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Future Frontiers: Enduring Challenges and Established Assumptions in the Work-Life Field

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Together, the chapters in this book paint a detailed portrait of the dramatic changes taking place at the beginning of the twenty-first century, both in the workplace and in the personal lives of workers. The structure, pace, and experience of work have intensified at the same time that family structures have weakened in terms of their ability to buffer workers from the stresses of the economy. Several authors note how the relationship between work and personal life is sure to be reciprocal, and we agree that attention should be paid to understanding how transformations in the family affect the workplace and work outcomes. However, this book's voice is focused on the workplace and to good effect. The chapters reveal the powerful roles organizational and job structures, policies, and processes play in mediating the relationship between workers and the economy, ultimately shaping the nature and quality of workers' personal and family lives.

In this chapter, we identify crosscutting themes of divergence and convergence from the organizational, individual, social, and cultural perspectives represented in this book. First, we consider themes that might be deemed points of contention, that is, enduring issues that are critical to the field of work-life scholarship and practice but for which there is limited consensus. This loosely coupled field must address some of these nagging issues if it is to advance to

the next stage of knowledge development. We then contemplate themes that might be thought of as recognized knowledge, or at least established assumptions, in order to develop foundations for future research and practice. Our discussion draws primarily on the chapters included in this volume, although we also incorporate some of the issues raised by authors and practitioners during the Center for Creative Leadership conference that was held in May 2003 to support the book's development, as well as our general knowledge of the field. Our goal is to foster knowledge development by raising the level at which research on work-life issues can begin and to help practitioners understand the hidden issues undergirding current debates and research directions.

POINTS OF CONTENTION

The themes we explore in this section can be viewed as enduring issues that reflect concerns central to knowledge development in the work-life field. Some of these issues are addressed directly by scholars and practitioners, in this volume as well as in other scholarship. However, many of these issues are visible only by looking across chapters that adopt different perspectives, pursue different goals, or employ different methodologies.

What Are the Boundaries Defining the Work-Life Field? What Is Not a Work-Life Issue?

The work-life field has grown enormously over the past ten years, as evidenced by the number of academic centers focusing on work-life issues both in the United States and abroad, the range of journals across disciplines in which work-life topics are addressed, and the growth of membership organizations, such as the U.S.-based Alliance of Work-Life Progress (AWLP), that cater to what are now called *work-life professionals*. The range of topics at any conference or in any volume on work-life or work-family issues is vast: the quality of life in today's families, women's labor force participation, the allocation of household and paid labor, the quality and accessibility of child care, flexible work options, stress, and so forth. Basically, any research that examines aspects of work or personal life can, and probably has been, approached as a work-life issue. Clearly, the work-life field is no longer focused only on the effects of employer-sponsored child care, despite the fact that this is where the field began, and the problems of employer support for child care have yet to be fully solved. What does the field gain and lose by extending its parameters? Is there a work-life field of study? If so, how might we characterize it today?

The field has certainly gained enormously by expanding its focus beyond formal employer policies aimed at helping workers with visible caregiving de-

mands (often women with young children) keep their personal lives from interfering with their work performance. In terms of knowledge development, the literature now holds a wealth of information on how work conditions affect personal life and vice versa. This literature is increasingly nuanced, focusing on the specific conditions in the workplace and in the home that are most important in explaining the ability of workers to combine effectively work and personal life. Moreover, this expansion has resulted in knowledge that tackles work-life issues at different levels—societal, organizational, job, interpersonal, and individual. Thus, one of the primary contributions we think has come with this expansion is that scholars are bringing new conceptualizations to the study of work-life issues. Indeed, we purposively invited scholars who write primarily outside the work-life literature to contribute to this volume because we wanted to introduce other work-life scholars and practitioners to perspectives we have found useful in our own research. Thus, overall, we see the broadening of the field as an essential step in knowledge development.

However, the more broadly the work-life field is defined, the harder it is to distinguish its core. If the field is about everything, it runs the risk of being about nothing. Moreover, at the developmental conference for this volume, practitioners voiced their concern when the possibility was raised of redefining the field in terms of "quality of life" issues rather than work-family or work-life issues. They argued that initiatives would be even harder to sell to managers; bearing responsibility for workers' whole quality of life seemed a stretch for managers who have a hard enough time concluding that companies bear some responsibility for creating and solving caregiving problems. Participants at the conference also expressed concern that if viewed too broadly, corporations' efforts may become mere window-dressing as they promote any program in terms of bettering workers' lives. Thus, we think there is merit in continuing to define the core of the field in terms of a focus on the relationship between work and personal life, necessitating research and practice that cross, and reconstruct, the boundaries between them.

Accepting that it is this relationship that is central to the field suggests at least one parameter: Theory and research needs to encompass relationships across work and personal life boundaries or needs to be focused on their nexus. For example, studies of families relevant to work-life issues would consider how certain qualities of family life can be linked to workplace conditions or employment outcomes. It would not be enough, for example, to examine the distribution of household labor between husbands and wives; the link to workplace conditions or employment outcomes also would need to be made. And studies of work relevant to the work-life field should consider how the effects of particular occupational conditions extend into workers' personal lives, into communities, and into society—perhaps in addition to their effects on performance. Studies at the community and societal level would be relevant to the extent they incorporate both work and family conditions as explanatory, mediating, or mod-

erating factors or as outcomes, for example, by investigating how the effect of government policy on family well-being depends on employer practices.

This cross-sphere parameter seems basic, and one may think we should include it in our discussion of established assumptions in the next main section of this chapter. However, studies seem still to focus predominately on one sphere or another, often shorting the other domain. Examples include cases when scholars focusing on work only measure those family influences that can detract from individuals' ability to fulfill work demands, or when scholars focusing on the family frame and measure work in terms of how it detracts from family life. Another example of scholars' tendency to preference one sphere over another is their use of limited, even single-item, measures to capture the "other" domain when they would not dream of employing such inadequate measures to capture concepts relevant to their own sphere of interest.

Several contributions in this volume serve as examples of the contributions scholars outside the work-life field can make to knowledge development when encouraged to look across the boundaries of work and personal life. For example, the chapter by Roberts, Desai, and Madsen (chap. 5) breaks new ground by bringing understandings of high-reliability organizations to the work-life field, highlighting both the benefits and costs of organizational policies that require workers to separate their personal life from their work life. Valcour and Hunter's chapter (chap. 4) brings established knowledge on technology to the work-life field, examining how variations in the implementation of technology can affect workers' ability to establish a high-quality personal life. Edmondson and Detert (chap. 18) shed new light on how work-life issues are articulated and acted on in the workplace, drawing on exciting developments in research on the organizational conditions that allow workers to speak up about sensitive issues. Moss, Salzman, and Tilly (chap. 7) bring theories of labor markets to bear on work-life issues, helping us understand how larger economic conditions shape the ability of workers to maintain work schedules that facilitate caregiving. At the individual level, Friede and Ryan (chap. 10) employ nuanced understandings of personality to reveal how core self-evaluations are likely to matter in explaining variation in how workers manage boundaries between work and personal life.

These chapters, and several others in the volume, contribute to the work-life field by offering new and developing frameworks useful for conceptualizing certain features of work or personal life and then tracing—in some cases empirically, in other cases conceptually—the implications of these features across boundaries. Thus, although the chapters in this volume do not reveal a consensus in answering the question "What isn't a work-life issue?" they demonstrate that there remains an enormous advantage to a sustained focus on the intersection of and reciprocal relationship between work and personal life. Employees neither show up at work as *tabula rasa* nor return home ready and able to simply turn off that day's events.

Do We Need a Consensus on How to Conceptualize and Measure the Relationship Between Work and Personal Life?

How the relationship between work and personal life is characterized is of ongoing and central concern in work-life scholarship. The chapters in this volume reveal little consensus in terms of the language and core concepts used to capture the relationship between work and personal life, invoking different images of that relationship. For example, Edwards and Rothbard (chap. 11) focus on work-life fit, arguing that one size does not fit all; this brings to mind a relativistic standard that a good fit for one person may be a matter of being more involved in work than family, but may be the opposite for another. Fletcher and Bailyn (chap. 9) argue that the goal of workplace interventions and social policy should be to promote work-life integration, which slackens the separation between work life and personal life allowing involvement and satisfaction with both. Poelmans (chap. 13) views the relationship between work and personal life as a set of interlocking decisions that can be understood by examining the negotiations among actors at home and at work. Several chapters conceptualize the relationship between work and personal life in terms of managing their boundaries, depicting a great deal of potential fluidity between the two. At the prebook conference, attendees even debated whether there should be a hyphen between work and life when talking about the work-life field.

Obviously, we did not force a consensus among the authors contributing to this volume—but should we have? The field's struggle with terminology is more than just that. It is a struggle to find the best conceptualization of the relationship between work and personal life. It is also an effort to develop a shared disciplinary history of core concepts. Our view is that researchers should employ the conceptualization that is best suited to furthering the knowledge they are seeking to develop. However, this assessment can be made, only when the theoretical underpinnings of the terms are taken into consideration. On the one hand, MacDermid's chapter (chap. 2) is a wonderful example of the importance of understanding the theoretical traditions out of which common conceptualizations have evolved. She explains how work-family conflict, and ultimately work-family enhancement, developed out of structural-functionalist traditions, especially out of role theories that differentiated intra- and interrole conflict. On the other hand, notions of work-family spillover derive from Melvin Kohn's (1977) classic research on how occupational structure shapes life off the job; the original focus was on the link between occupational structure and the quality of men's leisure activities.

In past research, scholars might choose to focus on *spillover* if seeking to identify the workplace conditions that matter for personal life, whereas they

might focus on *conflict* or *enhancement* if approaching the relationship in terms of role theory. However, in practice scholars have tended to adopt the most commonly used terms, which currently seem to be notions of work-life *integration* and work-family *conflict*. Unlike many of the authors in this volume, researchers oftentimes do not explain the basis of their selection of terminology, and one wonders how much thought is typically given to choosing among different possible conceptualizations.

Scholars today can advance the work-life field by carefully considering, and explaining, the theoretical origins of the terminology they employ to depict the relationship between work and personal life. Kanter's (1977) research on the separate spheres of work and family helped to develop the notions of boundary management. The focus on work-life integration continues the development of role theory by moving beyond conflict and enhancement to the possibility of merging life roles, undercutting the tenets of structural-functionalism as put forth by Parsons (1982). Like work-family fit, work-life *balance* comes out of theories of role stress but is less relativistic.

The terms scholars adopt paint an image of the relationship between work and personal life, thus opening or closing possibilities for intervention. As MacDermid (chap. 2) points out, viewing work and family roles as primarily conflicting has helped to fuel workplace policies aimed at ensuring that workers' personal issues do not interfere with their work performance. Alternatively, by framing work-life issues in terms of support for the reconciliation of work and life responsibilities, Lewis and Haas (chap. 16) point out how Europeans have begun to carve out a larger role for government policy and intervention.

Although the terminology may vary, the chapters in this volume suggest growing agreement on certain basic qualities of the relationship between work and personal life. Many authors argue that the relationship between work and personal life is not a fixed point but a process that evolves with changing circumstances and choices and certainly over the life course. Moreover, any particular point in this process is not considered an end in itself; that is, it could be good or bad, depending on personal characteristics and preferences. For example, Edwards and Rothbard (chap. 11) make the point that configurations that fit at one stage of life may not fit at another stage. Similarly, Lee, MacDermid, Dohring, and Kossek (chap. 14) describe how overinvolvement in work may enhance well-being before parenthood but may detract from quality of life afterward. However, there remains little consensus, in terms of the outcomes that should be considered at different points in the process of combining work and personal life and whether and when the focus should extend beyond the individual to other "stakeholders" such as spouses, children, and communities.

Moreover, methods are not keeping up with changing conceptualizations. From a reading of the larger work-life literature, one is struck by the fact that despite problems of common-method variance and the recognition that work-life relationships may wax and wane over the life span, most work-life research is cross-sectional and employs self-report data gathered largely via surveys. Lon-

gitudinal research measuring change over time and qualitative research investigating the processes linking work and personal life are less well represented.

Kossek and Ozeki (1998) document how researchers vary in the measures they use to capture similar concepts, such as work-family conflict, and highlight the need for measures that differentiate among types of nonwork roles and work roles. It must also be remembered that traditional theories and their associated measures were developed mostly from research on two-parent, male-headed, Caucasian American households. This fact alone should be an incentive for scholars to think carefully about both our conceptualizations and our measures. Yet, current research often employs—with little explanation—the same measures to samples of dual-earners, single-parents, gays/lesbians, single parents, and so forth.

In sum, there is limited consensus on the terminology and even some of the variables used to capture the relationship between work and personal life, both in this volume and in the larger literature. This lack of consensus is fitting—if it is the result of scholars carefully choosing particular conceptualizations on the basis of theory and their goals for knowledge development. Regardless of the conceptualization adopted, there is growing consensus that the relationship between work and personal life is best conceived as a process rather than a static state and that scholars need to assess, rather than simply assume, how varying relationships between work and personal life (be they defined in terms of boundary management, work-life integration, work-life balancing, or work-family fit) are related to the well-being of individuals, families, communities, and societies.

How Do We Create Knowledge That Crosses Disciplinary Boundaries and Levels of Analysis? What Are the Methodological and Conceptual Challenges of Doing So?

The level of analysis at which research is targeted is important to clarify perhaps primarily because it subsequently may dictate the level of intervention. For example, research focused at the individual level offers the possibility of identifying practical skills for work-life management; workers can effect change themselves rather than depending solely on their employer. Research focused at the work group level can reveal ways to improve social dynamics, support, and norms. Research at the organizational level can uncover needed improvements in organizational policies, practices, and cultures. Societal-level research can foster changes to national culture and government policies that reduce the mismatch between personal demands and workplace realities.

Although research at each level has a great deal to offer in terms of advancing both theory and practice, we suspect that crosslevel research may be extremely valuable for advancing the field in new ways. With few exceptions, most of the

chapters in this volume raise, and some address, multilevel questions. From an organizational perspective, for example, Moss, Salzman, and Tilly (chap. 7) raise concerns about the effects of changing opportunity structures on the ability of workers to manage caregiving. Friede and Ryan (chap. 10) consider how individuals' responses to organizational policies and practices depend on their core self-evaluations. The chapters (Lewis & Haas, chap. 16; Pitt-Catsoupes & Googins, chap. 21) adopting cultural perspectives are concerned with the effects of social policy on both institutions and individuals. Yet, in each chapter it is clear which level is foreground and which levels are background; we had a fairly easy time placing most of the chapters in a particular section of the book. What, then, are the conceptual and methodological challenges that must be overcome to do crosslevel research—that is, research that not only gives equal weight to multiple levels of analysis but that examines their intersection?

The conceptual and methodological challenges of doing crosslevel research take at least two forms. One is conceptualizing and studying multiple levels within perspectives; for example, tackling work-life issues from multiple organizational levels—firm, job, worker—or from the individual, couple, or family levels. Several of the chapters in this volume do this. For example, Lambert and Waxman (chap. 6) look at how opportunities for balancing work and personal life are adopted in policy at the firm level, implemented in practice at the job level, and then experienced by workers at the individual level. Similarly, Poster (chap. 17) examines diversity policies at the corporate level, as implemented at specific work sites, and as experienced by workers. Poelmans (chap. 13) presents a framework for looking at work-life decisions at the individual, couple, and family levels. Thus, progress has been made in conceptualizing crosslevel examinations within a particular context. Moreover, given the historic focus of the field, it is not surprising that there are ample examples of research that cross boundaries. However, most of this research is at the individual level, examining the relationship between individuals' experiences at work and their experiences at home.

What is largely missing from the literature is research that looks across levels *and* boundaries, that examines, for example, how employer policies affect family life. The conceptual challenges to this type of research are daunting. Few individuals can master all the theories that might be needed to conceptualize adequately different contexts *and* levels. The methodological challenges are as great. Doing research across levels means gathering data at multiple levels. For example, asking workers about their employers' policies and practices creates data at the individual level. From individual level data we can learn whether individuals have access to employer-sponsored child care, for example, but we cannot learn how their employer structures access to care; the worker may be the exception rather than the rule. Gathering data at the organizational level requires a direct assessment of employers' policies and practices, perhaps through interviews with managers and reviews of corporate documents. Simi-

larly, gathering data at the family level requires more than simply asking individuals about their own family experiences. Thus, often different methodologies are required to gain information at different levels of analysis—perhaps mapping community programs and parameters, surveys of workers, interviews with managers, observations of jobs, ethnographies of families, and so forth.

The work-life field has advanced in terms of crosslevel analysis within boundaries and in terms of within-level analysis across boundaries. Without research that crosses boundaries and levels of analysis, however, assessments of the relative efficacy of potential interventions to support workers' efforts to effectively manage work and family life will be based primarily on assumptions of unmeasured effects at other levels, tenable though they may be.

What Is Today's Business Case for Employer Support of Work-Life Integration? Do We Still Need to Make One?

The issue of how to make the business case for supporting workers' personal lives seems as old as the field. In fact, one could argue that work-life research began to gel as a field when it started to study the effects of formal work-family supports on employee performance, entering public discussion through the news media. Traditionally, making the business case has meant convincing corporate executives that work-life policies are a win-win solution for both employers and employees. Selling work-life issues to corporate executives still tends to take the form of showing how employer supports for work-life issues benefit the bottom line either by reducing employment costs (such as the costs of recruitment, absenteeism, and training) or by improving worker performance (such as workers' willingness to help their coworkers and to contribute new ideas). Such arguments have been useful for dissipating assumptions that supporting workers' personal lives is beyond the purview and responsibility of employers.

However, the field's quest to make a business case may have come at a cost. Many formal employer supports largely operate as work supports; that is, they were designed to help workers keep their personal responsibilities from interfering with their job involvement and performance. It is more difficult to sell supports that strengthen involvement in personal life, notably more active caregiving, in terms of enhancing worker performance and ultimately firm profitability. The more time you spend with your children, the less time you are likely to have for your work. Although several chapters in this volume make it clear that work hours are related only loosely to performance, the case for supports that facilitate involvement in family and community is on shaky ground if it is pitched primarily in terms of convincing employers that it will pay off on their bottom-line. As Kossek, Lobel, and Brown (in press) point out, if employers' only motivation for investing in work-life supports is for business reasons, then

they may be prone to drop supports during economic downturns. Moreover, they argue that making a business case for work-life supports emphasizes a shareholder perspective that supports the interests of employers, as compared to a stakeholder perspective that also takes into account the interests of employees, their families, the community, and society.

Fortunately, progress has been made in changing the nature of the business case. Over the past two years, a group of non-profit organizations (e.g., the Families and Work Institute, the Work Life Leadership Council, Boston College Roundtable, the Alliance of Work Life Progress, and the Conference Board) have led an effort to fashion a new business case that shifts the focus from the individual to the family and community and that moves the debate from a narrow focus on short-term profitability to a longer-term strategy of investing in employee and community well-being.¹ Two chapters in this volume extend these developments further. Lewis and Haas (chap. 16) argue that the case the work-life field should be making is a societal one, that important social rights should not be left to the discretion of employers and instead should be ensured by government. Pitt-Catsoupes and Googins (chap. 21) redefine work-life issues in terms of social issues, reframing the business case in terms of corporate social responsibility; corporations would be encouraged, if not required, to demonstrate their support for work-family issues to shareholders and the citizenry.

We concur that treating work-life issues as social issues is an important direction for the field and that it is essential if all workers are to have access to the supports they need to develop fulfilling personal lives. Nonetheless, we think it is still important to make a business case. Laws cannot ensure that supervisors will be supportive of workers or that workers will be evaluated on outcomes rather than face time. Moreover, social policies aimed at changing workplace practices necessarily involve employers in their implementation; history has taught us that employers can come up with creative ways to undermine employment laws if they are so motivated. Thus, the prospects of workers accessing the supports they need—whether from government, their employer, or their community—are improved greatly when employers are willing participants in the transformation of work, in the life of the larger community, and in the implementation of social policy.

If there is a business case to be made, what should it look like today? Ruderman's chapter (chap. 22) points out how differences in the goals and approaches of academics and practitioners create barriers to research that furthers both theory and practice. Discussion at the prebook conference highlighted the disconnect between how academics and practitioners view the business case. Practitioners discussed their need for pragmatic information on how specific programs and policies have resulted in specific outcomes in specific industries—information they think would help them sell particular initiatives within their particular firms. Scholars talked about the business case in terms of explaining

variance in outcomes that have implications for performance. They also discussed the limitations of case study research for building more generalizable knowledge, preferring representative samples that can be generalized across employers rather than firm- or industry-specific ones.

As Ruderman points out, practitioners tend to pay the closest attention to individual-level analyses that offer ways that employers might ease workers' stress or increase supervisors' supportiveness. By contrast, less attention is given to ideas of how to restructure fundamentally the way firms conduct business, design jobs, implement new technologies, or distribute benefits. It is not that the practitioners are uninterested in these ideas, but they do not readily see how they can make a case for such sweeping changes in their settings. This is probably the reality. Making a business case for supports for work-life integration will only get us so far in transforming the workplace, let alone the home.

A key challenge for the field, then, is to craft a new business case that is consistent with a broader social agenda that spans the boundaries of work and personal life, one that lays the foundation for employers' willing involvement in implementing this agenda. A case that focuses primarily on maximizing corporate profits is likely to be at odds with a progressive social agenda, such as one that incorporates expanded access to paid leave and well-designed reduced-hour jobs.

An underlying issue in building a new business case is the extent to which firms value workers and see their performance as essential to firm profitability. Work-life policies need to be seen as a bundle with other human resource (HR) strategies that invest in workers (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). If they are viewed as such, then firms are more likely to invest in their workforce—including supports for their personal life (Osterman, 1995). Moreover, research within firms demonstrates that workers in jobs deemed valuable to company success are better compensated and supported and have greater access to work-life supports (Konrad & Mangel, 2000). Thus, a first step in making a new business case is to reframe the logic for work-life supports. Instead of beginning articles with information on how the demographics of the workforce have changed, the field might also supply information on the extent to which firms gain a competitive advantage when they pursue profits primarily through quality enhancement rather than cost containment, discussing the ways in which workers—men and women—add value to service and production.

Work-life scholars and practitioners could make a unique contribution to building this new business case by explicating the contributions lower-level workers can make to firm success when their jobs are designed to allow them to do so. The chapters by Valcour and Hunter (chap. 4), Moss, Salzman, and Tilly (chap. 7), and Lambert and Waxman (chap. 6) highlight how the same work can be accomplished through jobs that allow workers to make unique and important contributions, rather than rendering their labor easily replaceable. Part of making the case of the importance of workers' contributions to firm success

would be to demonstrate how lower-level workers are on the front lines of customer service and technological innovation, and to point out the competitive advantage firms reap when they design jobs that allow these workers to add value to their product or service. Thus, a first step in making a new business case would be to focus on how workers—at all levels—are key to firm performance and profitability. Litchfield, Swanberg, and Sigworth's (2004) recent report that identifies corporations "best practices" for supporting lower-wage workers begins with a discussion of the value of lower-wage employees to corporations, providing an excellent example of how to construct a more inclusive business case.

The next step in creating a business case that lays the foundation for a broader social agenda would be to address problems in the implementation of current workplace and social policies. Were the United States to expand rights for workers, employers would play a key role in implementing any rights that are linked to employment status. Are they prepared to distribute these rights? The U.S. experience with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) suggests not. According to the most complete study of the FMLA since its adoption (U.S. Department of Labor, 1995), only 10.8% of private-sector workplaces are even covered by the FMLA; altogether, 55% of workers meet the eligibility requirements outlined by the act. Workers' "right" to parental leave is limited by employment factors that have little to do with workers' need for time at home: specifically, employer size (≥ 50 employees), hours worked (1,250 in past 12 months), and length of service with current employer (≥ 1 year). Moreover, as Lambert and Waxman (chap. 6) point out, workers in lower-level jobs often cannot access sick or vacation time or employer-sponsored health insurance. Thus, the second step in a new business case would be to focus on barriers to distributing supports that are available in many workplaces today, at least on the books. This may require changing employment laws to limit the ability of employers to define access to benefits in terms of employment status (temporary, nonstandard, part-time) or to identify barriers to access created by job design. Increasing the distribution of supports currently available would help to lay a foundation for the implementation of new social policies that expand the rights of workers to supports for work-life integration.

Recognizing the value of workers to firm performance and tackling issues in the distribution of work-life supports should facilitate greatly the next step, which is to explicate the need to support workers' personal life *per se*. In this step, the challenge is to broaden the case to encompass family supports as well as work supports, and changes in corporate culture as well as in formal policy. One might argue that the field has already made the case to employers that they benefit when they attend to workers' personal lives; but, as argued before, this case has resulted in a focus on supports that allow workers to continue their (over)involvement in work. The key now is to demonstrate how supports for personal life are part of an enlightened, long-term corporate self-interest or,

preferably, to move the discussion beyond self-interest toward notions of corporate social responsibility as suggested in the chapter by Pitt-Catsoupes and Googins (chap. 21). Perhaps the biggest challenge for the field is to change the very nature of the business case, to enable arguments for supporting workers' personal life to be put forth without selling them in terms of enhancing firm profitability.

The final step in making a new business case is to assess more systematically the merits and limitations of different avenues for intervention. Practitioners are clear that one size does not fit all; both resources and good will are wasted when initiatives fall short of intended consequences. Practitioners' preferences for knowledge that is industry-focused might be interpreted as a quest for in-depth information on the conditions under which certain initiatives have their intended effects. Studies that examine the effects of specific interventions using rigorous experimental methods are needed to rule out possible competing explanations for findings that support the efficacy of work-life supports; improved workplaces may be better in terms of not only their work-life policies but also their culture and their ability to attract and retain good employees (Kossek, *in press*).

The field has to take responsibility for more than simply documenting the carnage when workers do not have the supports they need to effectively manage work and personal responsibilities. Part of making the business case for work-life supports is demonstrating that business can make a difference—and how to make the difference—within the constraints and opportunities that operate in today's global economy. Clearly, partnerships between scholars and practitioners are needed in order to advance this agenda. Right now, it has been our experience that few employers systematically collect data to quantitatively or qualitatively evaluate the effectiveness of their work-life policies. This could involve collecting baseline data before an initiative is introduced and then follow-up data from several perspectives to capture the effects on work, workers, and their families. Administrative data, personnel records, bio-data, and productivity measures may all be essential.

In sum, today's business case for work-life efforts should lay the foundation for a broader social agenda aimed at improving the quality of life for workers and their families. The new case cannot be completely made on the basis that supports for workers' personal life always pay off with regard to the bottom line. Sometimes this may not be true, especially in the short run. Although it is important to identify the circumstances under which supports for work-life integration are a win-win solution for employees and employers, the field must own up to the possibility that supports may be needed even though they do not contribute to, and may even detract from, firms' profitability. The field can help change the nature of the case, and the debate, by keeping the focus on the reasons for investing in workers more generally, by explaining how investment in workers today necessitates attention to their personal lives, and by generating pragmatic information on how businesses can deliver needed supports to work-

ers. Moreover, tackling problems in the distribution of supports already available in many workplaces has the potential to put into place the mechanisms needed for distributing new supports to workers.

ESTABLISHED ASSUMPTIONS

The themes we identify in this section are ones that seem to have become part of the fabric of social inquiry into work-life issues, at least as reflected in this volume. Certain approaches to knowledge development are common across the chapters, even if not articulated formally by the authors. Recognizing the often unspoken rules of the work-life "trade" seems useful for identifying the parameters of the field and may propel scholars toward an active consideration of the kinds of approaches the field may be taking for granted. Moreover, articulating what may be newly developing standards for work-life research may prove useful clues for those outside the field who wish to contribute to the work-life literature.

Research Should Examine the Practical Implementation of Work-Life Policies and Programs

One theme that cuts across chapters, perspectives, and levels of analysis is the importance of looking closely at the implementation of work-life policies and other practices aimed at improving the ability of workers to manage work and personal responsibilities. At the international level, for example, Poster's chapter (chap. 17) focuses on how the implementation of the same diversity policy in the same company varies between work sites in different countries, depending on local workplace customs and the ways in which discourses around gender and ethnicity are constructed in that society. Similarly, Lewis and Haas (chap. 16) observe how the potential of social policies to support workers' ability to balance work and family life depends on gender differentials in wages and on the extent to which interpersonal relationships in the family continue to define family work as women's work. They describe in depth what they call "the implementation problem"—that is, the disconnect between social policy intentions and workplace realities.

At the organizational level, Valcour and Hunter (chap. 4) offer a contextualized approach to technology. They consider how the relationship between technological change and work-life integration depends on how new technologies are implemented in particular organizational, individual, and family contexts. The same technology can expand or constrict workers' ability to access flexibility, for example, depending on how it is implemented by the organization and

by workers in their own lives. Lambert and Waxman (chap. 6) reveal how opportunities available to all workers as a matter of employer policy are, in practice, often implemented unevenly across organizational levels and jobs.

At the individual level of analysis, chapters highlight how understanding the effects of workplace conditions necessitates a close examination of variations in how individuals enact and experience formal job structures and policies. Notably, Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton (chap. 12) discuss how individuals vary in their use of flexible work options, creating different challenges for managing personal responsibilities. They argue, for example, that flexibility may actually increase work hours among individuals who allow porous boundaries between work and personal life, and that control over how the job is conducted is more strongly related to employee well being than use of or access to flexibility. Friede and Ryan (chap. 10) specify core dimensions of personality that play a role in how individuals select, appraise, and cope with job stress shaping the way that formal job structures and policies are implemented in everyday life. Giga and Cooper (chap. 19) explain how the strength of a person's psychological contract with an employer depends on what the company and its representatives actually do, rather than what they say they will do.

In sum, the field no longer limits itself to examinations of what policies and programs companies have adopted. It is now common for researchers to look beyond what organizations *say* they do to examine what organizations actually do to support workers' efforts to meet work and personal demands. Moreover, fuller consideration now is given to understanding how individual qualities and interpersonal relationships temper or exacerbate problems in the implementation of workplace supports. Further crosslevel research that traces the relationships among organizational policy, employer practice, and ultimately worker experience, is needed if we are to identify the conditions under which employers' policies and practices enhance the ability of workers to combine effectively work and personal life.

Research Should Look Beyond Formal Work-Life Policies

Much of the early organizational research on work-life issues concentrated on workers' access to and use of formal organizational supports, such as employer supports for child care, flextime programs, and parental leave policies. Sutton and Noe's chapter (chap. 8) makes clear the importance of continuing to investigate how formal supports are implemented by employers and used by employees. Although formal policies can make it easier for workers to remain productive while fulfilling caregiving responsibilities, this is not always the case. Many so-called work-life policies still do a better job of supporting work life than personal life. And as Pitt-Catsouphes and Googins (chap. 21) point out, although the proportion of firms reporting formal work-life initiatives has increased over

the past two decades, they remain only a small minority. Fortunately, perhaps, research has revealed that other aspects of the workplace may be as, or more, important than formal policies in promoting workers' efforts at balancing work and personal life.

The chapters in this book reflect a growing consensus that researchers and practitioners must look beyond formal organizational policies to identify the key conditions of work that shape the ways in which workers combine work and personal life. For example, Hopkins' chapter (chap. 20) focuses on the central role supervisors play in setting the tone for how personal issues are dealt with in the workplace, in linking workers to available services and supports, and for directly intervening to support workers through difficult times. Her work breaks new ground by identifying the behaviors that characterize supervisors whom workers deem supportive. Moss, Salzman, and Tilly (chap. 7) consider how workers' access to work hours that fit family routines can be improved or diminished through industry restructuring. Fletcher and Bailyn (chap. 9) examine how particular aspects of job design, such as how interdependencies among workers are handled, shape the extent to which professionals are able to avoid overwork. Edmondson and Detert (chap. 18) analyze how the interpersonal climate in a workplace sends messages to workers concerning the extent to which it is safe to speak up about work-life issues.

An ongoing challenge for the field is to bring to the foreground a broad set of employment conditions for examination and to distinguish which of these either have the biggest effect on or can be managed most effectively to improve workers' prospects of balancing work with personal life. Formal work-life policies need to be one, but cannot be the only, component of a research agenda aimed at enhancing employer responsiveness.

More Effective Collaboration Between Researchers and Practitioners Is Needed

A recurring theme both in the book and at the prebook conference is that more work needs to be done to translate the lessons from work-life research into work-life practice. There is genuine interest on the part of many researchers in this volume to help identify the stages needed to move from research to practice. Although working with HR professionals continues to be key to advancing the field, scholars and practitioners note the need to widen the audience beyond HR—to go deeper into the organization. On the one hand, authors believe that practitioners could use help in understanding and selling more structural changes in the workplace and in countering arguments about the nature of our business. On the other hand, practitioners indicate that academics need to be more attuned to pragmatic business realities. As noted earlier, practitioners and academics often define the "business case" very differently.

Ruderman (chap. 22) argues that crosslevel research holds promise because problems with work-life integration can be traced from the societal level down to the worker level. For example, Ruderman notes that when there are strong situations due to job design or culture, it makes little sense for research to focus on individual differences or propensities. However under more flexible situations researchers and practitioners can help individuals take advantage of available choices. Collaboration between scholars and practitioners is most likely to take place when each has something to gain. Intervention research, or other types of change-oriented work-life studies, are likely to hold such a common ground; researchers are able to employ rigorous research methods to test theory and practitioners are able to get hard data on the effects of specific changes in their workplace.

Expand Definitions and Measures of Good Performance and Success

As noted in several chapters throughout the volume, notions of what makes for a good performer and ultimately a successful worker have been based on traditional models that no longer fit the realities or preferences of many of today's workers—male or female. From an organizational perspective, Fletcher and Bailyn (chap. 9) explain how assessments of worker performance are often based on face time, which helps to create a long-hours culture among technical and professional workers. They advocate an increased focus on neglected aspects of performance essential to the work performed in today's organizations, such as integrative functions vital to team work, and, as much as possible, basing performance appraisals on measurable results. Cleveland's chapter (chap. 15) focuses squarely on new definitions of performance that recognize the permeability of boundaries between work and family, calling for definitions of performance that incorporate the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, including spouses, partners, and children.

Chapters adopting individual perspectives on work-life issues are especially helpful in explaining why in today's world individual success should not be defined in terms of traditional notions of advancement up an organizational hierarchy. Lee, MacDermid, Dohring, and Kossek (chap. 14), for example, develop a framework of how parenthood often redefines professionals' orientation toward work, leading those individuals to base their assessments of success as much on their development as a parent as on their development as a professional.

The chapter by Pitt-Catsouphes and Googins (chap. 21) adopts a crosscultural perspective to consider how firms can be held more accountable for their responsiveness to work-life issues, advocating that firms' success at addressing these issues be systematically examined and communicated to investors and the public. Lewis and Haas (chap. 16) argue that we must look at the performance

of societies, assessing the extent to which they foster supportive employer practices and deliver supports directly to workers and their families.

In sum, the work-life field is adopting new and expanded definitions of performance and success that take into consideration workers' preferences across the life course and their desire to contribute to their work group, to their community, and to society. Moreover, the field is also devising ways to incorporate responsiveness to work-life issues into definitions and measures of corporate and societal performance and success. Careful conceptual work is needed to specify which aspects of performance and success are most likely to show the effects of different types of work-life supports, be they formal or informal. Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton (chap. 12) report that workers' use of formal flextime options is positively related to supervisors' appraisals of performance, suggesting that the best workers pay no cost for using formal supports (if this finding is the result of supervisor bias limiting those using formal supports) or that employers pay little cost for allowing workers this access (if worker performance is actually better). They also find that women managers and professionals are more likely to blend boundaries and that individuals who blend rather than segment work roles are more likely to receive lower ratings. More research is needed to distinguish the circumstances under which supports for work and personal life have different costs and benefits for workers and firms.

Attention to Gender Is Critical (Still)

The chapters in this book reflect a growing consensus that men, as well as women, face significant challenges in combining work with personal life, especially when it involves caregiving responsibilities. Work-life issues are no longer considered solely a women's issue. However, the consensus that both men and women face difficulties balancing work and family responsibilities does not mean that gender is no longer relevant to the field. To the contrary, the chapters in this volume make clear that gender issues must be addressed if we are to improve men's and women's prospects for effectively combining work and personal life.

The research in this volume, and elsewhere, demonstrates how inequalities in the workplace and in the home create very different circumstances for men and women and thus present men and women with different challenges for managing work and personal life. For example, Cleveland (chap. 15) points out that as long as definitions of good performance focus on behaviors and skills that favor men, men will be propelled toward overinvolvement in work and women will be discouraged from full participation. Fletcher and Bailyn (chap. 9) argue that redesigning jobs to promote work-life integration necessitates tackling gender disparities in the types of skills that are valued and in the ways in which performance is assessed. Indeed, in the perspective they put forth, issues of job design are inextricable from those of gender disparities.

Lewis and Haas (chap. 16) consider gender issues at the societal level, noting how countries vary in the extent to which workers' rights to work-life supports are mediated by employer discretion and thus vary in the extent to which they reinforce rather than reduce, gender inequality in the workplace and in the home. Poster (chap. 17) argues that understanding a country's discourse of gender and ethnicity is critical to understanding cultural differences in the implementation of employer diversity policies.

In sum, regardless of the extent to which gender equity is a stated goal, there seems to be substantial consensus that the field must continue to address issues of gender in both research and practice. Differences and similarities in the life courses and life circumstances of men and women need to be investigated and acknowledged in order to develop an understanding of the factors that shape the ways in which individuals construct their work and personal lives, and in order to develop interventions that hold the potential of helping both men and women succeed as workers, partners, parents, and citizens.

CONCLUSION

The themes discussed in this chapter highlight a number of the advances in the work-life field that have taken place over the decade since Zedeck's book *Work, Families, and Organizations* (1992) was published. Scholars have continued to approach work-life issues from a broad set of theories and frameworks, bringing individual, organizational, social, and cultural perspectives to bear on the work-life nexus. The field poses and addresses increasingly nuanced questions. Clearly, the field has moved beyond a narrow focus on traditional roles in traditional families to pursue a broader range of issues and populations. Current conceptualizations of the relationship between work and personal life allow for the possibility that the two can be mutually beneficial rather than at odds.

The themes of divergence highlight some of the challenges the field must tackle if we are to continue to develop knowledge in useful ways over the next decade. Methods have not quite kept up with theoretical advances. Like much research in other fields, common-method variance and cross-sectional designs limit our ability to trace relationships across levels of analysis and to tease out causal pathways. Longitudinal studies are required to investigate the processes linking work and personal life, multimethod studies to trace relationships across levels of analysis, and intervention research to build causal knowledge that rules out competing explanations. Partnerships between scholars and practitioners are a must if the rigor of workplace-based research in particular is to be enhanced and if findings are to be of practical use.

What remains as true today as a decade ago is the importance of recognizing that *work* is central to understanding work-life issues. The chapters of this book help direct attention to the ways in which conditions of employment are critical

to worker and family well-being, revealing multifaceted and reciprocal relationships. By building on the contributions in this book, and on the work of other scholars for whom work is of central concern, 10 years from now we should be in the position to celebrate rather than lament the field's attention to the work side of work-life.

NOTES

1. Ellen Galinsky, personal communication, May 29, 2004.

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