

Please cite as: Kossek, E. E., 2005. Workplace policies and practices to support work and families. In *Work, Family, Health, and Well-Being*. (S. Bianchi, L. Casper, R. King, Editors.), Erlbaum Press, pp. 97-116.

## 7

# Workplace Policies and Practices to Support Work and Families

Ellen Ernst Kossek

*Michigan State University*

Today's employees differ dramatically from their counterparts even 50 years ago (Ozeki, 2003). Dual-earner families are the typical American family (Barnett, 2001), and women make up nearly one half of the U.S. workforce (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998). The burden of caring for dependents among working employees is only likely to increase in the next few decades. One half of all children will live with a single parent (often female) at some point in their childhood. Individuals over 65 are one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population and will likely add to the caregiving demands of the working population (Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001). In addition, many individuals are working into their late 60s and 70s, either delaying retirement or working part-time in a second career. Consequently, they are likely to be managing both their own and other family members' health while they are still employed.

A structural mismatch between labor force characteristics and employers' workforce demands has become a critical problem in society. *Structural mismatch* is the incongruence between the design of job demands and career systems and the caregiving demands of workers, which to be met require more flexibility and support at work. The ideal worker historically has been one who is rarely absent from or late to work and does not let family responsibilities encumber his or her work hours or commitment to the job (Williams, 1999). Many employers do not see work-family support as a legitimate human resource issue of critical concern; rather, they see it, if anything, as a fringe benefit offered as a piecemeal policy coerced by labor market shifts (e.g., nursing shortage) or legislation (Kossek, Dass, & DeMarr, 1994). Employer response to this shift in the demography of the workforce is not unlike the initial response of many employers in the 1960s to affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. Also with slowing gross national product (GNP) growth and increasing global market pressures, employers do not perceive an urgency, nor the resources, to act (Kossek et al., 1994).

In this chapter, I discuss what employers can do to assist workers in managing their multiple demands and how an organization is affected when employees have multiple competing demands. I also discuss trends and identify

gaps to be addressed by future research. As the following review of research shows, more work is needed to fully answer these questions given that the work-family policy field is evolving in methodology and focus.

## CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH AND PRACTICE ON WORK-FAMILY POLICIES

*Work-family policies*, defined as employer policies and practices to support the integration of paid work with significant family demands, are increasingly linked, in theory, to recruitment and retention issues (Ryan & Kossek, 2003), individual and group performance (Van Dyne & Kossek, 2003), and greater employee commitment (Osterman, 1995). Consequently, over the past few decades, work-family policies have proliferated as a means to attract and retain employees (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999). Although employers often initially defined work-family integration as a parenting and dependent care issue, many firms eventually broadened policies and practices to support additional life roles such as community roles, elder care, teen supervision, personal health care, those related to personal values (e.g., political, religious), military service, domestic chores, or exercise. This trend reveals a growing recognition of the need to support not only those with visible family needs (e.g., child care), but all employees who may experience work-life stresses regardless of family status.

In practice, few employers have systematically evaluated the effectiveness of work-family policies, let alone linked them to business and human resource strategies. Employer interventions to help employees manage work and family are a form of workforce diversity management. Unfortunately, many organizations have adopted diversity interventions without effectively monitoring them, except only superficially (Comer & Soliman, 1996). Complicating matters more, the time lag between implementation and effects sometimes makes it difficult to identify clear relations between the adoption of work-family practices and productivity (Huselid & Becker, 1996). Work-life policies can also have group and organizational consequences, such as increased need for coordination or cross-training, which are sometimes difficult to disentangle (Van Dyne & Kossek, 2003). Further, successfully making major organizational change to support work-life integration for workers with heavy caregiving demands requires the company to transform the design of work and assumptions about the priority of work and family roles (Bailyn, 1993). Most jobs are currently designed without consideration of family needs. Workers are expected to reconfigure their family lives around work. The bottom line is that many jobs, at all ends of the pay scale, do not easily allow for work-life balance (Conlin, Merritt, & Himelstein, 2002).

Reflecting practice efforts, the research focus has broadened to include not only work-family policies, but also those related to work-life integration.

However, far more research has focused on policies that help integrate the roles of child caregiver with work than on policies that address other family or life roles, or that address multiple roles simultaneously (e.g., elder and child caregiving) and, as my chapter shows, significant gaps in the research remain.

Although demographic shifts and the intensification of the demands outside of work have spawned an explosion in general work and family research in the past decade, quality research on the effects of work-family policies is limited (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998, 1999). Recent meta-analyses of the individual and organizational outcomes of work and family policies (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998, 1999) and alternative work schedules (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999) each found fewer than 30 articles reporting the statistical effects of policies on standard work outcomes such as absenteeism and job satisfaction (Ozeki, 2003). Although 30 is not necessarily a paltry number, the quality of these studies varies widely; many used skewed samples or only cross-sectional self-report data, and most did not use common measures that would allow for easier generalizability. This variation in quality makes it possible for some authors in this volume, such as Thompson and coauthors (see chap. 8, this volume) to highlight many studies that show positive effects, whereas others note the equivocation in the research. Yet both are accurate depending on which studies are chosen and the methodological lens used.

I organize this chapter into three categories: those that focus on how and whether policies are adopted and their availability and use, those that focus on who uses the policies (a demographic view), and those that focus on the effects of work-family policies.

### Policy Adoption and Availability

The policy adoption branch of research examines which employer characteristics predict adoption of policies and responsiveness to employees' work-life needs. This arm of research faces several limitations. Data on policy adoption is focused at the organizational level of analysis despite that policy use is often left to supervisor discretion and the needs of the business. Consequently, policy adoption can vary widely in a single firm and across business units and employee groups. As the following data show, some policies are only available to employees in certain types of jobs and at certain levels, or they impose a minimum tenure requirement, as is often the case, for example, with leaves of absence or health care benefits. Such access rules may limit the availability of many work-family policies, particularly for workers at the lower levels, although they are often used to enhance a firm's public relations. Even the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which was passed in 1993 and requires employers to provide leave for new parents and leave to care for an ill family member or one's own illness, is more widely available to full-time than part-time workers given that workers are required to have worked a certain number of hours in the past year (Ferber & Waldfogel, 2000).

Furthermore, current research (and the media) may have overstated the availability of policies given that much of the research involves larger employers. Popular press reports in *Working Mother* and *Business Week* tend to favor large employers as do surveys by the Alliance for Work-Life Progress (AWLP). Next I share results from two different surveys to illustrate the wide variation in survey data on the purported availability of work-life policies.

Table 7.1 shows results from two waves of an AWLP survey of policy adoption in 1999 and 2001 and offers an indication of the prevalence and range of policies available as reported in surveys. The most commonly adopted policies, reported by three fourths of the organizations, were employee assistance plans (where employees have access to mental health counseling and other services, such as substance abuse rehabilitation) and flexible schedules. Paid paternity leave and concierge services, which provide assistance with personal domestic chores (e.g., dry cleaning, errands), were the least common policies. A caveat, however, is that because many policies, such as flexible schedules, are enacted at the work-group level by supervisors, there is no reliable way to understand, based on these data, the actual use of these policies across an organization.

Another gap requiring further attention is that available policies frequently go unused by employees owing to lack of publicity or other cultural barriers (Eaton, 2003). As an example, new in 2001, AWLP required survey respondents to report whether more than three fourths of their employees use at least one work-life program. Only 26% of government agencies reported that three fourths of their workers used at least one work-family program. This figure dropped to only 15% among corporations and to 13% for service providers. Thus, use of policies is much lower than their availability, and future research must examine policy enactment that promotes use.

More representative data on the availability of policies among U.S. employers of all sizes are available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), National Compensation Survey (2000), which includes questions on work-life benefits. Although this survey lacks the detail of those like the AWLP survey, its strength is its truer representation of the range of U.S. employers. The BLS survey finds that the availability of work-life benefits is low and more prevalent in the service industry and for professional jobs. According to BLS survey data summarized in Table 7.2, only 4% of U.S. employers provided some sort of referral or other assistance for child care, 2% provided funds for child care, 2% provided onsite child care, and 1% provided off-site child care. Only 5% of employers provided adoption assistance, and 7% provided long-term care insurance. Finally, 5% provided flexible workplace schedules.

Policy adoption also varies by industry and job groups. The BLS National Compensation Survey also shows that in 2000, service-producing private employers were 2.5 times more likely to provide assistance for child care, one third more likely to provide long-term care insurance, and one third less likely to

TABLE 7.1 Summary of Alliance of Work Life Professionals Surveys on Employer Adoption of Work Life Policies by Program Type and Industry

<i>Policy Availability (%)</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2001</i>
EAP services	77%	84%
Flexible schedules	77	83
Child-care referrals	83	75
Elder-care referrals	76	74
Tuition assistance	70	71
Work/family seminars	78	69
Wellness program	64	65
Telecommuting	70	64
Paid maternity leave	51	52
Medical services	38	40
Onsite child care	37	40
Backup child care	43	39
Child-care subsidy	29	35
Paid family leave	34	35
Concierge services	21	24
Paid paternity leave	27	21
Other programs (financial, personal assistance, education)	25	21
<i>Percentage of 2001 respondents reporting that over three-quarters of their employees use at least one work-life program</i>		
Government agencies		26%
Corporations		15%
Consultants and service providers		13%
All other organizations		16%

\*Respondents: 2001:  $N=337$ ; 1999:  $N=104$ .

Source. Alliance of Work Life Progress (<http://www.awlp.org/Surveyreport.pdf>).

provide adoption assistance than goods-producing private employers. The BLS survey finds that access to policies varies widely by employee group, which casts doubt on whether firm-level adoption data are an accurate reflection of availability across a workforce. In 2000, professional and technical employees

were twice as likely as clerical and sales employees and 5.5 times as likely as blue-collar and service employees to receive child-care assistance. Professional and technical employees were 2.5 times as likely as clerical and sales employees and 6 times as likely as blue-collar and service employees to receive adoption

TABLE 7.2 Percent of Workers With Access to Selected Work-Family Benefits

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Employer Provided Funds</i>	<i>On- Site Child Care</i>	<i>Off- Site Child Care</i>	<i>Adoption Assistance</i>	<i>Long- Term Care Insurance</i>	<i>Flexible Work Place</i>
Total	4	2	2	1	5	7	5
Worker characteristics							
Professional, technical and related	11	4	6	3	12	14	12
Clerical and sales	5	3	1	2	5	7	4
Blue collar and service	2	1	1	—	2	4	1
Full-time	5	2	2	1	6	8	5
Part-time	3	1	1	1	2	2	2
Union	8	6	2	—	5	15	3
Nonunion	4	2	2	1	5	6	5
Establishment characteristics							
Goods-producing	2	1	—	—	6	5	4
Service-producing	5	2	3	1	4	8	5
1–99 workers	1	—	—	1	1	5	2
100 workers or more	9	4	4	2	9	10	7

Source. BLS, National Compensation Survey, Survey of Employee Benefits, 2000.

assistance. Professional and technical employees were twice as likely as clerical and sales employees and 3.5 times as likely as blue-collar and service employees to receive long-term care insurance. Professional and technical employees were 3 times as likely as clerical and sales employees and 12 times as likely as blue-collar and service employees to have access to flexible schedules. Union employees were twice as likely as nonunion workers to have access to employer child-care assistance.

Most of the scholarly research does not reflect this within-firm variation in practice. Notwithstanding this, several studies offer additional insight into organizational characteristics that predict policy adoption. Goodstein's (1995) study on the adoption of elder-care policies shows that, regardless of industry or organizational size, employers are more likely to adopt policies when they have more female employees and are involved with other employer groups or professional organizations concerned about work-family issues. However, another study by Goodstein (1994) found that the proportion of parents in an organization did not predict responsiveness to institutional pressures for policy adoption. What mattered instead, and which was consistent with Morgan and Milliken (1993), was an employer perception that broadening work-family options would significantly influence productivity. The productivity link was echoed in Osterman's (1995) study showing that firms with high-commitment work systems, where clusters of human resource practices (e.g., self-managing teams, group-based pay, job security) are implemented to promote a high-involvement workplace, were more likely to adopt work-family programs.

### Demographic Research

The second category of work-life research, exemplified by Kossek and Ozeki (1999), examines how employee personal and family backgrounds relate to work outcomes (e.g., absenteeism of women with young children) or the perceived attractiveness or use of various policies based on various demographic factors (e.g., women are more likely to prefer or use part-time work policies or parental leaves than men) (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Kossek, 1990). One problem with these studies is that they use demographic variables, such as number of children or elders in a family or being female, as proxies for work-family conflict, but until recently they rarely measured whether using available policies reduced work-family conflict (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Aside from discussions of gender and parental status differences (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Grover & Crooker, 1995), the management and psychological research does not devote much attention to how individual differences in personal values, goals, and life plans affect the role of work-life policies in job choice and turnover decisions (Ryan & Kossek, 2003). Yet it should be noted that economists such as Holzer (chap. 6, this volume) refer to the notion of *compensating differentials*; that is, the tendency of some employers to focus

resources on benefits attractive to particular groups (e.g., working parents' interest in health care or flexibility) and less on compensation in the form of wages. Future work should not only measure demographics, but how these variables relate to the employee's level of involvement with caregiving, identification with work and family roles, and allocation of care demands across the family unit. Studies should also assess whether firms are allocating financial resources to the policies that are the most beneficial to employees with caregiving demands and whether the policies reduce conflict and stress.

### The Effectiveness of Policy

The arm of research that focuses on policy effects examines how policy use predicts employee attitudes and behaviors (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999). These studies tend to use two main approaches. The most common approach uses same-source cross-sectional data to assess relations between program use and employee outcomes. Some of these studies confound results by not distinguishing between use and availability or make the assumption that the same variables correlated with favorable attitudes toward program availability also predict use and favorable outcomes from use. The reliance on same-source data for predictors and outcomes also makes causality difficult to disentangle. The second approach uses pre- and postmeasures (but not often control groups) to assess changes in employee attitudes and behaviors after introducing a single policy (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999).

Given these methodological limitations, it is not surprising that the research shows mixed results that vary widely by employee samples, policy type, and outcomes assessed. Some research has found a positive relation between the presence or use of formal policies and employee loyalty (Roehling, Roehling, & Moen, 2001), individual performance and discretionary job behavior that goes above and beyond required job demands (Lambert, 2000), turnover intentions (Rothausen, 1994), absenteeism (Dalton & Mesch, 1990), commitment (Grover & Crooker, 1995), organizational productivity (Konrad & Mangel, 2000), and organizational performance (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). Yet just as many studies have found mixed or null results regardless of the type of employer support provided. For example, in a study of health care professionals with children at home, flexible scheduling and dependent care referral service use was not related to absenteeism (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Wagner and Hunt (1994) found that users of an elder-care referral service missed more days of work for care than nonusers (these results may be confounded by the fact that heavier users were also the employees who were more involved in providing care). Hill, Miller, Weiner, and Colihan (1998) found no difference in work-family conflict between individuals working in the office and those who were required (nonvoluntarily owing to office restructuring) to work from home or elsewhere.



Null effects (possibly because they did not consider the time lag effect of policy use) were found in two quasi-experimental studies. One well-designed study that compared two different types of flexibility—a 4-day, 40-hour work week versus flextime—found that neither was significantly related to organizational effectiveness (Dunham, Pierce, & Casteneda, 1987). Another quasi-experimental study by Kossek and Nichols (1992) compared behaviors and attitudes of employees using an onsite child-care center with nonusers on the waiting list (a naturally occurring control group). The waiting list was a good comparison group, much better than comparing users to nonusers in the general population, because this employee group had a need for the employer intervention (child care). Another strength of the study was that it did not rely on same-source data for predictors and outcomes. The study noted employee perceptions and behaviors separately from outcome performance measures, which were collected from supervisors and company archives. The results show no relation between center use and supervisor measures of performance or absenteeism (Kossek & Nichols, 1992).

Lambert's (2000) study at Felpro was notable in that she measured benefit use at one time and then later measured outcomes. She found that the heaviest users of work and family policies made more suggestions—an indicator of higher discretionary performance. The main limitation of this study was that it was conducted in a single firm with a unique supportive culture. The firm has since been acquired by Federal Mogul, which may have a different culture, and it would be interesting to replicate the findings now or in a multiple-firm study.

## EMERGING THEMES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

For the remainder of the chapter, I discuss emerging themes that are promising for future research. These themes relate to types of policies, policy enactment, and employment decision making; work-family intensification; managing borders between work and home; voice and performance in the context of supervisors and work groups; program structure and links to human resource strategy; and legitimization and engagement.

### Types of Policies, Policy Enactment, and Employment Decision Making

Ryan and Kossek (2003) argued that the research on employer policies to support work-life integration is simplistic in that many studies do not effectively differentiate between policy types nor do they recognize that the way in which policies are enacted may have different influences at various stages in one's career and employment decision making. With the exception of Perry-Smith and Blum (2000) and Eaton (2003), researchers have largely been silent on whether

variation in the way work-life policies are enacted (e.g., whether they are universal, whether they are linked to human resource strategy) is relevant to how they are accepted and used.

Work-life policies may vary across and within organizations in how employees experience them depending on how the policies are designed and implemented in that organizational context. For example, two legal firms or two different departments of the same firm may state in recruiting materials that they offer reduced workload arrangements. However, in one firm, this option is unavailable in the more prestigious work units, or most career-oriented employees do not feel free to use the policy, whereas the other firm employs part-time workers throughout the organization in all sectors and at all levels. Note that it is not the written policy descriptions that are key, but how employees perceive the policy in their immediate work environment. In addition, individual differences matter—not all working women, for example, are alike—yet gross generalizations persist in the research.

Ryan and Kossek (2003) identified four policy attributes—universalism, cultural integration, negotiability, and boundary blurring—as important to future research on the role of work-life policies in job pursuit and turnover decisions. These implementation attributes move away from simply describing policy features and toward considering the social enactment or functioning of policies.

*Universalism* refers to whether policies are available for everyone in all levels and jobs and locations. *Work-life bundling* is the degree to which work-life policies have been communicated as part of an organizational strategy and as an employer of choice—that is, an employer that invests in and cares about all employees. Here work-life policies are not publicized as individual benefits only available to workers with salient work-family demands, but as a group of overlapping human resource policies that help employees of many different personal backgrounds and lifestyles manage work-life roles (for more on work-life bundling, see Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000).

*Cultural integration* is the extent to which the use of work-life policies is seen as being consistent with the core values of organizational members. Legge (1989) contended that a unitary approach to organizational culture may be too simplistic, given that organizations often have multiple cultures. Palthe and Kossek (2003) noted that subcultures may be particularly relevant in understanding how policies are practiced in organizations. With regard to work-life practices, cultural integration traditionally has been studied at the macro or organizational level, but rarely at the work-group level where policies are typically enacted.

*Negotiability*, the third factor, reflects the degree to which the use of a policy must be negotiated with an organizational agent. Some work-life policies are available simply as a condition of employment (e.g., maternity leave). These policies may be enacted as a routine human resource transaction. For other benefits, such as the ability to work at home 1 day a week, a supervisor or the

human resources department must approve use. Thus, whether and how the policy is invoked involves some negotiations. Evidence suggests that there is variation in whether and how policies are enacted given that the preferences of supervisors and employees on how to manage work-family roles are likely to differ (Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999).

*Boundary blurring*, the final attribute, refers to the degree to which work-life policies encourage individual and organizational boundary overlap and a mixing or blurring of work and nonwork roles (Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999). Some policies are designed and implemented to support high separation or segmentation between work and nonwork roles. For example, emergency well-child care (e.g., hiring backup care when a sitter fails to show up) includes policies that convey high boundary separation in that they imply that children should not interfere with one's ability to get to work (Kossek & Block, 2000). Integrative policies, such as flexible schedules, enable a worker to restructure work to mesh with family roles.

Ryan and Kossek (2003) believed work-life policies and their enactment may play a different role at different stages in the employment relationship, such as applicant recruitment compared with incumbent retention. Although it is a popular maxim that work-life policies affect "recruitment and retention," limited research has measured with precision whether and how these policies shape turnover and attraction and whether processes are similar at each employment and career stage. The reasons an individual joins a firm may differ from the reasons that an individual stays, and individuals' understanding and interest in how work-life policies are implemented may vary at these different stages. A *Business Week* report (Conlin, Merritt, & Himmelstein, 2002) on high-achieving women highlights how the mismatch in their work-life needs changed from when they first left graduate school and when they had children. Although work-life balance issues were less of a concern when they first joined their firms, nearly all the women eventually quit their firms because the demanding nature of their jobs and the norms surrounding work-life policy use did not support their family needs. The role of individual differences, career stage, job design, and policy implementation characteristics on employment decisions merits future study.

### Work-Life Intensification

Many employees today are experiencing a time compression at work and at home (Milliken & Dunn-Jensen, 2005). They simply feel they have too much to do in too little time. Along a similar vein, some research in Europe has focused on work intensification; although hours may be legally reduced in some countries, workers nevertheless feel they have to do the same full-time job in the reduced working time (P. Berg, personal communication, May 28, 2003). Work intensification is also caused by declining staffing levels, which increase current

employees' workloads and the pace of work. These trends, coupled with the inability of many employees to manage family needs for flexibility during work hours, all contribute to rising stress. This intensification also applies to family life, when dual-earner or single-parent working families try to manage a demanding home life and their jobs with limited domestic help. The organization's role in exacerbating work-family intensification and encouraging overwork is a problem experienced at all economic levels and must be examined for policies to be effective. Interventions to develop new coping strategies and redesign work and norms, especially in high-commitment workplaces, merit future study.

Because many employees now juggle multiple and intensified life roles, and because it is important to society that employees not only care for families, but participate in other domains (e.g., elder care, exercise, etc.), future research should examine multiple policy use by employees both cross-sectionally and longitudinally given that employees often juggle many life roles at one time and needs for organizational support change over the life course. More studies using improved methodologies, such as a quasi-experimental design comparing types of interventions for treatment and control groups and multiple source data over time for predictors and outcomes, are sorely needed to add clarity to the research.

### Managing Borders Between Work and Home

The world of work has increasingly blurred the boundaries between work and home. Approximately 15% of the workforce (mainly white collar) has experienced a fundamental transformation in how work is structured and organized. Because of new information technologies and a shift in job design and employee preferences toward greater self-management of where, when, and how work is done, work is increasingly portable and "on call" 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Not only are companies contributing to this trend, with such functions as e-mail and other technology, but some employees desire a 24/7 flexibility to better mesh work and personal life (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2005).

The work-family research often assumes that flexibility in time and place has mostly positive outcomes for the worker. The assumption is that flexibility enables workers to excel at both work and family or "have it all" (Kossek et al., 2005). Greater integration among work, family, and personal roles is seen as a way to balance work and family life and even to use one to effect positive change in the other (Friedman, Christensen, & DeGroot, 1998). Yet there may be times when setting boundaries between work and home are desirable. Few studies examine which types of flexibility lead to higher quality of life. Research is also limited on the trend among many white-collar workers (especially professionals) to have more informal flexibility in terms of how jobs are

designed, instead of, or in addition to, existing human resource mediated policy. That is, some employees have increased access to autonomy and ability to control the timing and location of their jobs—not because of a formal policy (often overemphasized in the research), but because of the way their jobs are designed. More research is needed on how employees, particularly those in professional jobs, can influence the mental, physical, and time boundaries they establish between work and family domains and how the ability to control where and when one works affects effectiveness in work and life. Greater understanding is needed to identify predictors and outcomes about the different ways in which individuals manage the boundaries and borders between work and home. We also must better understand the enabling roles of job design and policies in supporting employee preferences for and outcomes of personal job autonomy (i.e., flexibility in where, when, and how one works).

### Voice and Performance in the Context of Supervisors and Work Groups

Many studies have found that one of the most important factors in the success of work-life policies is a supportive boss, but few studies have focused on these managers, examining their actual experience over time and with more than one individual. Recent research has also indicated that many barriers remain in the successful implementation and management of alternative work arrangements. One of these barriers is that many corporate managers and clients still view “face time” as a measure of productivity; yet we still know little about how to change these perceptions. Although management training on how to support work-life needs is often cited as critical, few firms have effectively operationalized what it means to be a supportive supervisor, and more research is needed on the supervisor behaviors and attitudes that enable employees to feel free to voice and make work-life choices that are consistent with their needs and values.

The effects on work groups when employees use work-life policies, such as different types of alternative work arrangements (e.g., flextime, part-time work, telecommuting), have been overlooked (Van Dyne & Kossek, 2003). These flexibility policies are typically adopted at the organizational level, but the details of administration and daily management decisions are left to individual managers or groups. Cross-level research is needed that examines the group performance consequences of individual flexibility and that identifies effective ways for managers to manage flexibility within work groups and still meet client needs.

An individual’s use of flexible policies should also be investigated in light of the characteristics of the work group and the nature of the client served (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999). Recent studies have shown that, although being female and having young children were predictors of

use at the individual level of analysis, use also depended on the social context of work. Such findings underscore the importance of work-group characteristics in explaining the policy use. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002), for example, found that although women in general are more likely than men to use family-care policies, employees in work groups with high percentages of women or with female supervisors report less family-care policy use. They also found having coworkers and supervisors with family responsibilities decreases, rather than increases, the use of flexibility policies. It seems flexibility is being allocated in work groups as a fixed and scarce resource.

### Work-Life Program Structure and Links to Human Resources Strategy

One barrier to the effective implementation of work-life policies is that they are often not integrally tied to human resource strategies or business objectives. Work-life policies are often not viewed as central to the overarching human resource strategy. There are also few links between work-life policies and other human resource policies. Career development and training opportunities are sometimes lacking for those with significant family responsibilities or who work reduced loads (for background on reduced load, see <http://flex-work.lir.msu.edu/>). Bonuses and performance ratings are sometimes informally discounted to compensate for flexibility. Managers are also rarely evaluated on how well they manage the work-life balance.

More research is needed on the structure and formality of work-life strategies and factors determining links to human resource and business strategies. There is increasing variation in where the individual responsible for work and family policy is located within the organization and how work-life program structure is linked to effectiveness (i.e., the degree to which available policies are used, reduce work-family conflict, and support positive work behaviors such as lower absenteeism). In most firms, responsibility for work-life policy falls under human resource management. However, whether work-life policy should be a stand-alone entity is increasingly coming under review. In other words, rather than having a separate work-life department, some firms include their work-life policies in the workforce diversity office, the employee assistance plan office, benefits, wellness and fitness, and even quality. Some employers believe that housing the work-family agenda in a broad-standing unit of the firm will enable work-life policies to have longevity and more clout. However, some work-life professionals believe their policies will have greater long-term acceptance if they are not a separate unit. Still others believe that making work-family policy part of a diversity agenda will have greater line management acceptance given that workforce diversity management has a longer history and acceptance as a business issue in the firm. There are clearly tensions in this approach. Certainly, making work-life policy a critical management concern will increase

effectiveness. However, if it is buried in another unit, there is a risk that the agenda will never be viewed as a legitimate business issue in its own right.

Organizations vary in their philosophy regarding work-life integration strategy. Some employers, for example, prefer to empower employees to manage their own work-life needs (respecting privacy) rather than interfere in the employees' lives through an active work-life department. Others are more actively involved in work-life issues, but this tends to stem less from formal policies than from CEO and top management commitment to supporting work-life integration. Starbucks is a good example of such a commitment; the CEO has a strong philosophy that employees should have work-life balance, and the organization provides full benefits for part-time workers. The informality of Starbucks shows that a firm can sometimes be family-friendly and effective without a lot of bureaucratic policies (<http://www.fortune.com/>, 2005). What does seem important is true access. In some companies, mandates require that a certain percentage of employees have access to flexible working arrangements. More research is needed on best practices at companies of all sizes, how these practices are linked to the way work is done, and how the systems of managing employees are conducted.

### Legitimization and Engagement

Cross-cultural research shows that work is defined and experienced differently in different societies; organizational and societal structures construct what individuals and families perceive as possible for work-life integration. Unlike other Western countries, in the United States, work-life integration issues are still largely viewed as an individual problem more than a business or societal problem. One study that examined how organizations overcome their resistance to adopting work-life policies found striking similarities between employers' resistance to such policies, as reflected in their discourse and language, and companies' early resistance to the Internet (Still, 2003). As they did during the Internet's early years, employers see work-life issues as unrelated to their core business and a matter on which they have little expertise. Study of how to overcome employer resistance to work-life assistance is clearly needed. Future research should examine how to promote employer support for work-life balance and effective policy use as an employer responsibility and a mainstream employment issue.

Although it is important to establish productivity links or the "business case" for work-life integration—which is often suggested as one way to promote increased employer involvement—there are cautions to overemphasizing the business case (i.e., showing the economic cost-benefit analysis of policies). The business case overemphasizes one stakeholder, the shareholder, over all other stakeholders (i.e., families, employees, society). Also the business case approach allows companies' commitment to work-life policies to wane in bad economic

times, underestimates the long-term societal costs of noninvolvement, and holds work-life initiatives to a higher standard than many other organizational policies.

What might be more fruitful are stakeholder and criterion approaches, which could be developed in future research. A stakeholder approach would examine outcomes for the multiple constituencies served by the policies, such as employee outcomes, family outcomes, and community strength indicators. A criterion approach to evaluation might examine the goals of policies or practices and assess whether these goals are met.

A stakeholder approach must confront economic issues. If research shows that family-friendly policies raise productivity, there is no societal trade-off and everyone might gain from using such policies. However, if family-friendly policies cost money without raising productivity, then someone will bear the costs, such as nonusers in the firm. It may be that companies will only invest enough resources to attract financial investors. There remains, however, the possibility that innovation in work-life policies may increase productivity, which is an avenue policymakers should promote.

Beyond a focus on productivity, some employers believe it may be more beneficial to focus on employee engagement—that is, to show the link between effective work-life balance and being engaged at work. Work-life policies may help ensure employees are not stressed, have a higher job and life satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), a positive attitude, and arrive at work ready to fully concentrate on their jobs. Engagement may be an intermediate outcome that is necessary to ensure effectiveness at work and home.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the School of Labor and Industrial Relations at Michigan State University for providing graduate assistantships to Casey Schurkamp and Chassidy Barton who helped with this research.

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