangement was invisible and seamless to customers. And surprisingly, in a fourth of the firms, if downsizing or financial conditions occurred, RL was now more valued by senior management as a dual talent retention and costing savings strategies that helped the bottom line.

At the organizational level for the implementation stage, the first key responsibility was to build momentum and encourage the

expansion of RL to new groups. For example, a work-life expert and organizational leader might gather feedback data from managers and employees on experiences, and encourage different work units to try RL. By doing so, leaders helped spread RL to new groups by making it normative. In half the companies, leaders had supported the spread of RL to new areas of the firm or to new demographic groups such as line workers, new mothers, more men (30% of firm) or retirees (15%) in order to bring back valued skilled workers. The objective was for RL to be increasingly used by all demographic groups and career stages. Participants from 25% of the companies indicated that RL were also facilitated by the organization when the policy was made visible and easily accessible. As one individual stated:

"The company has put on the table that almost anyone can request a RL position and HR will work with the manager to try to make it happen."

A second critical organizational responsibility was to place a higher emphasis on business results instead of "face" time. One fourth (25%) of the firms noted moving away from face time was essential in the acceptance of RL. This extended to employees who were not RL workers, who were empowered to work schedules that fit their lives. As one executive stated: "We keep telling our managers, 'It's not… hours… It is results.'"

3.2.3. Stage 3: Sustainable career embedding

At stage 3, the critical stakes were to ensure that the RL arrangement was sustainable over time. This stage was important as cases that were successful for the employee's career, supervisors, and organizations were cases that benefited from joint efforts to embed RL into the organization's culture, rather than working at RL arrangements in a one-shot isolated way.

The key shared responsibilities between employees and managers related to engaging in troubleshooting when the need arose, and to championing RL generally. First, managers and employees partnered to troubleshoot and adapt mutual expectations regarding performance expectations, to make sure someone was not rated as a lower contributor over time if they were seen as not doing as much work as their peers if a manager "forgot" someone was working RL. Although a great diversity of leadership styles was reported by the managers, in a third of the cases, the managers used a hands-off trusting approach, yet communicated their needs openly and engaged in tough conversations when issues came up. Similarly, employees also had to be leaders in fine-tuning the arrangements and managing RL enactment over time. A manager said:

"When I went RL I didn't put a sign on my door that said 'I don't work Fridays.' Or I didn't leave a voicemail that said it's Friday and I'm not at the office. Then I told my boss, 'when I go back to full time in January', my boss said 'I'd forgotten that', and I think it affected how he saw my performance, but now that is water under the bridge."

Another shared responsibility at the embedding stage, pertained to manager and employee actions to champion and legitimize RL to other members. One example was a manager engaging in public actions to show the value of the RL worker, such as nominating high performers for an award or special training. Such actions helped to reinforce the cultural legitimacy of RL work through both management action and employee high job commitment. Success stories also related to retaining the employee thanks to the RL, and to sometimes the RL employee being promoted. This did not come without risks for the manager, as one explained:

"I was developing a reputation…as a manager who was obviously very, very open to flexible arrangements. But every once in a while I'd kind of get a jab from a colleague about, "Well, gee, everybody in your organization seems to be on some kind of a growth assignment, "kind of a thing… So I felt like I had to, on some regular basis, defend my position as being open to these kinds of things, especially for people who were still trying to move up in their careers."

Similarly, managers narrated how they championed RL by experimenting with other flexibility forms to educate others and support implementation. Examples include establishing a part-time work network or employee resource group network for RL professionals for support and knowledge- sharing. In a fifth of the firms, RL employees were able to attend meetings virtually, which facilitated implementation as scheduling meetings didn't have to be limited to certain days.

Turning to the organizational level, an important responsibility at this stage pertained to senior managers adopting narratives supporting RL by framing it as a way to support other strategic goals such as globalization or becoming more agile. For example, one company with a long history of promoting cultural empowerment saw RL as fitting in well with not only growing globalization but also greater trust in flexible working for the entire firm. An informant notes,

"When you're global, you can't see people, so you get used to establishing relationships via phone or long distance, and you get used to trust[ing] people." We take flexibility for granted."

Similarly, an informant at another firm explained, "So there is a lot of flexibility built in. More and more, we don't work with people who sit down the hall from us." Clearly, greater acceptance of flexible working required making a cultural shift toward a new way of managing and thinking about one's staff and transferring greater boundary control to employees. He said,

"Organizationally… many people like having staff at their beck and call. A lot of people, the first thing they think of is "what is going to happen the first Friday I really need her"?

A second organizational responsibility was to adapt HR policies such as performance appraisals and reward systems to help embed RL, and to ensure people were not evaluated on the same performance criteria than full-time workers. Thus, performance evaluation objectives were pro-rated, such that if a typical load for a project manager was 5 projects, a manager working 80% could still get the highest rating for managing 4 projects. Another example was that an RL employee could still get a bonus or be nominated for a prestigious award.

Lastly, firms that were more advanced in embedding to RL were also more likely to take the responsibility to collect data to evaluate its effectiveness and fine tune it. Employers that saw RL as a sustainable prevalent way of enacting a career were also more likely to measure the effectiveness of RL. They were more likely to track the number and retention of people working RL at any given time, make managers accountable for RL, and benchmark RL effectiveness.

4. Discussion

This article began with a discussion of the mixed research on the difficulties sometimes faced in implementing RL work, such as fully reducing workloads to match pay reductions, and enabling incumbents to have sustainable careers as envisioned by the editors of this special issue.

Our study advances the integration of research on part-time and flexible working (Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2017; Hornung et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2000) with the job redesign (Leana et al., 2009) and the sustainable (De Vos et al., 2018; Veld et al., 2015) and customized careers (Valcour et al., 2007) literatures. We contribute to the part-time and flexible working literature by extending Gascoigne and Kelliher's (2017) findings that workload reduction is often done informally and even without authorization. We concur with these findings and document a full range of RL implementation tactics that we classify as job differentiation and integrating actions. Our research also helps strengthen research and practice on RL implementation in the perspective of sustainable careers by discussing the novel idea of workload reduction versus reshuffling: the knowledge we provide on how work can be reduced or reshuffled can be put to use to enable employees looking to reconcile different work and nonwork commitments to remain happy, healthy and productive (De Vos et al., 2018). Our finding that work is sometimes reduced and sometimes reshuffled to coworkers or the manager has implications for coworkers and managers: when work is reshuffled such that others act as backups for the RL employee, the RL employee may benefit from a more sustainable career, but the ones who take on the additional load may end up worse off. Thus, using differentiating and integrating tactics that reduce workloads without overloading others are more likely to foster sustainable careers.

Second, we contribute to sustainable careers theory by illustrating the dynamic, systemic and processual nature of the building and maintaining sustainable careers over multiple stages, levels, and stakeholders, extending careers (De Vos et al., 2018) and career customization (Valcour et al., 2007) and collaborative crafting (Leana et al., 2009) studies. This process is fundamental in that it embeds job redesign tactics that when done in isolation could easily result in inequitable workloads and job intensification; yet when done in collaboration aligned with context over time ensures that working a RL remains compatible with objective career success. In sum, one-off accommodations are not likely to foster sustainable careers, whereas a collaborative process over time does. Our model shows how the concept of sustainable careers is a shared responsibility between employers and employees (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015) that includes analyzing the implementation of forms of work that challenge cultural assumptions of excessive work devotion (Blair-Loy, 2003). We proposed a three-stage framework involving employees and supervisors interactions at the job level, that are aligned with organizational level contextual cultural and policy supports. This framework extends prior research viewing RL as an individually-negotiated "i-deal." (Hornung et al., 2008). It shows how collaborative crafting embeds RL in sustainable careers, as opposed to relegating RL to the early stages of cultural accommodation as identified by Lee et al. (2000). Aligning one's career with one's values by working a RL is only sustainable when workloads are effectively redesigned so that employees do not receive part-time pay for nearly full-time workloads, and when they are viewed as being on legitimate career tracks.

4.1. Further research, limitations and practical implications

Our study opens up many interesting future research avenues. First, regarding work redesign tactics, we identified the use of differentiating and integrating tactics. Given sustainable careers may involve dual and sometimes almost paradoxical processes, future studies might examine when these processes are complementary and when they are conflicting. Using only differentiating tactics may result in the stigmatization of the RL employee, whereas managing in ways that regularly integrate him or her with the rest of the team may be beneficial. For example, Lautsch and Kossek (2009) found that rather than just managing teleworkers' needs, managers had more effective coworker relations and work processes when they managed the needs of teleworkers and non-tele-workers simultaneously. Therefore, RL individuals' unique career needs (differentiation) and their needs to also feel belongingness (integration) may need to be jointly managed. Future studies also should explore whether the simultaneous use of integration and differentiating tactics may help embed RL work into sustainable careers, not only for the RL employee himself or herself but also for their coworkers and managers. Conversely, studies might identify when emphasizing certain tactics over others is more likely to result in reduction over reshuffling. Second, future research should examine whether firms that have greater use of collaborative crafting are also more likely to be at the elaboration or transformation stages of implementing sustainable career systems (Lee et al., 2000). Third, research comparing career outcomes from RL strategies with other sustainable career strategies (e.g., going on leave, or informally cutting back, or changing professions) would be insightful. Research is also needed on the long-term health and nonwork outcomes of sustainable career strategies such as RL work. Are employees who reduce their workloads able to attain longer longevity and better family and career outcomes than those who burn themselves out while working 60–70 h a week on a traditional stan-dardized overworking professional career path?

Our sample was limited in that we focused the analysis on professionals in successful arrangements. Recent reviews show that professional part-time work is more available to professionals than to blue collar and hourly workers (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). Future studies may examine how to implement RL work in challenging career work contexts that traditionally have lacked access to other flexibility forms such as telework or flextime. In addition, our interviewees mostly discussed cases they deemed successful and there may be a bias insofar as we have less data on cases that failed. Future research should collect more data on tactics that do not work well and crafting that fails to involve key actors. Also, while a strength of this study is that we have multi-source and multi-level data, our data is from managers, HR experts, and executives. Our sample fits our intent, but future research should investigate RL manager-employee dyads over time, and triangulate data with HR, peers, and family members.

This study's sample was mostly women, so we did not examine gender explicitly. Our sample is in line with the fact that women

are still the heavier users of these arrangements across nations even though they are often offered to men and women (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). As RL is a rising trend among dual earner families and phased retirees, future studies may be able to include more men. Also, the data in this study were mostly from the U.S., a country lacking strong paid support for family leaves (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). Perhaps RL is more important as a sustainable career strategy in our sample as it may have been hard for U.S. professionals to take a leave and still be on a career path. We therefore call for comparative studies across countries with diverse work-family public provisions and regulations.

Senior executives, managers, teams, and HR leaders can use the job redesign tactics, processes, and examples from this paper to better implement RL in their firms. The scales we propose in the appendix are valuable for an employer to benchmark its RL approach. We draw attention to important collaboration tactics such as first having a mutual dialogue, scoping the position right, and using FTE costing at the RL exploration stage. At the implementation stage, proactively preventing overwork and building momentum are crucial responsibilities. At the embedding stage, troubleshooting, championing and using metrics to assess effectiveness enable mainstreaming sustainable careers. Offering multiple ways to achieve a career is critical given the aging workforce, growing family stress, slowed progress in advancing women, and fertility rate decline. RL may be one way to not only enhance sustainable careers but also energize global, national, and local economies by increasing labor force participation over the life course.

5. Conclusion

This study can help speed the learning curve for what still is an innovative career practice that is not widely implemented. We hope that the tactics and collaborative crafting actions that we have identified are helpful for scholars to continue to advance this research stream and for organizations, managers and individuals as they craft sustainable careers.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A. Exploratory background study to benchmark implementation challenges of reduced load work

We conducted a quantitative survey of work-life experts in 54 firms recognized as desirable workplaces for working mothers in order to understand the current state of implementation practice for RL work in North America. We reached out to the Association for Female Executives (NAFE), members of the Boston College Work-Family Roundtable, human resource advisory boards, and reviewed Working Mother lists for our sample. The survey results identified a range of organizational approaches and challenges pertaining to the implementation of RL work, summarized briefly below. It also included open-ended questions and piloted exploratory implementation measures.

Prevalence of RL work. In the survey of 54 firms, virtually all respondents (98%) indicated that professionals were expected to work longer than 40 h a week, suggesting a context in which more employees were likely to desire RL work for sustainable careers. Seventy-seven percent of the firms reported that there were more employees working a RL than five years ago. Half (55%) of employers agreed or strongly agreed that it was possible to be hired from the external market as a RL employee. Seventy percent agreed that a high performing RL worker had an equal chance for advancement compared to an employee working full time.

Implementation barriers and approaches. However, the survey results also suggested that implementation barriers remained. In fairness, employees who work reduced hours or load and take a pay cut should not be expected to complete the same amount of work as they did when they were full time. However, in over two- fifths of the firms (42%), the respondents did not agree with the statement "The performance review process for those working RL adjusts the criteria for evaluation in a fair manner, given the lesser hours of the individual". Regarding career development and special development opportunities, 44% of organizational respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that career development opportunities were less available for RL workers. Thirty percent of employers believed working on a RL basis hindered one's access to special developmental assignments. Moreover, our results showed that the approval process for RL work varied widely and in a majority of the cases (52.8%) the supervisor had complete discretion to craft informal or formal agreements, with the remainder involving both HR approval and a formal agreement with the direct supervisor (40.9%) or other arrangements (6.9%). Surprisingly, none of the employers in the sample stated that their HR department was the only responsible for approval, indicating that RL work is not a right of employment but an idiosyncratic deal that must be negotiated with the individual department or supervisor. This suggested the need for more qualitative analysis on the implementation of reduced load work with managers. The survey also included piloting of several exploratory scales. The *access to RL work scale* (see below) captures restrictions of access based on caregiving status for elder care, child care, whether one was a salaried or hourly worker, or married. The *RL cultural support and integration scale* (see below) captures the degree to which RL work is culturally supported and integrated into the firm, by adapting work practices or linking to business objectives. The mean scores generally showed average or slightly lower levels than average support. For example, only 40% of organizations reported that salaried employees were equally as likely as hourly employees to have access to RL options. Similarly, the cultural integration scale hovered close to the middle of the scale with a mean of 3.11. The survey results were helpful for understanding organizational and HR contextual linkages for the stages of RL work. While these scales need further validation, the content areas were valuable for

understanding HR and organizational contextual supports and provided content understanding the need for collaborative crafting activities to implement RL work.

Reduced Load Access (Cronbach's alpha: 0.70).

1. Salaried employees are equally likely as hourly employees to have access to reduced load.
2. Managers are equally likely as professionals to have access to reduced load.
3. People with children are equally likely as people without children to have access to reduced-load.
4. Married people are equally likely than unmarried people to have access to reduced load.
5. People with elder-care responsibilities are equally likely as people without elder-care responsibilities to have access to reduced load.

Reduced Load Culture and Integration Scale (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.84).

1. RL policies are linked to our overall organization strategy and business objectives.
2. RL policies are somewhat integrated with other related HR policies.
1. 3 We have reviewed our promotion and career systems to ensure that those working on a RL basis are not penalized.
3. The RL policies in this organization reflect a culture that is supportive of employees effectively fulfilling their work and life commitments.
4. The way in which RL options are actually implemented in this organization suggests an organization culture that is less "work-life balance friendly" than the policies imply. (REVERSE CODED).
5. Although there are RL arrangements in the organization, the overall organizational culture is not supportive of the individuals working on a RL basis. (REVERSE CODED).
6. The organizational culture here makes it easy for individuals to attempt reduced-load arrangements.

Both scales use a 5 point Likert Scale of 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree or disagree, 4, agree, 5 strongly agree.

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