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Work–life initiatives and organizational change: Overcoming mixed messages to move from the margin to the mainstream

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Ellen Ernst Kossek

Michigan State University, USA

Suzan Lewis

Middlesex University Business School, UK

Leslie B Hammer

Portland State University, USA

Abstract

This article examines perspectives on employer work–life initiatives as potential organizational change phenomena. Work–life initiatives address two main organizational challenges: structural (flexible job design, human resource policies) and cultural (supportive supervisors, climate) factors. While work–life initiatives serve a purpose in highlighting the need for organizational adaptation to changing relationships between work, family, and personal life, we argue they usually are marginalized rather than mainstreamed into organizational systems. We note mixed consequences of work–life initiatives for individuals and organizations. While they may enable employees to manage work and caregiving, they can increase work intensification and perpetuate stereotypes of ideal workers. In order to advance the field, organizations and scholars need to frame both structural and cultural work–life changes as part of the core employment systems to enhance organizational effectiveness and not just as strategies to support disadvantaged, non-ideal workers. We conclude with an overview of the articles in this special issue.

Keywords

flexibility, mainstreaming, organizational change, work–family, work–family conflict, work–life

Corresponding author:

Ellen Ernst Kossek, Center for Work-Family Stress, Safety, & Health, 433 South Kedzie Hall, School of Labor & Industrial Relations, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824–1032, USA.

Email: kossek@msu.edu

Growing organizational resources are being devoted in many contexts to 'work-life initiatives' that aim to adapt employment settings to the workforce's changing work-life needs, and to respond to government regulations for fostering labor force gender integration and protecting working families. Although concepts such as 'work-family policies' and 'employer work-life supports' are increasingly part of everyday discourse in employing organizations and in most industrialized societies (Kossek and Friede, 2006; Lewis et al., 2007), they are complex, ambiguous in meaning, and evolving in practice, rationales, and cultural acceptance.

The goal of this special issue is to advance our understanding of the impact of work-life initiatives designed to foster workplace structures and cultures that are supportive of the interface between work, family, and personal life. Work-life initiatives ideally are based on rationales of jointly benefiting the well-being and effectiveness of employers, and employees on and off the job, including their families. We argue that despite increasing practitioner and scholarly attention, significant gaps remain between the promise of work-life initiatives and their reality. Much remains to be done to foster increased mainstreaming of work-life initiatives as 'core' human resource and management prerogatives.

In this article, we provide an overview and definitions of the main types of work-life practices, and rationales supporting fuller implementation. We briefly consider the history and current context and assess gaps that remain between the promise of these initiatives and their mainstreaming into systemic organizational change. We discuss what needs to happen next to support broader integration of work-life initiatives and overcome mixed messages. We then introduce the six articles in this special issue and draw on this introduction to demonstrate the meaning and location of the authors' contributions.

Work-life initiatives as organizational structural and cultural support

Definition

Work-life policies and practices are geared to enhance organizational structural and cultural/relational support for work, family and personal life. *Structural work-life support* alters human resource policies and practices and job structures to enhance flexibility to increase worker control over the location, place or amount of work, or provide additional instrumental resources such as information and direct services to enable individuals to be able to combine employment with caregiving or other important non-work roles. Examples of structural support include job redesign to enable flexible work schedules, teleworking and virtual arrangements, reduced workloads or other non-traditional work arrangements; occupational safety and health initiatives to reduce job and family stress; formal policies on absenteeism, vacations, and sick time that support work-life needs; and enhanced childcare and eldercare benefits (vouchers, care assistance).

Cultural work-life support is defined as informal workplace social and relational support, for example, from supervisors and co-workers together with organizational cultural norms that increase an individual's perceptions that employees who are jointly involved in work and family roles are fully valued. Examples might include change efforts such as training to increase social support of supervisors and co-workers for employees' non-work

demands, and foster positive group and organizational norms (see Hammer et al., 2009a; Kossek and Hammer, 2008). Cultural support operates at two interactive levels: the work group level, where one receives relational support from managers or co-workers; and the organizational level where resources and overarching cultural values and norms are engendered. The integration of these systems within an organization is critical in moving work-life supports into the mainstream of organizational functioning.

Cultural and relational support is proving to be a critical factor influencing whether or not workers make use of work-life policies (Allen, 2001). Informal supervisor support for family is a critical determinant in whether or not workers have access to formal work-life policies (Hammer et al., 2009b). Cultural supports also include culture change initiatives that support the legitimacy of 'good employees' being seen as dually involved in caregiving and other non-work roles while sustaining employment and pursuing a career. Support can also include enabling one to slow down a career for non-work needs, such as reducing hours, taking a job leave, or allowing opportunities to re-enter the workforce without a career penalty.

Such cultural changes challenge the hegemony of the ideal worker who is expected to place the work role ahead of the family or personal life role at all times (Rapoport et al., 2002). The ideal worker myth is deeply rooted in historical workplace norms based on the 'myth of separate worlds' referring to employment settings that were enacted and designed as if workers did not have families competing for time and identities during working hours (Kanter, 1977). Even when work-family policies are well established, workplace norms based on the idea of ideal workers who always place work ahead of family can undermine their utility in supporting the dual agenda of workplace effectiveness and gender equitable work-life integration (Rapoport et al., 2002; Holt and Lewis, in press). Research suggests perceptions of ideal workers can serve to perpetuate gender stereotyping that differentially affects men and women professionals where female professionals are perceived as less flexible and rated lower in performance than male colleagues who reported similar involvement in work and family roles (King, 2008).

We argue that organizational change efforts are most likely to be effective when structural and cultural supports are integrated and linked in the organizational social system. Yet the streams of research on structural and cultural supports are not well integrated. Without enhanced cultural integration, work-life initiatives risk becoming bureaucratic structures, lacking mainstreaming into complex employment systems. Rather they risk remaining being viewed as privileged accommodations for those who take up entitlements with stigmatization for doing so (Holt and Lewis, in press). When use is not seen as normalized as a core workplace practice, work-life initiatives have the unintended consequences of promoting in- and out-group dynamics, as managers differentially manage work-life issues for users and non-users (Lautsch et al., 2009).

Shifting social meanings of work-life initiatives in industrialized societies

One challenge with work-life initiatives taking hold in companies is that their social meaning shifts over time in industrialized settings. In the US, the work-life field began in the late 1970s when Americans were exhibiting increased mental and physical strain based on limited job autonomy and lack of support for overall quality of life (O'Toole,

1974). Studies assessed *quality of life* questions: 'what is the nature of the job design, physically, intellectually and socially, and how does this affect individual and family well-being?' (Kossek, 2006).

Work-life initiatives also have connotations as practices to support *equal employment opportunity*, with their emergence and diffusion to help employers adapt to Civil Rights legislation passed in the 1960s (Civil Right Act) and 1970s (Pregnancy Discrimination Act) in response to dramatic shifts in labor force gender demography. Age discrimination legislation passed in the 1970s not only increased the number of older workers in the labor force today but resulted in about one third of the workforce juggling eldercare with 15 percent of these being 'sandwiched' – caring for elders and children simultaneously (Kossek, 2006; Neal and Hammer, 2006). Overall, equal employment legislation indirectly helped employers to begin to socially accept the idea that growing numbers of employees (mostly women) would also be actively juggling caregiving.

In the 1980s, the term '*work-family policies*' spread in the popular culture referring to dependent care supports focusing on workers with the most visible non-work demands – those caring for children. Companies began building on-site childcare centers and some even added lactation stations. Subsequently, eldercare supports such as information and referral also arose. Flextime and alternative work arrangements to be used for family reasons became more accepted as they were seen as a way to help individuals 'integrate' work and family after being forced to 'separate' work from family at the corporate workplace for so many decades. Yet cultural backlash began to grow against users of work-family supports at this time, making one question whether work-family policies were more effective in a serving public relations role for recruitment than in being actually 'usable' without jeopardy (Eaton, 2003).

In order to ease tensions between work-family policy users, whose lower face time at work was seen as a sign of lower commitment to careers, many large US employers began to switch the names of their '*work-family*' policies to be labeled '*work-life*' policies, to indicate that all employees have a need to be supported for a life outside of work. Given the way in which the language on work-life policies has evolved, there is no wonder that there is still social conflict and complexity related to their implementation.

One should note that the US case, while instructive of employer evolution in organizational change across industrialized societies, is not necessarily typical. The approach is bounded in the individualistic nature of US national culture. In liberal economies, such as in the US, the role of government in regulating employers is minimal with greater reliance on market forces (Kossek, 2006). The US provides the least government support for working families of all industrialized nations, which is in sharp contrast to the design of other welfare state models of work-life support (Esping-Anderson, 1996). Other nations around the globe from the EU to Latin America provide considerably more public support (leaves, public childcare). Consequently there has been greater focus in the US than elsewhere on employer-driven work-life initiatives, particularly those adopted by large companies to support skilled professionals and higher level managers. Some scholars question whether these supports trickle down to help lower level workers, citing organizational stratification of work-life policies usability (Lambert and Waxman, 2005). In sum, perhaps due to lack of federal level support, there has been greater focus in the US culture on employer driven work-life initiatives, as compared with other countries.

Divergent histories of work–life initiatives, converging contemporary experiences

Turning to Europe, the Nordic countries are best known for their progressive state policies and regulation to enhance gender equity in the workplace and the home, so there is often less emphasis on voluntary employer initiatives (Kamerman and Moss, 2009), although many companies do implement flexible working arrangements (Allard et al., 2007). Moreover the European Union, through its Directives, sets minimum standards for all members in relation to, for example, parental leaves and equal rights and conditions for part-time workers. Thus, context matters and the trajectories of work–life initiatives have developed in different ways in different cultures. Nevertheless, these differences are increasingly countervailed by common trends and growing interconnectedness of economic and social systems.

With the world population aging, and increased numbers of women in the workforce, around the globe, there has been a dramatic rise of dual-earner couples and single parents in multigenerational households that impact the support needs and expectations of many workers (including men as well) regarding what work–life supports individuals need from organizations. For example, in the US, today nearly 78 percent of women with children under 18 are working at least part-time, 40 percent of all US managers and professionals are women, and 80 percent of two-parent families with a child under 18 years are dual earner (Bond et al., 2002).

Heightened global competition has resulted in changes in the nature of work such as the intensification of work and the blurring of work-non-work boundaries (Kossek and Lautsch, 2008; Lewis et al., 2009). Also, the flattening of the world platform systems for delivering services and manufacturing of goods and the growing interdependence of economic systems have also contributed to the converging trends of work intensification, 24–7 operations, and blurring work–home boundaries for many jobs.

Within the firm, employers have attempted to mainstream work–life issues due to a variety of overlapping management perspectives (Kossek and Friede, 2006). Most employers first adopt work–life policies to comply with *government regulation*. Legislation provides a necessary floor of protection for all workers. While legislation can sometimes enhance employee sense of entitlement to additional employer support (Lewis and Smithson, 2001), in other contexts notably in Eastern Europe, state provisions can sometimes lower expectations of additional organizational supports (Kovachev, 2009). Moreover since government policies are implemented at the employer level, it can be difficult to legislate workplace culture change, although new right to request flexible working legislation arising in the UK and Australia is attempting to do so.

When social policy perspectives are insufficient, *business case*, *employer of choice* or *engagement* arguments arise to promote mainstreaming. A prevailing argument is that as the workforce is becoming increasingly diverse, employers who are able to adapt to these demographic shifts can realize a higher quality workforce, which enhances organizational performance by adding value to the firm thereby enhancing competitive advantage (Kossek and Friede, 2006). Cost savings also ensue from having lower turnover and higher discretionary performance, particularly when bundled with other human resource practices, such as high commitment or high performance work systems (Berg et al., 2003).

Employee engagement perspectives arise based on the notion that work–life initiatives reduce stress, and increase personal and team resilience. This enables employees to cope with growing pressures from fast-paced environmental change in ways that are sustainable for their well-being and enhance the organization's performance (Ollier-Mallatere, 2010, this issue). Both the high performance and the engagement views are grounded in assumptions of beneficial effects from integrating work–life initiatives with internal organizational or external environmental systems, which further illustrates the value of bringing them into the mainstream.

Emerging challenges and opportunities

There are many other examples of ways in which the world has evolved since work–life initiatives first emerged, requiring organizations to further mainstream work–life initiatives to respond to new societal changes ranging from economic to technological to health to environmental.

The global recession of 2008/09 illustrated the interconnectedness of economic systems, resulting in new work–life demands. Many countries around the world experienced massive unemployment for thousands of laid-off workers. At the same time, in some regions higher over-employment occurred with dramatically rising workloads of those employees holding onto their jobs working in chronically understaffed organizations. Can the meaning of work–life initiatives evolve to support overwork and underemployment simultaneously, to support organizations and families in difficult times? Offshoring of jobs from industrialized countries also increased as employers tried to cut labor costs, exacerbating work–life issues in developing countries or transitional economies (Gambles et al., 2006).

With changing technology making it possible to work 24–7, rather than work–life initiatives to support integration, some employees need work–life support to help them learn to separate boundaries between work and family. Organizations must learn to be able to support a variety of 'flexstyles' as a diversity attribute of the varied preferences and needs workers have regarding the degree of desired blending of work and family roles throughout the workday or week (Kossek and Lautsch, 2008). More individuals want to work in different ways across generations, lifestyle, and family configurations. Employers need to adapt to view work–life preferences for integration and separation as a new form of workforce diversity.

Epidemics increase employer and employee needs to mainstream flexible work–life supports. For example, the impact of HIV/AIDs has depleted workforces and increased the number of employed caregivers who need support in South Africa. Recently in the UK with fears about the spread of swine flu, employees are being advised not to struggle into work and infect other people and employers advised to encourage people to work more from home (see [www.computing.co.uk/computing/news/2246852/bma-swine-flu-business]). Those employers with virtual work initiatives in place will be better placed to sustain performance through an epidemic or other crises such as a terrorist attack. Lastly, global warming, pollution and traffic congestion are environmental trends increasing the need to mainstream teleworking, which can reduce auto pollution and shorten commutes (Kossek and Michel, in press).

Despite these growing societal pressures in support of mainstreaming, it is increasingly apparent that the mere existence of work–life policies alone does not necessarily result in organizational integration. Many employers face difficulty implementing these initiatives into the culture sufficiently to reap the benefits of reduced worker stress, increased retention and recruitment, gender equity and fuller utilization of human resources (Ryan and Kossek, 2008).

Moving work–life initiatives to the mainstream

The emergence of work–life initiatives in many contexts around the globe highlights the need for organizations and societies to adapt in order to better support diversity in family and work role integration needs. While it is increasingly accepted that some employees (mainly though not exclusively women with children) do not wish to or are unable to work traditional less flexible and sometimes excessive work hours and schedules, the myth of the ideal worker, conflated with hegemonic masculinity in work styles lives on (Bailyn, 2006). Indeed, contemporary ways of working in the global economy increase the time greediness of employing organizations (Cosier, 1974; Van Echtelt et al., 2009). These competing trends sustain the mixed messages and implementation gaps between work–life policies and practices, and the marginalization of work–life initiatives.

In sum, many mixed messages and ambiguities remain about the employer role in work–life integration. Until work–life initiatives become more mainstream; a right and not a privilege limited to those individuals most in needs of caregiving assistance, they will continue to be marginalized. At one time it might have been assumed that changes in workplace policy would lead to fundamental changes in practice and ideology but such changes have been, at best, slow and uneven. It is unlikely that work–life initiatives can achieve systemic change without making visible and challenging basic assumptions about the ideal worker who is ‘unencumbered’ by family or other non-work commitments; assumptions that are embedded in taken for granted everyday working practices across many contexts that purport to support the integration of work and family (Holt and Lewis, in press; Lewis and Cooper, 2005; Rapoport et al., 2002).

The next evolutionary phase will be to bring work–life initiatives from the margins where they support those who do not conform to the increasingly outdated ideal worker norm, towards mainstreaming work–life considerations as ongoing business practice. In mainstreaming work–life, organizations and scholars would view this as another core employment practice. Managing work–life issues and ensuring good work–life practice are seen as standard employment operational approaches. If and when this happens perhaps there may no longer be a need for a separate work–life field of study, but work–life would be subsumed under another organizational function such as compensation, career and performance management, and organizational development. This calls for a systems view of organizations (e.g. Katz and Kahn, 1978) where the functions and systems are interrelated and complement one another.

The concept of mainstreaming has been used in a number of social policy debates from gender and diversity to education. For example, it has been argued as a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and practices in all

spheres (United Nations, 1997). In the US, schools employed mainstreaming strategies to integrate children with learning disabilities into regular classrooms. What would mainstreaming work–life mean for scholars and employers? What tensions would be involved and how these tensions be managed for positive outcomes?

For employers, HRM professionals and managers, mainstreaming work–life would involve reflecting on the potential impact of every decision and practice on all employees, as whole people with legitimate lives beyond work, alongside potential impacts on performance and organizational effectiveness, as suggested by systems theory. Dual agenda research, research that aims to advance productivity and gender equity simultaneously, shows that overlooking either employee or organizational perspectives undermines change initiatives and that each should be accorded equal weight for optimal outcomes (Bailyn, 2006; Rapoport et al., 2002).

At an organizational and wider societal level mainstreaming might involve challenging not only the male model of work/ideal employee myth but also the more taboo topic of assumptions that progress is all about ever increasing economic success. For example, studies show that while a certain level of affluence is necessary for well-being, the richest countries are not necessarily the happiest (Layard, 2005). One of the tenets of the European Union is that economic and social progress must go hand in hand. However, this is not easy. Most would agree in principle but employer and individual interests are not always aligned without pain, as stakeholders are often at different starting points.

For scholars, there is a vital role in systematically evaluating not only work–life initiatives but also a range of mainstream policies and practices using a work–life lens. Making the links between work–life integration and other aspects of OB and HRM will also help to situate work–life as crucial to a holistic approach to improving employees and organizations. This will require multidisciplinary approaches to address structural and cultural/relational changes within multiple and dynamic social systems and the relationships between them.

Taking a systems approach to manage transitional systemic tensions

Katz and Kahn (1978) introduce organizational systems theory to help understand the integration of different functions and systems within organizations that are highly interdependent and rely on one another. Applying this concept to the integration of work–life initiatives into the mainstream of organizational functioning is necessary to understand ways to reduce implementation barriers. Work–life initiatives that take a greater systems perspective will be more easily integrated into the organizational structure. Organizational scholars and practitioners who recognize the interdependencies of work–life initiatives within the broader functioning of the organization will lead the success of work–life initiatives for greater uptake in the future.

Systems theorists also argue that to truly understand the underlying causes of a problem or situation, one must understand the context in which it occurs. In systems theory, the context is the relevant environment in which a system occurs, or those outside factors that influence the behavior of the system (Lendaris, 1986). In order for work–life policies to be more integrated into the broader human resource system, organizational context needs

to be considered and promoted. There are ways that work–life programs and policies can enhance organizational functioning from both an individual employee health perspective to a larger organizational effectiveness perspective (see review by Kelly et al., 2008). The failure to consider the broader effects of work–life policies on the organizational context has been a shortcoming and a reason why such policies have not been more integrated into the mainstream of organizational human resource practices.

Social systems change constantly and impact on other systems, so changes affecting work and personal life will happen whether organizations adapt to them or not. Change is often associated with resistance, time lags and transitional tensions, for example, managerial resistance to non-traditional ways of working, and tensions at work and at home about men's involvement in unpaid work and care, or societal ambivalence over the need to support single parents or elder caregivers (often female). But tensions can be productive. They can create learning, such that actors in some social systems adapt and innovate more easily than others. Tension may thus be a sign of progress. For example, in a cross-European study of the transition to parenthood, there was more tension among couples in Norway who were struggling to achieve gender equality as parents, than among those in more traditional societies where a gendered division of domestic labor was taken for granted (Lewis et al., 2009). Recognizing and collaboratively addressing tensions between the perceived needs of some employers and employees in relation to work–life initiatives can therefore be a necessary step towards collaboration to find mutually beneficial solutions. Nevertheless, power imbalances can undermine or prevent processes of productive tension management.

Scholars can help this process along by systematic evaluation of work–life initiatives and by highlighting change processes. However, it is important to clarify what the goals are. Are they short-term gains or longer-term well-being and sustainability of multiple social systems such as organizations as well as families and communities? A short-term quick fix approach has contributed to the marginalization of work–life and is not sustainable. What are the tipping points that might produce a change in perspectives in the way that the changing workforce demographics did in the second half of the 20th century that allowed transformation of workplace diversity? The global recession may be associated with a retrenchment of work–life initiatives but could also challenge taken for granted myths such as that hard work in the sense of long and intensive hours will always be associated with economic success. Future tipping points may include, for example, epidemics and environmental disasters noted above which could make travel to work impossible. Those organizations that are flexible both culturally and structurally are likely to be the most sustainable whatever the future holds.

Current issue focus on the mixed messages of work–life initiatives

The articles selected for this special issue all highlight some of the mixed messages about whom these policies benefit, their legitimacy, and the many questions that remain about how to ensure effective implementation (Lewis et al., 2007; Ryan and Kossek, 2008). The articles in this special issue discuss research carried out in Europe and North America. We know less about work–life initiatives in other regions, especially in developing economies.

While work–life initiatives have become more readily available, all of the contributors identified some aspects of the persistence of considerable cultural ambivalence about how to implement them, and who they must ultimately benefit. Questions are raised such as the feasibility of benefiting different types of workers and organizations at the same time and how to reconcile competing interests between employees and employers. Cross-cutting themes pervading all authors' work are the tensions in implementing work–life initiatives in ways that ultimately truly benefit both employers and employees, and the problem of how to reconcile multiple stakeholder agenda and identify a nexus of common good.

Some strengths of the articles in their totality are their reflection of variety of interdisciplinary perspectives (from psychology to sociology), methods (qualitative and quantitative) and cultural views (critical and appreciative perspectives) that cross disciplinary boundaries on work and family, which is essential to ensure their 'successful' adoption. They also implicitly recognize that views of success can balance stakeholder views and multiple lenses. These are examples of the type of research that is needed for the future.

More importantly, these articles identified problems more than solutions on how to improve the implementation of work–life initiatives. More research is needed on what's working with current policies and practices and how to implement interventions that improve both structural and cultural support simultaneously. None of the articles examined both structural and cultural issues and we suggest that these different types of work–life initiatives are necessarily intertwined. Within each subarea there were gaps as well. Far more research under structural support examined flexible working in terms of alternative work arrangements, with little or no research on basic supports such as time off work for sickness, leaves for caregiving and health, and direct services to help with caregiving or other work–life needs such as time to exercise or engage in preventative care to improve physical and mental health. It is also surprising that we received few submissions on work–life benefits such as childcare and eldercare, which provide additional resources for care and which are critical as long-term care becomes increasingly important with the aging demography of the industrialized countries. In some countries such as the US, increasingly public support for caregiving is especially critical as institutional resources supporting child and eldercare are declining and have not risen substantially in the past decade (Kossek and Distelberg, 2009). The availability of caregiving supports is not enough; it must be of good quality delivered in a stable social system. For example, in some Latin American countries, while there are improving economic opportunities for working mothers and available public care support, concerns over the quality of public childcare and the possibility of street violence make some mothers reluctant to leave their neighborhoods to go to work or put their children in public care (IESE, 2009). Effective caregiving systems are increasing critical for the economic and social development of future generations of workers.

Within cultural support, we found very little research at the supervisory and co-worker level, another gap. There was also very little cross-level research on how relational support at the supervisor or work group level relates to organizational level cultural support and the inter-relationships between these various sources of workplace cultural support (for a review, see Kossek et al., 2007).

Overall, what the articles did do exceptionally well was to highlight the mixed messages of work–life initiatives and the articles fell into two main clusters. One cluster took

a critical perspective on cultural support. These articles identified *cultural problems* in the ways in which these policies are conveyed and *social dilemmas* in implementing work–life initiatives such that the benefits of their take-up outweigh the tradeoffs, particularly from the employee perspective. A second cluster examined problems in implementing *boundary blurring or boundary changing* work–life initiatives such as flextime, teleworking and, e-work, or use of technological tools (cell phones, email, texting), as well as reduced-load work that alters working time boundaries to tilt more towards the non-work domain. These articles examined factors influencing the social construction of the personal benefits of such initiatives despite technology use leading to greater supplemental work, and increased work intensification.

Regarding the first cluster, two articles examined the social meanings of work–life initiatives. In their article, ‘Representations of work–life balance and support’, Samula Mescher, Yvonne Benschop and Hans Doorewaard examine how employers posture to promote their companies as supporters of work–life balance (WLB). The article integrates theory from strategic HRM and feminist studies to provide a critical perspective of the implicit and explicit messages of ‘work–life balance’ support. Text and qualitative analysis of 24 websites showed how work–life issues are communicated to perpetuate images of ideal workers and ideal parents. The study illuminates the unintended effects of the implicit and explicit messages of the websites conveying that work–life balance is a privilege and not an employee right.

Ariane Ollier-Malaterre’s article ‘Contributions of work–life and resilience initiatives to the individual/organization relationship’ compares individual and relational perspectives on work–life research. Drawing on in-depth interviews with US and UK professionals from a multinational pharmaceutical company, she considers the meaning of these initiatives for employees comparing personal up to national identities. She found that while work–life and resilience initiatives foster desirable outcomes such as loyalty, pride and appreciation, they simultaneously promote negative outcomes, such as disappointment, over-obligation to stay with the firm and sometimes just indifference. These data are drawn upon to develop a decision tree to understand employees’ awareness, needs, access and judgment of the initiatives. (See also Bagger et al., 2008, for a discussion of how the salience of family identity moderates family to work interference.)

Four articles examine issues of teleworking, and flexible working in regards to organizational tensions in implementing work–life initiatives in ways that balance employee and employer interests. In their article, ‘Technology-assisted supplemental work and work-to-family conflict: The role of instrumentality beliefs, organizational expectations and time management’, Grant H Fenner and Robert W Renn develop predictors of what they label ‘TASW’: technology-assisted supplemental work. This involves individuals performing work role-prescribed tasks at home after regular work hours with the aid of technological tools such as laptops, cell phones, BlackBerries®, and PDAs. They found that instrumentality beliefs of the perceived usefulness of technology and organizational expectations (psychological climate) were positively related to TASW. Although TASW was positively related to work-to-family conflict; time management (setting goals and priorities) reduced the negative personal impact of TASW.

In their article, ‘Doing more with less? Flexible working practices and the intensification of work’, Clare Kelliher and Deidre Anderson discuss the mixed results from

implementing flexible working practices. They use a UK sample of employees who work reduced hours, different hours and/or working remotely. They found, based on qualitative analysis, that although employees are experiencing work intensification from flexible work practices that are promoted as work–life initiatives, employees were not necessarily negative in their views. The authors argue that employees are trading choice for effort and accept work intensification as a *quid pro quo* to have greater control and access to flexible working arrangements. (See also Mickel and Dallimore, 2009, for another example of how employees make tradeoffs as a strategy to manage work–life tensions in order to improve quality of life.)

In ‘Institutional explanations for managers’ attitudes towards telehomeworking’, Pascale Peters and Stefan Heusinkveld’s central view is that the institutional pressures such as mimetic and normative forces emanating from occupational communities play a central role on managers’ attitude formation towards telehomeworking. Using data from 96 CEOs and 380 HR managers in Dutch organizations, they show that normative and mimetic pressures affect managers’ beliefs, that are reflected in their perceptions of the relative (dis)advantage of telehomeworking. They found variation in managerial beliefs regarding the perceived improvements of work outcomes and perceived social costs/benefits. While CEOs’ beliefs were more susceptible to mimetic pressures, HR managers’ attitudes were more normatively driven. Their study argues that examination of the diffusion and organizational change from work–life initiatives should give greater consideration to institutional environments and managerial subcultures.

In their paper, ‘Moderators of the curvilinear relation between extent of telecommuting and job and life satisfaction: The role of performance outcome orientation and worker type’, Meghna Virick, Nancy DaSilva and Kristi Arrington examine factors that relate to employee satisfaction with telecommuting. Drawing on control theory, they find that the extent of objective performance outcome data used in employee evaluation moderates a curvilinear relation (inverted U) between extent of telecommuting and job satisfaction. They also found a curvilinear relation between extent of telecommuting and life satisfaction, with moderation by worker type (defined by work drive or addiction and work enjoyment). The study suggests that when used excessively or too little telecommuting can lead to less positive outcomes such as lower satisfaction and work engagement.

Future research

There remains a number of gaps in the work–life literature highlighted by this issue. First, we need research integrating cultural and structural perspectives. An example of this is research that aims to simultaneously improve the cultural support and work redesign, with structural support to increase control over work hours and locations in order to improve health and well-being of employees across several industries, workforces (e.g. professionals compared to lower wage workers) and national cultures in order to identify processes for successful implementation across contexts (see National Work, Family, & Health Network, 2009). Such studies would include formal supervisory training to increase family supportive supervisory behaviors that result in increased perceptions of cultural support for worker control over scheduling (see Hammer et al., 2009a; Kossek and Hammer, 2008). This research needs to include multiple outcomes and measures of

effectiveness from multiple disciplines such as medical or biological measures of stress such as blood pressure and cortisol; psychological measures of employee and family well-being, and organizational effectiveness indicators using economic productivity and societal measures (e.g. labor force participation rates).

Second, we also need research integrating critical and positive inquiry perspectives (see Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2005) to understand what's working and not working with these initiatives, with increased researcher and practitioner collaboration. Currently, practitioners can focus more on best practice studies conducted internally or by work-life consultants, that are not well disseminated in the public domain. Scholars, on the other hand, seem to take a critical view and focus on the problems in implementing these initiatives or alternatively take a naive view on the difficulty in actually implementing change management practices. Creating researcher and practitioner teams would be one way to include both critical and positive perspectives and bridge the research-practice gap. Currently, research scientists often overlook the needs of practitioners, which can result in research being conducted on esoteric topics that are not relevant to real-world settings, or are far too over-generalized to be useful in any specific context. Likewise, practitioners may find it difficult to translate current research findings into site-specific approaches that will address pressing workplace issues. Then, research grounded in the science of translation may more easily make its way into daily organizational practices. This means learning more about how new practices and policies are adopted and how barriers to adoption can be avoided (Glasgow and Emmons, 2007). As an example, scholars (Hammer and Barbera, 1997; Kossek, 2006) discuss the need to integrate alternative work schedules into the broader human resource systems such as its effects on training, retention, recruitment, selection and the performance appraisal system. For example, if managers are trained to be more supportive of work and family then they should also be evaluated for transferring these behaviors on the job in performance appraisals, and rewarded for exhibiting such behaviors.

Third, we need research crossing levels, such as individual, work group, and organizational, and subareas within levels (e.g. co-workers and managers within the work group level). Regarding levels of analysis gaps, some levels have been overlooked more than others. For example, while there is clear documentation of the business outcomes associated with the reduction of work-family stress, such as decreased absenteeism and turnover and increased organizational commitment; few studies have been designed to actually assess the organizational level outcomes and cost-benefits associated with the implementation/adoption of work-family policies (Kelly et al., 2008). Thus, a key issue that is critical to the integration of work-family policies into mainstream organizational policies and practices is the ability to document the beneficial effects on firm performance.

It is important to consider the impact of work-family structures and culture not only on organizational wellness, but also on individual wellness. Research has recently emerged demonstrating the health benefits of work-life supports for employees. There is clear evidence of the beneficial effects of reduced stress and strain, and specifically work-family stress on individual employee health and well-being (e.g. Allen and Armstrong, 2006; Hammer et al., 2005; Thomas and Ganster, 1995).

We also need more in-depth work comparing initiatives within a substantive work-life domain such as studies comparing the impact of an initiative targeting working

parents to a policy targeting eldercare, or general leisure time off from work. Or research might examine how different types of control over working time support (e.g. different types of flexible working such as flextime versus reduced-load work or leaves), vary in motivational, boundary blurring, and psychological impact (Kossek and Michel, in press). Not all forms of flexibility in use are the same in impact, and the literature needs to further develop in this area.

Such research would foster greater development of theory on how different work–family processes may operate in enacting these supports. It would also integrate work–family theories on conflict and enrichment theories (see Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006) with other mainstream organizational behavior theories such as motivation theory (see Kossek and Misra, 2008), to boundary theory (Ashforth, 2001) to psychological job control theory (Karasek and Theorell, 1990).

Overall, it is clear that to advance the field we must examine both formal policies and cultural acceptance at the same time as we recognize that norms and values about their ‘success’ may vary from country to organizational context and for different workers. Tolerance of this diversity will enable increased implementation of work–life and work–family initiatives as new ways of working into the future as a core employer policy and practice to bring them into the organizational and societal mainstream.

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Ellen Ernst Kossek is University Distinguished Professor at Michigan State University's School of Labor & Industrial Relations and Associate Director of the Center for Work, Family Health and Stress of the NIH-funded National Work, Family and Health Network. She was elected to the Board of Governors of the National Academy of Management, Chair of the Gender and Diversity in Organizations Division, and is a Fellow of APA and SIOP. Her research interests center on workplace flexibility, supervisor support, organizational cultural change, workplace inclusion and diversity, and international human resources management. She has published seven books on diversity, work-life and human resource management, most recently *CEO of Me: Creating a Life that Works in the Flexible Job Age* (with Lautsch, 2008, Wharton School Publishing), a book on work-life flexstyles. [Email: kossek@msu.edu]

Suzan Lewis is Professor of Organizational Psychology at Middlesex University Business School, London. Her research focuses on work-personal life issues and workplace practice, culture and change, in diverse national contexts. She has worked with employers and policy makers on work-life issues in Europe, Asia and North America. She and has published numerous articles and 13 books on work-life issues, most recently *Work, Families and Organisations in Transitions: European Perspectives* (Policy Press, 2009) with Julia Brannen and Ann Nilsen. She is a founding editor of the international journal *Community, Work and Family*. [Email: s.lewis@mdx.ac.uk]

Leslie B Hammer is a Professor of Industrial/Organizational Psychology at Portland State University. She is the Director of the Graduate Training Program in Occupational Health Psychology at Portland State University and the Director of the Center for Work-Family Stress, Safety, and Health. Dr Hammer is a member of the National Work, Family, and Health Network, which is conducting a multi-site two-industry study of workplace interventions that impact health of workers and their families (www.workfamilyhealthnetwork.org). Her research interests center on work-family, health relationships, and sandwiched generation families. She is a Past President of the Society for Occupational Health Psychology (SOHP). She recently completed a book (*Working Couples Caring for Children and Aging Parents*, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007) and serves on many editorial boards. [Email: hammerl@pdx.edu]