Workplace Policies and Practices to Support Work and Families:
Gaps in Implementation and Linkages to Individual and Organizational Effectiveness

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The employees who comprise the U.S. workforce of the 21st century are dramatically different from the last century (Ozeki, 2003). Dual-earner families are the modal American family (Barnett, 2001) and women make up nearly half of the U.S. workforce (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998). Dependent caregiving burdens for working employees are only likely to increase in the next few decades. Half of all children will live in a single parent headed household (often female) at some point before they are 18 years old. Individuals over 65 are one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population, making the need for working relative caregivers likely to rise significantly (Kossek, Colquitt & Noe, 2001). Many individuals are working into their late sixties and seventies, either delaying retirement or working part time in a second career as opposed to an up and out thirty-year career (Moen, 2003); and consequently managing care related to aging for self or family while employed.

Although growing numbers of employees have family and other life demands that influence their ability to join and fully contribute to work organizations, a critical societal problem is the rise of a structural mismatch between labor force characteristics and employers’ work force demands. “Structural mismatch” refers to the incongruence between the design of job demands and organizational career systems and members of the labor force’s needs to have flexibility and support to enable regular participation in caregiving roles. The ideal worker historically has been one who is rarely absent from or late to work, and does not let family responsibilities encumber their hours on and commitment to the job (Williams, 1999). Many employers simply do not see work-family support as a legitimate mainstream human resource issue of critical concern; but rather a fringe benefit that is 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 nature of the work force is not unlike the initial response of many employers in the 1960s to affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. Also, with slowing GNP growth and increasing global market pressures, employers don’t perceive they have the urgency, expertise, or resources to act (Kossek et al., 1994).
In order to encourage employers to improve implementation of formal and informal supports for employee’s family demands, this chapter was designed to address the following questions. They are: “What can employers do in terms of workplace policies and practices to assist workers in managing their multiple demands?” and “How is the organization affected when employees have multiple competing demands?” As the literature review below shows, more research is needed to fully answer these questions as the work-family policy field is evolving in methodology and focus. I discuss trends and identify gaps to be addressed by future research.

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 other significant family demands, are designed to help organizations address the structural mismatch between the design of job and career systems and the labor’s force’s growing dependent caregiving demands. These policies are theoretically of increasing importance to the employment relationship affecting recruitment and retention (Ryan and Kossek, 2003), individual and group performance (Van Dyne & Kossek, 2003), and high commitment (Osterman, 1995). Consequently, over the past few decades, work-family policies have proliferated as a means to attract and retain employees (Kossek and Ozeki, 1999). Although employers often initially define work-family integration as a parenting and dependent care issue, over time in many firms there is a broadening of policies and practices to support participation in additional life roles such as community, elder care, teen supervision, personal health care, those related to personal values (e.g. political, religious), military service, domestic chores, or exercise. This trend shows growing recognition of the need to support not only those with visible family needs (e.g., child care), but all employees at many life stages who may experience work life stresses regardless of family status.

In practice, there has been limited systematic evaluation of policy effectiveness by employers let alone linkage to business and human resource strategy. Employer interventions to help employees manage work and family are a form of workforce diversity management, and
Unfortunately, many organizations have adopted diversity interventions without effectively monitoring them except very superficially (Comer and Soliman, 1996). Also, it is sometimes difficult to show clear relationships between the adoption of work-family practices and productivity due to a time lag effect, as it sometimes may take years for the effects of human resource practices to show up on the bottom line (Huselid & Becker, 1996). Personal use of work life policies may help individuals but also have group and organizational consequences such as increased needs for coordination or cross-training that are sometimes difficult to disentangle (Van Dyne & Kossek, 2003). Further, to successfully make major organizational change to support work-life integration for workers with heavy caregiving demands would require transformation in the assumptions and design of work about the priority of work and family roles (Bailyn 1993). Right now most jobs are designed without consideration of family needs. Workers are expected to reconfigure their family lives around work. The bottom line is many jobs at all ends of the pay scale do not easily allow for work-life balance (Business Week, 2002).

The field of scholarship on work-family policies also offers many opportunities for future research. Reflecting practice, there has been evolution to broaden the research focus to include not only work-family policies but also those related to work-life integration. However, far more research has been published in top journals on policies to support the integration of the child care role with work, than on other family or life roles or the use of multiple policies at the same time (e.g., elder & child care), and as the review will show there are significant gaps in existing research. While demographic shifts and the intensification of nonwork demands 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 thirty articles reporting the statistical effects of policies on standard work outcomes such as absenteeism and job satisfaction (Ozeki, 2003). While thirty is not in and of
itself necessarily a paltry number, the quality of the methodology of these studies varied widely—
many used skewed samples or only cross-sectional self-report data, and most did not use common
measures allowing for easier generalizability. This variation makes it possible for some writers
such as Thompson et al., (see Chapter 2.3, this volume) to highlight many studies showing
positive impacts, while other writers (such as in this chapter) note equivocality in the literature.
Yet both writers can be equally accurate in their reflections depending on which studies are
accentuated and the methodological lense used. The work family policy field can be organized
into several steams: an adoption stream, a demographic stream, and a policy impact stream.

**Policy adoption and availability.** The policy adoption stream examines what employer
characteristics predict adoption and responsiveness to employees’ work-life integration needs. In
order to be able to begin to help employees, work-life policies need to be available, however there
are several limitations of this stream. Data on policy adoption is focused at the organizational
level of analysis, despite the fact that the use of many policies is left up to supervisor discretion
and the needs of the business. Consequently, there can be wide variation in a single firm in the
adoption of policies across business units and employee groups. As the data will show below,
some policies are only available to employees in certain types of jobs and levels, or have a
minimum tenure requirement- as often do, for example, leaves of absence or health care benefits.
Such access rules may make many work-family policies essentially unavailable to many
employees, particularly at the lower level, despite their high face value to enhance a firm’s public
relations stance. Even the publicly mandated Family and Medical Leave Act, which was passed
in 1993 and requires employers provide leave for new parents as well as leave to care for an ill
family member or one’s own illness, has much higher availability to full time than part time work
because there is a requisite number of hours to work in the past year (Ferber & Waldfogel, 2000).

In summary, current adoption research (and the media) may have overstated the
availability of policies as much of the research published in journals in management and the
social sciences involves larger employers who are most likely to give research access. Popular
press reports in *Working Mother* and *Business Week* also tend to favor large employers as well as surveys by the American Work Life Professional Association (AWLP), which tends to have membership by the largest employers who have a person with formal responsibility for work and family policies ([www.awlp.org](http://www.awlp.org)). Below I share results from two different surveys to illustrate the wide variation in survey data on the purported availability of work-life policies.

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

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Table 1 shows results from two waves of an AWLP survey of policy adoption in 1999 and 2001 to give an indication of the prevalence and the range of policies available reported in surveys. The most commonly adopted policies reported by three-fourths of the organizations were employee assistance plans (where employees can get mental health counseling and other services such as substance abuse rehabilitation) and flexible schedules. Paid paternity leave and concierge services, providing assistance with personal domestic chores (e.g. dry cleaning, errands), were the least common policies. A caveat of surveys like those conducted by AWLP, is since many policies such as flexible schedules, are enacted at the work group level by supervisors, there is no reliable way to understand the actual use of these policies across an organization from these data.

Another gap requiring further attention in the policy adoption stream is that available policies frequently go unused by employees due to lack of publicity or cultural barriers preventing use (Eaton, 2003). As an example, new in 2001, AWLP required survey respondents to report whether over three-fourths of their employees use at least one work-life program. This reporting requirement showed lower use levels. In only 26% of government agencies did over ¾ of the workers use at least one work-family program. This figure dropped to only 15% of corporations have use of a work-life policy by three-fourths of the workforce and to 13% for
service providers. Thus, use levels are much lower than 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 is probably found in the Bureau of Labor Statistics National Compensation Survey (2000), which includes questions on work life benefits. While 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 shows the availability of work life benefits to be very low; and more prevalent in the service industry and for professional jobs. According to BLS survey data summarized in Table 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 on-site child care, and 1% provided off-site child care. Five percent of employers provided adoption assistance. Seven percent provided long-term care insurance. Five percent provided flexible work place schedules.

**Policy variation by industry and job groups.** In 2000, the BLS Compensation survey shows 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 provide adoption assistance than goods-producing private employers. The BLS survey shows access to policies varies widely by employee group making firm level adoption data suspect as being a 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 more likely than blue collar and service employees to receive child care assistance. Professional and technical employees were 2.5 times more likely than clerical and sales employees, and six times more likely than blue collar and service employees to receive adoption assistance. Professional and technical employees were twice as likely as clerical and sales employees, and 3.5 times more likely than blue collar and service employees to receive long-term care insurance. Professional and technical employees were three times more likely than clerical and sales employees, and twelve times more likely than blue collar and service employees to have access to request flexible
schedules. Union employees were twice as likely to have access to employer child care assistance than nonunion employees.

Most of the scholarly research does not reflect this within firm variation in practice. Notwithstanding this, several papers offer additional insight into organizational characteristics predicting adoption. Goodstein’s (1995) study on the adoption of elder care shows that regardless of industry or organizational size, employers are more likely to adopt policies if they have a greater proportion of female employees, and involvement 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 was consistent with Morgan and Milliken (1993) is an employer perception that broadening employees’ work-family options would have a significant impact on productivity (Goodstein, 1994). The productivity perceptual link was echoed in Osterman’s 1995 study showing that firms with high commitment work systems were more likely to adopt work-family programs.

**Demographic research stream.** The second research stream, the demographic research stream, identified 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 (e.g., women are more likely to prefer or use part time work policies or parental leaves than men) (cf Grover & Crooker, 1995; Kossek, 1990). One problem with these studies is that they use demographics such as an employee’s number of children or elders or being female as proxies for work-family conflict, but until recently, rarely measured whether using policies actually 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 literatures does not contain much consideration of 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 (chapter 2.2 this volume) refer to the notion of compensating differentials - the approach of some employers to focus resources on benefits attractive to particular groups (e.g., working parents’ interest in health care or flexibility), and less into compensation related to direct wages. Future work needs to not only measure demographics but also assess how these relate to the employee’s actual level of involvement with caregiving, identification with work and family roles, the allocation of care demands across the family unit, and whether firms are allocating financial resources to the policies that are the most beneficial to employees with caregiving demands and actually reduce conflict and stress.

**Policy impact stream.** The policy impact stream examines how policy use predicts employee attitudes and behaviors (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999). These studies tend to use two main methodological approaches. The most common approach was to use same source cross-sectional data to assess relationships between 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 policy availability will 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 type of approach uses pre-and post measures (but not often control groups) to assess change and employee attitudes and behaviors as a result of the introduction of a single policy (Kossek and Ozeki, 1999). Given these methodological limitations, it is not surprising policy impact research shows mixed results that seem to vary widely according to the employee samples, policy type, and outcomes assessed. Some research has found a positive relationship between the presence or use of formal policies and loyalty (Roehling et al., 2001), individual performance and extra-role behavior (Lambert, 2000), turnover intentions (Rothausen, 1994), absenteeism (Dalton & Mesch, 1990), commitment (Grover and Crooker, 1995), and organizational productivity Konrad & Mangel (2000) and performance (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). Yet just as many studies show 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 actually reported missing more days of work for
care than nonusers; yet 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 Culihan,
(1998) found no difference in work family conflict experienced by IBM professionals who were
required to work under a “virtual office plan” that reduced office space while giving them
electronic supports to work from anywhere (often at home), compared to those who worked in
traditional office locations.

Examples of null effect studies (possibly because of the lack of consideration of the time
lag effect of using policies) come from two quasi-experimental studies. One well designed study
comparing different types of flexibility, the introduction of a 4 day 40 hour work week with
flextime, found that neither was statistically significantly related to organizational effectiveness
(Dunham, Pierce & Casteneda, 1987). Another quasi-experimental study by Kossek and Nichol
(1992) compared behaviors and attitudes of employees using an on-site 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, as
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. Employee
perceptions and behaviors were collected separately from outcome performance measures which
were collected from supervisors and company archives. Kossek and Nichol (1992) found no
relationship between center use and supervisor measures of performance or absenteeism.

Lambert (2000)’s 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 her findings now or in a multiple firm study.

**NEW EMERGING THEMES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

For the remainder of the paper, I will discuss new emerging themes that are promising for future research. These relate to policy enactment, type, 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 linkage to HR strategy; and legitimization and engagement.

**Policy enactment, type, & employment-decision-making.** Ryan and Kossek (2003) argue the literature on employer policies to support work life integration is somewhat simplistic, in that many studies do not effectively differentiate between policy type nor how the way in which these policies are enacted may have a differential influence at various stages in career and employment decision-making. They believe a critical gap is that theoretical distinctions usually have not been made in how work-life policies have been implemented. With exception of work by Perry-Smith & Blum (2000) and Eaton (2003), the literature has largely been silent on whether variation in the way work-life policies have been enacted (e.g., whether they are universally open to all, whether they are linked to human resource strategy) matters for how they are accepted, and used.

Work-life policies may vary across and within organizations in how employees experience them, depending on how they 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 have reduced workload arrangements. However, in one firm this is not available 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-timers throughout the organization in all sectors and at all levels. Note that it is not the on-paper policy description that is key, but how employees perceive the policy’s implementation—the way the policy is viewed as practiced in
one’s immediate work environment. In addition, individual differences do matter— for example, not all working women are alike— yet gross generalizations persist in the literature.

Ryan and Kossek (2003) identify five policy attributes—universalism, bundling, cultural integration, negotiability and boundary blurring—as being particularly 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 toward considering the social enactment or functioning of policies. *Universalism* refers to whether policies are available for everyone in all levels and jobs, in contrast to availability limited to specific employee groups (e.g., partners but not associates; managers and professionals but not clerical workers) or geographic locations (e.g., corporate headquarters but not at the plants). *Work-life bundling* is the degree to which work-life policies have been communicated as being part of an organizational strategy of seeking to be perceived as an “employer of choice,” that is, an employer who 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). *Negotiability* reflects the degree to which whether and how an individual uses 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 HR transaction. For others, such as the ability to work at home one day a week, a supervisor or the Human Resources department must approve use. Thus, whether and how the policy is invoked involves some negotiations. Growing evidence suggests variation in the enactment of negotiable work-life policies, as the preferences of supervisors and employees regarding how to manage work-family roles are likely to differ (Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999). *Boundary blurring*, the fourth attribute reflects that work-life policies vary on a continuum in the degree to which they encourage individual and organizational boundary overlap and mixing and
blurring of work and nonwork roles (Kossek et al., 1999). Some policies are designed and implemented to support high separation or segmentation between work and nonwork roles. For example, emergency well child care (to hire back up care when a sitter doesn’t show up or a child is sick) are 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 be able to mesh family roles.

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) contends that a unitary approach to organizational culture may be too simplistic, as organizations often have multiple cultures. Palthe and Kossek (2003) note that subcultures may be particularly critical for 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 on the work group level where typically enacted.

Ryan and Kossek (2003) believe work-life policies and their enactment may play a different role at stages in the employment relationship, such as applicant recruitment compared to incumbent retention. Although it is a popular maxim that work life policies affect “recruitment and retention,” limited research has measured well whether and how these policies really do shape turnover and attraction and whether they have similar processes for each employment and career stage. In regards to recruitment compared to retention, 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 of membership. A Business Week (2002) report on high achieving women highlights the mismatch in their work-life needs that changed from when they first graduated from Harvard Business School and when they had children. Although work life balance issues were less of a concern when they first joined their firms, eventually nearly all quit their firms because demanding nature of their high-powered jobs and the norms around 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, 2005). They simply feel they have too much to do in too little time. Along a similar vein, some research in Europe is on the issue of work intensification- hours may be legally reduced in some countries but workers simply feel that they have to do the same full time job in the reduced working time (Berg, 2003). Work intensification is also cased by declining staffing levels that increase current employees workloads and the pace of work. These trends coupled with the inability for many employees to manage family needs for flexibility during work hours all contribute to rising stress. There is also a family intensification occurring for dual earner or single parent working families, as many are managing 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 class levels and must be examined in order for policies to be effective. Interventions to enable new coping strategies to be developed and to redesign work and norms especially in high commitment workplaces merit future study.

Since many employees now juggle multiple and intensified life roles and it is important to society to have employees who not only care for families but participate in other domains (e.g., elder care, exercise etc.), future research also should examine multiple policy use by employees both cross-sectionally and longitudinally as employees often juggles many life roles at one time and shift needs for organizational support over the life course. More studies using improved methodologies such 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 stream.

**Managing borders between work and home.** We’ve been living in a world of work that has increased blurring of boundaries between work and home. For approximately 15% of the
workforce, there has been a fundamental growing transformation in how some white collar 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 can be enacted 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Not only are companies contributing this trend by having work emailed to employees overnight that demands a timely response, but some employees desire to have 24-7 flexibility to better mesh work and personal life (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton 2005).

The work-family literature often assumes that flexibility in time and place has mostly positive outcomes for the worker: that it enables workers to “have it all-“ excel at both work and family (Kossek et al, 2005). Greater integration between work and family/personal roles repeatedly is seen as a way to balance work and family life and even to use one to catalyze positive effects in the other (Friedman, Christensen, and DeGroot, 1998). Yet there may be times when setting boundaries between work and home and structure may be desirable. A gap that the literature has under-examined is what kinds of flexibility lead to higher quality of life. Research has also understudied the fact that many white collar workers (especially professionals) have increased access to informal flexibility in terms of how job designed instead or in addition to some HR mediated policy. That is, some employees have increased access to autonomy and ability to control the timing and location of their jobs, not due to use of a formal HR policy (often over-emphasized in the literature), but because of the way their jobs are designed. More research is needed on how employees enact boundaries as a linking mechanism between work and family and how the ability to control where and when one works affects life effectiveness. 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 need increased understanding of the enabling roles of job design and policies in supporting employee preferences for and outcomes of personal job autonomy (i.e., flexibility in here 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 such as alternative work arrangements is a supportive boss, but few studies have really focused predominantly 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, and this norm has become a part of many organization’s cultures; 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 of policy use such as different types of alternative work arrangements (e.g., flextime, part time work, telework) on work groups 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 for standard operating procedures are left to individual managers or groups. Cross-level research is needed that looks at the group performance consequences of individual flexibility for coordination and motivation within work groups and to identify effective ways for managers to manage flexibility within work groups and still meet client needs is needed in future research.

The demography of the work group and the nature of the client served also need to be investigated further in terms of individual access to use flexible policies (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999). These studies showed that although being female and having young children were predictors of use at the individual level of analysis, use also depended upon 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 the surprising finding that while 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, flexibility policy use. It seems flexibility is being allocated in work groups as a fixed and scare resource.

**Program structure and linkage to HR strategy.** One barrier to the effective implementation of work–life policies is that they are often not well linked to the human resource strategies or business objectives. Work-life policies are often not yet seen in many firms as central to the overarching human resource strategy. There is also little linkage between work-life policies and the other HR policies. Career development and training opportunities are sometimes lacking for those with heavy family responsibilities or who work reduced load (for background on reduced load see: [http://flex-work.lir.msu.edu/](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 work life.

More research is needed on the structure and formality of work life strategies and factors determining linkage to human resource and business strategies. There is increasing variation in where the individual responsible for work and family policy is located in employing organizations, and how program structure links to effectiveness. In most firms, the work life policy is located in the human resource management function. However, the reporting relationship and whether work life is a separate entity increasingly varies, as some work-life professionals feel their policies will have greater long-term acceptance if they are not a separate unit. So while some employers have a separate work and family or work-life department, in other firms, work life is part of the work force 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. Others believe making work family policy part of the diversity agenda will have
greater line management acceptance as 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 seen as a critical management concern, will increase effectiveness.
However, if it is buried in another unit, there is a risk that the work life agenda will never be
viewed as a legitimate business issue in it own right.

Organizations vary in their philosophy regarding work life integration strategy. Some
employers, for example, do not have a very active work life department. They prefer to
“empower” employee to manage their own work life needs (respecting privacy) rather than
interfere in the employees’ lives. Others are more actively involved in work life issues, but this
tends to be due less to formal policies than to CEO and top management cultural commitment to
supporting work-life integration. For example, Starbucks is a good example of this as the CEO
has a strong philosophy that employees should have work life balance and provides full benefits
for part time workers, yet the informality of Starbucks shows that a firm can sometimes be very
effective in being family friendly without having a lot of bureaucratic policies. What does seem
important is true access. In some companies, mandates are given that a certain percentage of
employees must have access to flexible working arrangements. More research is needed on best
practices at companies of all sizes and how these practices are linked to the way work is done and
the systems of managing employees are conducted.

Legitimization and engagement. Cross-cultural research shows us that work is defined
and experienced very differently across societies; organizational and societal structures construct
what individuals and families perceive as possible for work-life integration. Unlike some other
Western countries, in the U.S. work life integration issues are still largely seen as an individual
problem more than a business or a societal problem. One study that looked at how organizations
overcome resistance to adoption of work life policies found employer discourse or language of
resistance to involvement to be very similar to early resistance to involvement in the Internet
Like the Internet in the early years, employers see work life issues as not related to their core business and something they don’t have much expertise on. Study of how to overcome employer resistance against active involvement in work life integration to rectify the labor market mismatch is needed. Future research should examine how to promote increased employer recognition of support for work-life balance and effective policy use as an employer responsibility and a mainstream employment issue.

While is it important to have research showing productivity linkages or the “business case” for employer support of work-life integration, which is often suggested as one way to promote increased employer involvement, there are caveats to overemphasis on the business case (i.e., showing the economic cost-benefit analysis of policies). The business case overemphasizes on one stakeholder, the shareholder over all over 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 look at 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 take a look at the goals of the policy or policies or practices and assess whether these goals were met.

A stakeholder approach must confront economic issues. If research can show that family-friendly policies raise productivity, there is no societal tradeoff and everyone might gain from using such policies. Yet on the other hand, if family friendly policies cost money without raising productivity then someone will bear the costs—such as nonusers in the firm. It may be companies will only invest enough resources to be able to attract financial investors. There remains, however, the possibility that innovation in work family policies may increase productivity, which is an avenue policymakers should promote.
Besides focusing on productivity, some employers believe it may be even 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 and 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.

REFERENCES

Alliance of Work/Life Professionals  http://www.awlp.org/Surveyreport.pdf


_____. 2002, Nov. 25. Mommy is really home from work, Business Week, 101-104.


http://flex-work.lir.msu.edu/


Table 1
Summary of Alliance of Work Life Professionals Surveys on Employer Adoption of Work Life Policies By Program Type and Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Availability (%)</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EAP Services</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible Schedules</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care referrals</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder care referrals</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition assistance</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/family seminars</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness program</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommuting</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid maternity leave</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical services</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-site child care</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back-up child care</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care subsidy</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid family leave</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concierge services</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid paternity leave</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(financial, personal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assistance, education)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of 2001 respondents reporting that over three-quarters of their employees use at least one work-life program

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government agencies</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporations</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants &amp; Service Providers</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other organizations</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Alliance of Work/Life Professionals  http://www.awlp.org/Surveyreport.pdf
Table 2: Percent of workers with access to selected work-family benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worker characteristics</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer provided funds</th>
<th>On-site child care</th>
<th>Off-site child care</th>
<th>Adoption assistance</th>
<th>Long-term care insurance</th>
<th>Flexible workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, technical &amp; related</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical &amp; sales</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue collar &amp; service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonunion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goods-producing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-producing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-99 workers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 workers or more</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>