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WORK-LIFE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: BREAKING DOWN OR CREATING BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVENESS?

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Although many employers have adopted policies to support the integration of work with personal and family life, expected positive gains are not always realized. One reason for this gap is that practitioners and researchers often overlook how variation in policy implementation and use by different employee stakeholder groups fosters a culture of inclusiveness. We discuss four ways in which work-life policies are implemented (the level of supervisor support for use, universality of availability, negotiability, and quality of communication) and show how these affect the degree to which policies are seen as promoting inclusion or exclusion. These implementation attributes affect whether an adopted policy is perceived to fulfill work-life needs and act to signal the organization's support for individual differences in work identities and life circumstances. Implications for HR practitioners are discussed. © 2008 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Over the past few decades, employer policies and practices to support work-life integration have proliferated as a means to attract and retain a high-quality workforce (Kossek & Lambert, 2005). *Work-life policies* include any organizational programs or officially sanctioned practices designed to assist employees with the integration of paid work with other important life roles such as family, education, or leisure. Examples of work-life policies include flexibility in the timing, location, or amount of work (e.g., flextime, job sharing, part-time work, telework, leaves of absence), direct provision of caregiving

and health benefits (e.g., child or elder care, domestic partner), and monetary and informational support for nonwork roles (e.g., vouchers, referral services).

Despite rising adoption of the number and range of work-life policies and growing practitioner claims regarding their value (cf. Shellenbarger, 1997, 1999), it is clear that the existence of a policy alone does not guarantee employee recruitment, satisfaction, or retention. Sutton and Noe (2005) recently provided a review of family-friendly program effectiveness and concluded that programs had either no relationship or even a negative relationship with attraction of

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new employees, improvement of retention rates, reduction of stress, and enhancement of productivity. We believe that one reason for these findings is that more attention must focus on how work-life policies are implemented and how they promote or deter from a culture of inclusiveness.

The primary aim of this article is to discuss how the implementation of work-life policies can break down or reinforce (and even create) barriers to the creation of an inclusive workplace, and to provide four indicators employers can use to benchmark their implementation effectiveness. We

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first provide a definition of inclusiveness and a framework to illustrate how work-life policies relate to the goal of workforce inclusion. We then discuss the unique implementation challenges of work-life policies and introduce indicators that can be used to understand the degree to which policies are likely perceived as promoting inclusiveness. We provide illustrations as to how those implementation differences can affect whether work-life policies create feelings of inclusion or exclusion. Finally, we discuss how HR professionals can implement

work-life policies to be more inclusive.

The Role of Work-Life Policies in Creating an Inclusive Workplace

An inclusive workplace is one that values differences within its workforce and uses the full potential of all employees (Gasorek, 2000; Mor Barak, 2005). Research by Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin (1999) found indicators of inclusion to include equality in the distribution of decision-making influence, access to information, and job security. Roberson (2006) conducted a study to distinguish definitions of diversity from inclusiveness and found that inclusion focuses on employee involvement and integration. Considering these definitions, a workplace would be considered inclusive with regard to work-life issues if the organization:

- values individual and intergroup differences in the primacy of work versus other life roles;
- supports variation in domestic backgrounds and in blending work and non-work demands;
- does not view differing nonwork or caregiving identities as barriers to an individual fully contributing and fulfilling one's potential at work; and
- promotes involvement of all employees regardless of their nonwork demands and preferences.

That is, an inclusive workplace would be one where individuals feel accepted and valued (Pelled et al., 1999; Roberson, 2006) regardless of whether they are single or partnered, have children or not, are heterosexual or not, work full time or a reduced load, or are present daily or telecommute. An inclusive workplace promotes acceptance and high levels of engagement of individuals who telework so that they may provide home care for an aging parent, as well as those that choose nursing homes as the best option for their parents' care. It is one that equally values those who believe leaving work early to attend a child's soccer game is critical as well as those who do not mind missing games, and for those who use all their available paid time off to train for a triathlon as well as those who feel personal time is reserved for family emergencies. It is one that equally engages those who rearrange work hours to attend religious services or to perform National Guard duties.

The adoption of work-life policies is one means that companies use to create an inclusive workplace. To understand why an organization might desire an inclusive workplace, Thomas and Ely (1996) identified three perspectives on diversity: a discrimination-and-fairness, an access-and-legitimacy, and an integration-and-learning perspective. Note that these are not seen as mutually exclusive.

First, organizations may adopt work-life policies due to a legal mandate and a desire for equal treatment of employees. For example, in the United States, employers are

legally mandated to offer unpaid leave and time off from work up to 12 weeks for the birth or adoption of a child, a serious health condition, or to care for a spouse, parent, minor, or disabled child who has a serious health condition (Block, Malin, Kossek, & Holt, 2005). In the European Union, Directive 2002/73 requires that employers provide a job to women returning from maternity leave that is equivalent to the one they held prior to the leave (European Parliament and European Council, 2002).

Second, the access-and-legitimacy perspective suggests the adoption of work-life policies is seen as “good business” in terms of recruitment and retention of underrepresented individuals and good public relations (Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Kossek & Friede, 2006). For example, employers seeking to increase the number of women in certain positions may tout flexible work arrangements as a way to be more attractive to potential hires. The organization’s adoption of the work-life policy is driven by the view that a more inclusive workplace will make one a more attractive employer (Avery & McKay, 2006).

Third, a learning-and-effectiveness perspective integrates employee needs and values in new ways into the culture as part of organizational adaptation to a changing labor market (cf. Lee, MacDermid, & Buck, 2000). Individual family and personal life needs are not considered irrelevant or detrimental to profitability but are deemed important to address to enhance organizational and personal effectiveness (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). However, researchers have found mixed support at the

organizational level for the connection of diversity and effectiveness, in terms of productivity and profitability (Kochan et al., 2003; Richard, 2000; Richard, McMillan, Chadwick, & Dwyer, 2003; Sacco & Schmitt, 2005). In the work-life area specifically, Sutton and Noe (2005) found inconsistency in whether the adoption of policies relates to organizational effectiveness.

Figure 1a illustrates conventional wisdom about the presumed connection between work-life policy adoption and inclusion and outcomes. Employers often assume that adopting policies leads to perceptions of inclusion. Figure 1b shows that in reality, the link is more complex. We contend that a key explanation for why expected gains from work-life policy adoption are not consistently found is because the ways policies are implemented do not necessarily foster perceptions of inclusion. While policy *adoption* may be intended to promote inclusiveness, it is policy *implementation* that determines whether inclusion occurs. Variations in policy implementation will affect perceptions of support for different needs and identities, through both direct experiences of employees and vicarious experiences by observing what happens to other users of similar identities. To increase the usefulness of work-life policies as a diversity management vehicle, greater understanding of these linkages is needed.

Work-Life Policy Implementation and Inclusion

Variability in implementing *any* human resource policy can affect inclusiveness; work-



FIGURE 1a. Conventional View of Link Between Adoption and Inclusion

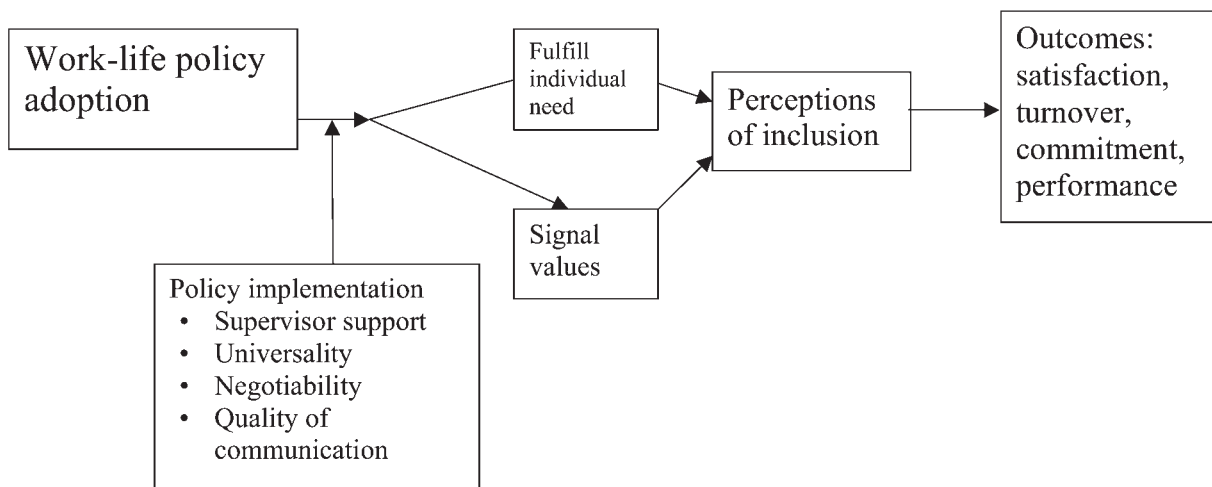


FIGURE 1b. Proposed Link Between Adoption, Implementation, and Inclusion

life policy implementation is particularly critical for fostering or deterring from inclusion. First, while work-life policies historically were adopted with a goal of breaking down barriers to the inclusion of women and those with caregiving demands (Rothausen, 1994), the goals of work-life policies have now broadened to include a multitude of nonwork identities. Unlike many HR policies (with the exception of EEO and diversity policies), work-life policies are presumed to directly impact inclusiveness (Rothausen, 1994) because they show that differences in role primacy are accepted, variation in blending work and nonwork roles is supported, and the involvement of all employees regardless of nonwork demands is promoted.

Second, the use of work-life policies is distinctive from the use of other HR policies in that there are possible negative outcomes or backlash from their use. For example, many coworkers and managers assume that users of flexibility policies create more work for supervisors and receive unfair benefits at the expense of coworkers (Grover, 1991, Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999). Research suggests that users of work-life policies risk experiencing possible backlash and negative career outcomes (cf. Powell, 1999; Rothausen, Clarke, Gonzalez, & O'Dell, 1998). Although there are some exceptions (users of whistleblower, grievance, or sexual

harassment policies), users of work-life policies are more likely to face backlash effects than users of most other HR programs. In this sense, use of work-life policies can lead to exclusion.

Third, implementing work-life policies requires a fundamental cultural change in the assumed hegemony of work and nonwork that typically is not required from implementing other HR policies. This perspective is a radical departure for many workplaces, since most have been designed based on the assumption that work identities are the central identity in an individual's life; hence, work-life policy implementation will have a greater effect than other HR policies on whether a culture is transformed to be inclusive.

Fourth, many firms have policies formally available, but in practice vary in the degree to which use is sanctioned (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Lyness, Judiesch, Thompson, & Beauvais, 2001). For example, the American Bar Association reported that although 95% of law firms have a policy allowing part-time employment, only 3% of lawyers do so, fearing it will hurt their careers (Cunningham, 2001). When policy use is not supported, it can detract from promoting feelings of inclusiveness.

Finally, and central to arguments in this article, the wide variability in how work-life policies are implemented affects whether

they break down or build up barriers to inclusion. Consider how an organization's members treat those on maternity or parental leave. In one implementation, the norm is for coworkers to cover key areas of an individual's job while s/he is gone; in another, no one is assigned the worker's tasks, forcing the employee to work part-time during what is supposed to be a leave, receive numerous work-related calls, cut the leave short, or work long hours on return (Ralston, 2002). It is our contention that variability in implementation can have strong effects on inclusiveness. In the next section, we outline four ways in which policy implementation varies.

Implementation Attributes

While much literature has examined variation in policy adoption across organizations (cf. Ingram & Simons, 1995), there are only indirect discussions of implementation. As Bourne, Barringer, and McComb noted, "Family-friendly policies may originate from the organization, but they are implemented (or not) in the local work context" (2004, p. 3). While policies to support work and life integration are formally adopted at the organizational level, variation in how they are implemented across workgroups, business units, and locations exists.

We reviewed the work-life research and popular literature to examine cases where policies did not lead to desired effects, concerns were raised about policy fairness, or where a variation in implementation was noted. We used an iterative analysis in an intentional manner to develop, test, and refine our framework (Creswell, 1994). We identified four implementation attributes as sources of variability: *supervisor support* for policy use, the degree to which policies are seen as *universally* available to all employees, whether policy use is an entitlement or must be *negotiated*, and the *quality of communication* regarding how and when the policy can be used. Table I summarizes the aspects of implementation. Next we define each of these implementation attributes, followed

by a discussion of how they relate to inclusiveness.

Supervisor Support

Considerable research has indicated that supervisor support plays a key role in the experience of work-family conflict (Allen, 2001; Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Casper, Fox, Sitzmann, & Landy, 2004; O'Driscoll et al., 2003). Supervisors are the gatekeepers to effective implementation of work and family policies as they (a) often have final approval as to whether employees can use a program such as reduced workload, telework, or flextime; (b) influence whether employees are cross-trained to back up each other during absences; (c) affect whether policies are well publicized; and (d) lead in the creation of norms supporting use of policies (Hopkins, 2005). The majority of research examines general supervisor supportiveness (e.g., Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002) rather than support of a specific policy.

Supervisor support of policy use involves both emotional and instrumental support. Do supervisors remove any obstacles to policy use? Or do they discourage use through making it difficult? For example, employees may have the right to telecommute one day a week, but supervisors can vary in how easy they make it for an employee to do so through how meetings are scheduled, how those who telecommute are communicated with and treated, and so on. As another example, greater supervisor support of a policy that allows job sharing would be shown by a supervisor who clarifies roles and pinpoints obstacles than by a supervisor who does not communicate equally with both job sharers regarding responsibilities. A third example: supervisor support for use of a reduced load policy would involve guarding against individuals working more hours than they are paid for because of ineffective workload management (Lirio, Lee, Williams, Haugen, & Kossek, 2004). Supervi-

A lack of supervisor support can lead to nonwork roles serving as barriers to full contribution and engagement and to nonsupported employees feeling excluded.

TABLE I Architecture for Intangibles

| Implementation Attribute | Breaks Down Barriers | Reinforces/Creates Barriers |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Supervisor Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for policy use recognizes individual needs and value preferences • Support promotes feelings of respect and inclusion • Removing obstacles to policy use signals that employee is valued • Looks at how implementation will affect the workload and social justice perceptions in workgroup | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support can prevent individuals from being able to fully engage in the workplace • Lack of support for policy use can be a form of subtle discrimination • Discourages employees from using a policy by making it difficult to use • Signals a lack of appreciation for individual needs and preferences |
| Universality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal policies (i.e., by definition of being open to all employees simply on the basis of being a member of a firm) reflect inclusiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particularistic policies signal that some are excluded • Particularistic policies can serve as barriers to full engagement for some individuals • Particularistic policies can have adverse impact against certain groups if availability is limited on the basis of job level and geographic region, and these are related to ethnicity and/or gender |
| Negotiability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiable policies allow for consideration of individual needs and avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When individuals feel negotiations are unfair or based on some bias that creates a barrier to inclusion |
| Quality of Communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively communicated policies signal inclusion and employer caring by demonstrating that policies exist not merely as public relations vehicles. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selective communication of policies creates barriers to inclusion • Ineffective communication leads to policies existing on paper for employer symbolic purposes without adding instrumental value to employees |

sors can affect backlash and jealousy in coworker relations by considering policy effect on the entire workgroup. For example, this can involve cross-training, setting core hours, and modes for communication and back-up systems when people are flexing.

As we will develop further, supervisor support of policy use affects inclusion. In the above examples, individuals are not purposefully excluded, but the lack of support for

policy use leads to a less inclusive work environment. A lack of supervisor support can lead to nonwork roles serving as barriers to full contribution and engagement and to nonsupported employees feeling excluded.

Universalism

Universalism refers to the degree to which work-life policies are perceived as readily avail-

able for use by everyone in all levels and jobs rather than limited to specific groups (e.g., partners but not associates; managers but not clerical workers) or geographic locations (e.g., corporate headquarters but not at the plants; U.S. but not non-U.S. locations). Research shows wide internal variation in the degree to which different employee groups have access to policies (Lambert & Waxman, 2005). Unionized workers are less likely to have access to flexibility policies than nonunion workers (Golden, 2001). Workers in low-wage jobs are less likely than managers and professionals to have flextime, on-site child care, or company-sponsored tax breaks to pay for child care (Holcomb, 2001). Without same-sex domestic partner benefits (offered to only 18% of U.S. workers; Bradsher, 2000), without the public sector bridging coverage for uninsured part-time low-income workers, and with variability in co-pays across employee groups, health care is low on universalism.

To the extent that a policy is more particularistic, it can create barriers to inclusiveness within the organization, particularly because access often is not available to those at lower wages, who tend to be disproportionately minorities and women (Lambert & Waxman, 2005). Particularistic policies can lead to individuals feeling that they are not valued similarly to those who can access the policy.

Negotiability

Negotiability reflects both the degree to which an individual's policy use or practice

can be negotiated with an organizational agent (e.g., supervisor, HR department) and the perceived fairness of the negotiation process. For some work-life policies, such as the ability to take an unpaid maternity leave after the birth of a child, organizational actors have little latitude in how the policy is interpreted in practice. For other policies, such as the ability to work at home one day a week, someone must approve use of the policy, resulting in greater intraorganizational variability in policy use (Eaton, 2003; Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999). For example, research on reduced workload policies showed wide variation in how workloads and work arrangements were customized depending on the individual workers' desires, the nature of the job, and the degree of organizational learning about the practice (Lee, MacDermid, Williams, Buck, & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 2002). Negotiation also may reflect subtle discrimination. Barham, Gottlieb, and Kelloway (1998) found that supervisors may be more willing to approve a request in reduction of hours for female than for male employees.

Note that negotiability is conceptually distinct from supervisor support of using a policy, although it is not always unrelated. A supervisor can be nonsupportive when an employee uses a policy regardless of its negotiability, and a policy can be negotiable whether there is or is not supervisor support for using what is negotiated (e.g., employee has negotiated ability to telecommute one day a week but important

CASE BOX Supervisor Support

Chris manages 35 employees at a computer systems organization who telecommute to some degree. He is supportive of telework because it gives employees a way to get uninterrupted time to work. "I have seen an increase in productivity as my workers have had the time to process," Chris says. Chris feels that telecommuting has "increased morale" as well as increased his ability to recruit and retain knowledgeable employees. Chris has to work continually to convey to upper-level management that these employees are valuable and promotable as "they still don't understand how telecommuters can be just as productive as those who work in the office. They still value face time." Chris does certain things to make sure that telework works for everyone in the office—all employees have "touch points" in the office so that they can keep "connectedness" to the group. He requires that all spend at least some time in the office to enhance team interaction. Chris is proud of providing a telework option.

meetings are not scheduled considering the employee's preferences for day out of the office). Negotiability also is conceptually distinct from universality, although the two may connect in practice. A policy can be universal (anyone can telecommute one day a week), but the terms of enactment (which day of the week) may be negotiated or fixed. Further, negotiability can lead to particularistic implementation of a policy that is universal in principle (i.e., all employees can request reduced loads; only those that are top performers are able to successfully negotiate them).

Negotiable policies can lead to greater inclusion or exclusion. Inclusive implementation does not equate to meeting all employee requests, but to insuring that negotiable factors are approached consistently across all employees. Jealousy and backlash are likely to occur if individual deals are not communicated effectively. The tenets or parameters for negotiation and customization must be clearly developed in order to foster positive perceptions of justice and feelings of inclusion.

Quality of Communication

Variability exists within organizations in the degree to which formal written work-life policies exist for different organizational units (Kropf, 1999), impeding employee awareness. Written policies that are poorly communicated also limit cognizance of the

policy's availability and applicability to individual situations (Christensen, 1999). Research has indicated employees are not always aware of the availability of government mandated entitlements (Baird & Reynolds, 2004). One reason many fathers may not take parental leave is a lack of knowledge of their right to use the policy (Powell, 1999). As another example, a department may allow some top performers access to flexibility but will not publicize that this option is available in order to prevent lesser-performing employees from requesting it (Williams, 2000). Employee groups without regular access to the organization's Web site and e-mail (e.g., custodial staff, plant line workers, store associates) may be less aware of policy availability. Further, Casper et al. (2004) demonstrated that supervisors generally report low levels of awareness of work-life programs, which affects their referrals of employees to those programs.

Studies have long demonstrated that communication affects acceptance of HR and managerial innovation (e.g., Kossek, 1989; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971). For example, Nord and Tucker (1987) found that if communication channels are open, dissatisfaction and resistance to innovations are much lower. Greater application of concepts regarding quality of communication from the innovation and change management literatures should lead to greater perceptions of inclusiveness related to the implementation of work-life policies.

CASE BOX

Quality of Communication

Ann has been supervising a teleworker at a major electronic systems corporation for the past year but has recently asked that individual to take a new position and discontinue telework. When she came to the department, the telework arrangement with this individual was already in place. She stated that "there was no written contract, no structure. I was handed a difficult scenario and I had to make it work." Ann sees telecommuting as difficult to carry out unless there is a structure in place that sets up expectations, standards, feedback, and a contingency plan if the arrangement is not going well. While some supervisors in the organization contend that there is a formal written policy on teleworking, Ann has never seen it. Ann expressed frustration as the organization's treatment of telework is that "it is not being publicized and that makes it difficult to find ways to make it work."

Linking Policy Adoption and Implementation to Inclusiveness

We have argued that policies vary in implementation attributes and that variation affects perceptions of inclusion. In this section, we outline how work-life policies affect inclusion through two non-mutually exclusive mechanisms: need fulfillment and value signaling.

Need Fulfillment

The existence of a policy can fulfill a need (e.g., for a flexible schedule, for child care), and therefore provide individuals with inclusion—the ability to be fully engaged in their work role or, in some cases, even to take on a work role. For example, a family leave policy that has broad parameters can meet the needs of individuals with unique family situations: a lesbian couple adopting a child would be afforded the same benefit as a heterosexual woman giving birth within the context of a traditional marriage or a single male taking on a guardianship or an individual whose parent is suffering from a debilitating illness. Allowing all of these individuals the opportunity to address life needs without conflict with the work role would increase inclusion; disallowing one to fulfill the need would increase feelings of exclusion.

Individuals vary in their needs, preferences, and values with regard to managing work and nonwork roles and recognizing or ignoring this variability will affect perceptions of whether the organization is promoting inclusiveness or creating barriers to inclusion. Using demographic variables such as gender or number of children or marital status as proxies for needs, preferences, and/or values is problematic (e.g., Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). For example, the common assumption is that work-life policies designed to assist with caregiving (i.e., for children or elders) should have greater impact on the work attitudes and behaviors of those with such responsibilities than those without (Grover, 1991). However, such a

link has not been found consistently. Caregiving responsibility does not automatically equate to positive reactions to policies related to caregiving because individual needs, preferences, and values are not well captured by the demographic “has or does not have caregiving responsibility.” For example, some caregivers may not see an on-site childcare center as meeting their needs because of the specific setting they would like for their child (e.g., one provider and no other children) or because of mixed needs (e.g., easier to enroll younger child in preschool at same location where older child attends school). The most inclusive approach to implementing a work-life policy would be one where the organization obtains a direct assessment of needs and preferences rather than assumes these.

Whether a work-life policy will lead to greater inclusion also could depend on the resources an individual has available to meet needs. For example, flextime policies may have little impact on inclusion if one’s spouse/partner is unconstrained by a set work schedule and can handle time-based family interferences with work for the partner. As another example, emergency well-child care may be an important resource for a single mom newly moved to an area even if other employees with her caregiving responsibilities do not use the benefit, simply because of her lack of family resources. Thus, neither policy availability nor individual demographics are the key to whether the policy will break down barriers to inclusion, but whether individuals have unmet needs met.

The implementation attributes of a policy will affect whether it fulfills needs. As an example, if an employee has a need for flexibility in his work schedule during certain months to allow him to train and compete in a sport, whether flextime is available, negotiable, supported by his supervisor, and communicated well will affect whether he has his needs met or unmet, and hence

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signaling.*

whether he feels included. In general, if a manager does not support policy use or creates obstacles to use or if one is unaware the policy is available or does not understand that the policy can help meet a need, employees will experience exclusion.

A slightly different relationship occurs when one considers particularistic or negotiable policies because the level of the implementation attribute means that different employees will receive different outcomes (i.e., some can use a policy and some cannot, or the nature of use differs across employees).

Employees vary in their values, and work-life policies may not match employee values.

Those employees who are directly negatively affected by the particularistic or negotiable nature of the policy are more likely to see the organization as less inclusive than those not adversely affected. Research has shown that a “frustration effect” occurs for those who require a policy and find it unavailable to them, as Kossek and Nichol (1992) found in comparing work-life outcomes for users of an on-site child care center and those on the waiting list.

Further, if employees seek flextime or telecommuting privileges and do not obtain them, they are more likely to see the decision as unfair than if they obtain the outcomes they seek. However, justice theory has established that it is not just self-interest that drives perceptions of fairness (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). A work-life policy that allocates resources on the basis of location or seniority rather than on the basis of equity (e.g., those who derive the benefit are those who put forth the most effort at work or perform the best) may be viewed as an unfair distribution of resources to those who feel equity should be the rule in allocating resources (Leventhal, 1976). As another example, if a department decides only one employee can telecommute on Fridays and this will rotate among employees (an equality allocation), those with long commuting times may see this as less fair than a need-based allocation. In general, employees who see a work-life policy as allocating resources on a basis that they perceive as less fair (Grandey, 2001) will have fewer positive

evaluations of the organization’s culture in terms of inclusiveness.

Value Signaling

A second mechanism for work-life policy influence on inclusion is via the role a policy serves in signaling the organization’s values. Traditionally, work-life policies are presented as “good business” because they let employees know that the organization is a caring and family-friendly workplace. While individuals do show preferences for organizations that display concern for others, research has found that individuals’ specific value orientations also play a role (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1992). Rynes and Cable (2003) noted that while some organizational characteristics are widely valued by most job seekers, the strength, and sometimes direction, of preferences varies according to individual differences in values and beliefs.

Employees vary in their values, and work-life policies may not match employee values. For example, an organization might provide a certain number of days of visiting nurses to stay with sick children; for some individuals in certain cultural traditions, this might not coincide with their values and how they view their parental role. They may see this policy, in fact, as being “un-family-friendly”—as not allowing a parent to stay home with a sick child.

Implementation attributes convey organizational values related to inclusion. For example, research has indicated that “caring” is a value that individuals universally seek in employers (Ravlin & Meglino, 1989). Supervisor support for a policy’s use will be seen as validating that the organization cares and will be seen as reflective of overall organizational supportiveness (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002). Conversely, a positive message of concern that adopting a policy is meant to send easily can be offset by messages of lack of caring through a lack of supervisor support for use.

Implementation attributes also send signals regarding organizational values about differentiation among employees. Whether

this signaling will affect an individual depends on the extent to which the way a policy is implemented is inconsistent with individual values. For example, collectivists are motivated by the goals and norms of the collective, prefer egalitarian rewards, and are more likely to object to inconsistency in treatment across the collective (Colquitt, 2004; Hui, Triandis, & Yee, 1991). Hence, we would expect collectivists to react more negatively to particularistic and negotiable policies, as these lead to differential treatment across the collective.

Interactive and Dynamic Effects of Implementation Attributes on Inclusion

These implementation attributes are conceptually distinct, but their covariability within organizations and for specific policies is likely to vary. For example, universal policies may be high or low in negotiability (e.g., everyone can work flextime but you must negotiate; everyone has health care and the nature of coverage is nonnegotiable). An individual's perceptions of the organization as an inclusive environment are influenced by multiple policies. Examining single-policy effects on work outcomes (e.g., does organization-sponsored day care increase employee satisfaction) requires consideration of the role of other policies and their implementation attributes. Negative and positive influences of different policies may be offsetting.

Also, a policy initially may be viewed as promoting inclusion but then reassessed. For example, job applicants may view teleworking as a way to achieve work-life balance. However, several studies have shown that teleworkers have difficulties in establishing boundaries between work and personal lives (Hill, Miller, Weiner, & Colihan, 1998; Loscocco, 1997) and those whose teleworking leads to putting in more hours than being in the office actually experience a decrease in work-life balance (Cree, 1998). Thus, the policy as actually experienced—in part due to implementation attributes—may not be as positive as the individual expects and may not lead to greater inclusion.

Further, family needs of individuals change over time as unions are made and dissolve and children are born and grow; changes in views of policies may reflect changes in family needs. Phenomena such as “family-friendly backlash” (Harris, 1997; Rothausen et al., 1998) also may result from reevaluations over the course of time. A single, unattached job seeker who does not have family issues may not be considering an organization's stance on work-life in choice decisions. However, once on the job, such policies may lead to problems for the individual. For example, s/he may experience problems in how the work of someone on parental leave is reassigned to him/her (Herst & Allen, 2001) or experience greater expectations regarding client entertainment in the evenings or travel than coworkers with young children. This can lead to reassessing whether the organization is inclusive of all individuals or if “singlism” exists (DePaulo, 2006).

Implications for HR Practice

What are the implications of this framework for HR professionals seeking to break down barriers to inclusion via implementing work-life policies? We see three general checkpoints for determining if policies are promoting inclusion:

- Consider what implementation attributes will be part of planned adoption.
- Consider how policy implementation breaks down or reinforces or creates barriers to inclusion.
- Consider that there will be interactive and dynamic effects between implementation attributes of a policy and across policies.

Planning Implementation

An organization must consider how it plans to implement policies broadly and how intraor-

Examining single-policy effects on work outcomes requires consideration of the role of other policies and their implementation attributes.

ganizational variation is likely to be manifest. For example, an employer should consider what policies it wants to make particularistic and what it wants to make negotiable. Such decisions might be based on a desire to attract a particular group with a policy, or a desire to attract a diverse applicant pool (in terms of work-life concerns). The decisions may also be based on the overall human resource strategy: is this an organization with individualized HR policies or is it a goal to have only one contract across the workforce? Or, is this an organization where business-unit variation in policies, such as based on geography, product, or organizational levels, is desirable? The

Firms must recognize that a single "best practices" approach to work-life issues may not exist because of the great variability in needs, preferences, and values.

level of permissible intraorganizational variability can be controlled via clarity in organizational-level communication, management training, and regular auditing of policy awareness and use.

Further, is policy implementation a conscious strategic decision? Sutton and Noe (2005) noted that organizations may adopt policies because of normative pressure (e.g., a group of internal employees pressures for adoption), mimetic pressure (e.g., a successful competitor offers the policy), or coercive pressure (e.g., government mandate such as with regard to family leave).

Implementation attributes may relate to what pressures led to policy adoption. For example, instituting flextime in a department in response to mimetic pressure might lead to a more universally implemented policy than if a specific group had pressured for flextime.

Lambert and Waxman (2005) suggest a need to consider whether a policy is consciously particularistic or just unavailable. In practice, policy variations may be attributed to obstacles that an organization or unit is unwilling to address. For example, to implement a policy universally may require a business unit to rethink how work is scheduled or conducted, to invest in new technology, or to negotiate new contracts with unions. Changing the way a policy is implemented

may meet with resistance or dramatically change cost considerations. It also may require fundamental changes in work redesign and the way employees are managed (Rapoport et al., 2002). For example, employees may require cross-training to allow backup, or employees may be given input as a group to decide how and if flexible work arrangements would be implemented in their work unit. These barriers may need to be overcome to implement the policy in a more inclusive manner.

Considering Barriers

Firms must recognize that a single "best practices" approach to work-life issues may not exist because of the great variability in needs, preferences, and values. Attempting to reduce intraorganizational variability in policy content and policy implementation may not be possible or desirable, and therefore training and supporting managers so that implementation is inclusive is imperative. Table I provides indicators that HR professionals and managers can use in determining whether implementation is breaking down or reinforcing barriers to inclusion.

Organizations must monitor when policies do not have the intended effects. For example, an employee may expect that s/he will be able to work flextime when a policy is announced but then find s/he cannot because the policy is not universal, is negotiable, and s/he is unable to secure the arrangement, or that a lack of supervisor support makes it difficult to carry out. Raising expectations and not meeting them can have undesirable effects (e.g., Grandey, 2001; Parker & Allen, 2001). Organizations must recognize some of the inherent tensions in making work-life policies attractive and used. For example, negotiability may meet more employee needs, but it may also increase the likelihood of being seen as unfair.

Considering Interactive and Dynamic Effects

Understanding the relative role of work-life issues vis-à-vis other determinants of inclu-

sive culture such as compensation, meaningful work, and coworker relations is essential to making predictions regarding the effects of work-life policies. Empirical research is needed to understand the role in affecting inclusion relative to other employment concerns that have established relationships to satisfaction, commitment, and other work-related outcomes.

Because organizations may be simultaneously enacting multiple policies related to work-life integration and these may vary in how they are implemented, consideration needs to be given to this covariation. For example, a manager might consider how implementing a particularistic policy will be received when other policies in the work-life domain are universal, or how implementing a policy with little room for negotiation might be viewed in relation to other more

negotiable policies. Such interactive effects may affect perceptions of inclusion.

Conclusion

In order for research on work-life policies to reach a higher level of sophistication, organizations and scholars need to move beyond promoting the mere existence of work-life policies as a means to a more inclusive workplace. Considering how implementation leads to feelings of inclusion and exclusion can aid in understanding how work-life policies can lead to more positive individual and organizational outcomes.

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