

# **Corporate work-life balance initiatives: Use and effectiveness**

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Managers and professionals are uniquely placed to experience difficulties combining work responsibilities with non-work commitments, due to long hours of work and extensive use of communications technologies enabling work tasks to be performed at any time, anywhere. In response to a workforce increasingly concerned with maintaining a work-life balance, organisations now offer a range of initiatives designed to facilitate the integration of work and non-work domains. These initiatives usually take the form of flexible work options, family or personal leave, and organizational assistance with childcare or eldercare (Estes & Michael, 2005). Common initiatives include flexible work hours, telework (working from home or a satellite location), job sharing (sharing a full-time job between two employees), voluntary reduced work hours, parental leave, and financial and/or informational assistance with childcare and eldercare services.

This chapter will examine the antecedents to and outcomes of corporate work-life balance initiative usage among professionals, as well as equity concerns and “backlash” among non-users of such initiatives. Interconnecting influences such as gender, diversity, val-

values, and dispositional characteristics will be explored, and their role in the use and effectiveness of corporate work-life balance initiatives analysed. The chapter will seek to highlight some of the implications of the research for policy implementation, with an aim to improving the likelihood of work-life balance initiatives achieving their intended purpose among managers and professionals: enhancing work-life balance and strengthening performance on the job.

### **Who uses work-life balance initiatives?**

First of all, it is worth noting that work-life balance initiatives frequently experience low levels of take-up among staff eligible to use them (Pocock, 2005). There are a number of reasons why this is the case. Some employees have no perceived need or desire to use the initiatives. Some employees are concerned about the potential repercussions of using the initiatives, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Some employees, however, are simply unaware that the initiatives exist, or that they are entitled to use them (Kodz, Harper and Dench, 2002; Lewis, Kagan and Heaton, 2000). It is not always clear to staff what initiatives are available, or exactly what these initiatives entail (Duxbury, Higgins and Coghill, 2003).

Women, however, are more likely both to have knowledge of the work-life initiatives offered by their employer (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002; Prottas et al., 2007) and to take up these initiatives (Houston, 2005), as are those with longer tenure in the organization (Lambert, Marler and Gueutal, 2008). Managers and professionals

tend to have greater access to work-life balance initiatives than non-supervisory white collar employees and blue collar workers (Swanburg et al., 2005), and managers have also been found to use these initiatives to a greater extent than employees with no supervisory responsibilities (Lambert et al., 2008). Two important predictors of usage appear to be personal commitments outside of work, and the climate for initiative use within the organization. Individuals with young children, those who provide care to elderly, ill, or disabled relatives, and those who have non-family related commitments outside of work are more likely to use flexible work arrangements, leave, and referral services (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002; Lambert et al., 2008). In their study of academics, Shockley and Allen (in press) found a positive relationship between need for occupational achievement and use of flexible work hours when family responsibility was high; similarly, for academics with high family responsibility, their need to segment work from other life roles played a less important role in predicting their use of telework. As for the importance of the social context, managers whose colleagues use flexible work arrangements are more likely to take up these practices themselves (Kossek, Barber and Winters, 1999; Lambert et al., 2008). Research by Allen (2001) found that workers who perceived their organizations to be more supportive of family concerns were more likely to use the work-life balance initiatives available to them.

Although work-life balance initiatives are often targeted at highly skilled workers in order to improve recruitment and retention (Gray and Tudball, 2003), managers and professionals don't always

feel capable of using these initiatives due to organisational pressures for long work hours and the domination of workplace values negating work-life balance, such as availability and presenteeism (Blair-Loy, 2001; Fried, 1998; Perlow, 1997). Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) note that organizations offering work-life balance initiatives enjoy enhanced legitimacy and a reputation as desirable employers, but that these organizations may also dissuade staff from using the initiatives; their study of professionals and managers at an international bank renowned for being “family-friendly” revealed that staff received ambiguous and contradictory messages about using the wide assortment of initiatives on offer. Long work hours and high levels of dedication were demanded of managers and professionals, and as a result, nearly two-thirds of the study sample reported that taking an extended parental leave or setting limits on the hours they spent at work would hurt their career advancement. Here again we see evidence of how significant the social context of the work group can be. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) found that managers and professionals are more likely to use work-life balance initiatives when they are protected from perceived negative career consequences by the buffering effect of working with powerful supervisors and colleagues – i.e., work groups with longer tenure, composed primarily of men, with fewer family responsibilities.

Concerns regarding career penalties feature heavily in much of the research on work-life balance initiative usage. Shockley and Allen’s (in press) study of academics found that a workplace emphasis on “face time” predicted low use of flexible work hours, and

for professionals with few family responsibilities, the need for occupational achievement was also negatively linked to flexible work hour use. Butler, Gasser and Smart (2004) found that more positive work outcome expectancies, i.e., no harm to status or career progression, were related to higher rates of work-life balance initiative use. The latter authors also found a significant effect of worker disposition: employees with higher work-family self-efficacy – a stronger perceived ability to handle the conflicting demands of work and family – reported greater intentions to use the initiatives on offer.

Another recurring issue in this area is gender, and this issue is connected to employee concerns regarding career penalties. Compared to women, few men take up the work-life balance initiatives offered by their employing organizations, instead using vacation or sick leave when family commitments necessitate time away from work (Berry and Rao, 1997; Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Pleck, 1993). In Bygren and Duvander's (2006) study of American couples, the women in the sample were the ones who made the most changes to their work schedules to accommodate family responsibilities, in large part because the men had fewer work-life balance initiatives available to them and because their wages and benefits were higher and thus unpaid leave was not an appealing option. The authors' research found that men employed in the private sector, at small workplaces, and in workplaces dominated by men were less likely to use parental leave, as were those employed by organizations where other men had not previously taken up their parental leave entitlement to a large extent. Fried's (1998) study revealed that men were

informally discouraged from taking family-related leave, as were women working in male-dominated positions.

One of the main explanations for why men do not use a larger share of the leave available to them is that they find it difficult to be absent from their workplaces (Brandth and Kvande, 2001, 2002; Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2002). Liff and Cameron (1997) suggest that both men and women with career aspirations will be reluctant to use work-life balance initiatives due to fear of being perceived as less committed to their organization. This proposition has received support in a number of studies. Brandth and Kvande's (2002) study of Norwegian working fathers found that as men progress up the managerial career ladder, they exhibit a reduced tendency to use the paternity leave to which they are entitled. Bittman, Hoffmann and Thompson's (2004) case studies of two large Australian organizations showed that employees at all levels of the organizations thought that taking leave or reducing work hours could irreparably damage men's careers. Nord, Fox, Phoenix and Viano's (2002) case studies of two American firms revealed employee impressions that use of the companies' work-life balance initiatives would lead to being perceived by peers as "slackers", or as poor team players, and that men, more than women, felt that using the initiatives would have a negative impact on their career progression.

Given these findings, it is unsurprising that work-life balance initiatives are often under-utilized by men, as well as by single employees and career-oriented women (Bailyn, Fletcher and Kolb, 1997; Whitehouse and Zetlin, 1999). As Fried (1998) points out, or-

ganizational culture often produces different behaviour in men and women even when work-life balance initiatives are ostensibly gender-neutral. The perception often exists in organizations that work-life balance initiatives are intended primarily for the benefit of working mothers. As a result, when men take up these initiatives, their use can be seen as unusual and subject to question (Daly, Ashbourne and Hawkins, 2008). In Bittman et al.'s (2004) Australian case studies, among the workplace barriers discouraging men's take-up of work-life balance initiatives were the novelty of men's use of such initiatives, and doubts about the legitimacy of men's claims to family responsibilities. Men are rarely regarded as primary caregivers for children or the elderly; consequently, their desire to take time away from work for family reasons can be seen as an indulgence (Daly et al., 2008).

Clearly, there are a number of factors predicting managers' and professionals' use of work-life balance initiatives. Chief among these are commitments outside of work, usually in the form of caregiving responsibilities, and organizational climate for initiative use, which manifests itself most frequently in employee concerns regarding the effects of use on career progression. In an ironic twist, anxiety regarding negative career repercussions of initiative use has been linked to higher levels of work-life conflict (Anderson, Coffey and Byerly, 2002; Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness, 1999), the very phenomenon work-life balance initiatives were designed to eradicate. In the next section, research on the outcomes of initiative use will be reviewed: Does using these initiatives enhance work-life bal-

ance for managers and professionals, and what are the consequences for their performance on the job?

### **What are the outcomes for managers and professionals using work-life balance initiatives?**

According to Fleetwood (2007) corporate work-life balance initiatives are simply employer-friendly work practices in disguise, and do little to improve work-life balance for users. While examining the effects of these initiatives on organizational performance is beyond the scope of this chapter (see Beauregard and Henry, 2009 for a review of how firms benefit from offering work-life balance practices), we will now examine evidence for the assertion that initiative usage is of little help to managers and professionals struggling to combine work responsibilities with non-work commitments. Much of the research investigating the effects of corporate work-life balance initiatives examines availability rather than use, rendering the results more helpful to organizations pondering the advantages of offering initiatives than to individual managers and professionals pondering the advantages of using them. There have, however, been a few studies focused specifically on initiative use.

#### ***Effects of initiative use on work-life balance***

Using flexible work hours has been linked to lower levels of work-to-life conflict (Anderson et al., 2002; Hill et al., 2001) and non-directional work-life conflict (Lee and Duxbury, 1998; Saltzstein,



Ting and Saltzstein, 2001). In a study of IBM teleworkers, Hill, Ferris and Martinson (2003) found that working from home was a significant predictor of work-life balance and perceived success in one's personal and/or family life. In Kossek and Nichol's (1992) study of a corporate onsite childcare centre, users of this service reported a greater ability to balance multiple roles than that reported by non-users.

Aside from these main effects of initiative use on work-life outcomes, there is also evidence of indirect effects. Research by O'Driscoll et al. (2003) showed that the relationship between employee use of work-life balance initiatives and work-to-life conflict was mediated by perceptions of the organization as being supportive of family concerns. In Shockley and Allen's (2007) study of female managers and professionals, use of flexible work hours and ability to work from home was associated with reduced work-to-life conflict and life-to-work conflict for those with greater family responsibilities. For those with few family responsibilities, however, use of these work-life balance initiatives was linked to higher levels of work-life conflict.

It would seem, then, that using work-life balance initiatives can help employees balance their work and non-work demands. But what is the impact of initiative use on managers' and professionals' ability to meet work demands? In the next section, we will inspect the links between initiative use and job performance, focusing on telework, flexible work hours, childcare provision, and voluntary re-

duced hours as the initiatives most commonly investigated in the research literature.

### *Effects of initiative use on job performance*

*Telework*, in which employees work from locations other than the office (usually, at home), has a mixed reputation when it comes to employee performance. On the one hand, there are a number of research reviews showing positive links between use of telework and productivity (Kurland and Bailey, 1999; Pitt-Catsouphes and Marchetta, 1991). For instance, studies employing self-report measures of productivity frequently show positive effects of telework use upon performance (Callentine, 1995; Hill et al., 1998), and both quantitative and qualitative research has found that participation in telework programs was associated with higher performance ratings from supervisors (Frolick, Wilkes and Urwiler, 1993; Kossek, Lautsch and Eaton, 2006). These positive effects may be dependent upon who was responsible for initiating the telework arrangements. Hartman, Stoner and Arora (1991) found that when supervisors imposed telework arrangements upon employees, more time spent teleworking was associated with lower productivity. Higher productivity levels were reported by those participating in employee-initiated or mutually-initiated telework programs.

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that telework can present a number of drawbacks to users of this work-life balance initiative. In Nord et al.'s (2002) qualitative study of management

consultants, those participating in telework practices reported experiencing isolation, reduced social interaction with their colleagues, and difficulties in achieving team synergy due to their reliance on remote modes of communication such as e-mail, instant messaging, and the telephone. Professional isolation has been identified elsewhere in the research as a pitfall of telework, as have reduced informal learning, less participation in mentoring relationships, decreased teamwork, and negative effects on professional development activities like interpersonal networking (Cooper and Kurland, 2002; Kurland and Bailey, 1999).

*Flexible work hours* have also been associated with greater self-reported effort and productivity (Chow and Keng-Howe, 2006; Nord et al., 2002), although in their review of studies carried out by Dunham, Pierce and Castaneda (1987) and Pierce and Newstrom (1982; 1983), Kossek and Ozeki (1999) suggested that more limited amounts of flexibility, wherein workers specified in advance which hours they would work, may produce higher levels of performance than varying schedules on an ad-hoc basis. In addition to increased productivity, using flexible work hours has also been linked to reduced absenteeism (Dalton and Mesch, 1990; Halpern, 2005; Krauz and Freibach, 1983). This relationship may be strongest when employees are not required to obtain approval from their managers for the flexibility required (Pierce and Newstrom, 1983).

*Childcare provision*, like telework, has received mixed reviews when it comes to employee performance. A study of on-site child-

care by Kossek and Nichol (1992) found no effects of use on employees' performance as rated by supervisors, although users of the childcare program rated the quality of their performance more highly than non-users did of their own performance. While some studies have found that using on-site childcare centres reduces levels of absenteeism (Auerbach, 1990; Milkovich and Gomez, 1976), others have found no relationship between childcare centre use and absence at work (Goff, Mount and Jamison, 1990; Kossek and Nichol, 1992; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). This discrepancy in findings might be explained by the role of work-life conflict as a mediator in the relationship between childcare use and absenteeism. Users of on-site childcare centres will only experience lower levels of work-life conflict if the childcare provided is the most satisfactory of all childcare options available to the employee, and only then will absence at work be reduced (Goff et al., 1990).

*Voluntary reduced hours* of work have not often been studied in isolation (i.e., apart from other work-life balance initiatives), so it is difficult to determine their effect on managers' and professionals' performance at work. Research by Lewis (1997) found that chartered accountants working reduced hours on a voluntary basis reported greater productivity and efficiency on the job. Nord et al. (2002), however, found that reduced hours of work, accompanied by reduced salaries, did not necessarily result in reduced work or reduced goals. Research participants identified a number of instances in which their firms' human resources policies did not make suffi-

cient adjustments to evaluation or compensation of work in the context of fewer contracted hours.

In addition to studies considering these four work-life balance initiatives separately, there exists research that examines bundles or groupings of practices and their joint effects on employee performance. Some of this research has linked use of work-life balance initiatives to improved self-reported performance, in the form of greater focus, concentration, and motivation (Raabe, 1996; Williams et al., 2000). The perceived usefulness of work-life balance initiatives has been associated with greater participation in organizational citizenship behaviours (Lambert, 2000), and the use of a range of initiatives (including healthcare, fitness, and education benefits) has been related to both increased task performance and contextual performance (as represented by interpersonal facilitation and job dedication), mediated by affective commitment to the employing organization (Muse et al., 2008).

### ***Effects of initiative use on organizational commitment***

The increased commitment of initiative users to the initiative providers is a recurring theme in the work-life balance literature. In general, employees who use onsite childcare centres, referral services, and other family-supportive initiatives report higher levels of commitment to their employing organization (Goldberg et al., 1989; Grover and Crooker, 1995; Orthner and Pittman, 1986; Youngblood

and Chambers-Cook, 1984). Using flexible work hours has also been linked to greater organizational commitment, as well as decreased intentions to leave the organization (Aryee, Luk and Stone, 1998; Halpern, 2005; Houston and Waumsley, 2003; Nord et al., 2002).

Some indirect relationships between work-life balance initiatives and organizational commitment have also been found. In a study of knowledge workers in Scotland, flexible work hours were positively related to organizational commitment and extrinsic job satisfaction, mediated by trust in the organization (Scholarios and Marks, 2004). Casper and Harris (2008), meanwhile, found that for the men in their study, the availability of flexible work hours was positively related to organizational commitment only when use of flexible work hours was high. When use was low, the availability of this initiative was negatively associated with organizational commitment, suggesting that increased loyalty to the employer may only be generated among users and future users of initiatives, rather than all employees.

Some caveats exist to the link between initiative use and organizational commitment. Eaton's (2003) study of professional and technical employees in biopharmaceutical companies found that the availability of work-life balance initiatives led to enhanced organizational commitment, but only when employees felt that using the initiatives would not result in negative work outcomes, such as career penalties or deterioration in relationships with co-workers. Nord et al. (2002) observed that even where initiative use was supported by the organization, difficulties could arise for employees when the in-

initiatives were not compatible with the organization's external environment, particularly in terms of client expectations for uninterrupted access to the management consultants in their study. A number of Nord et al.'s study participants also expressed concern about the effects of work-life balance initiative use on their prospects for promotion and career advancement. Are career concerns such as these justified? The next section will examine the evidence for negative consequences of initiative use on career progression.

### *Effects of initiative use on career advancement*

Due to the time and workload pressures inherent in many managerial and professional jobs, decreased-workload options such as voluntary reduced hours are not often available to employees in the upper echelons of their occupation. Researchers have argued that when these types of work-life balance initiatives are made available to managers and professionals, usage is frequently associated with negative career outcomes (Raabe, 1996). Work-life balance initiatives such as telework, flexible work hours, and family leave contribute to reduced visibility of the employees using them. This can present problems when time spent in the workplace is used as a key indicator of employee commitment and contributions to the organization. As a result, the use of work-life balance initiatives that remove managers from their regular workplace has been linked to fewer promotions, poorer performance evaluations, and reduced salary increases (Bailyn, 1997; Judiesch and Lyness, 1999; Perlow,

1995). Results such as these have been found in both experimental and observational research. For example, experiments have shown employees using work-life balance initiatives are perceived by co-workers as being less committed to the organization, less ambitious, and less suitable for promotion, despite no differences being perceived in their capability to do the job effectively (Allen and Russell, 1999; Rogier and Padgett, 2004). In the field, research has demonstrated that accountants using flexible work hours are perceived as less likely to be promoted and more likely to leave the organization, while female engineers using flexible work hours may be excluded from decision-making roles or from career advancement opportunities (Cohen and Single, 2001; Watts, 2009).

The impact of work-life balance initiative use on career prospects can also be seen indirectly. Wayne and Cordeiro (2003) investigated the effects of taking family leave on co-workers' perceptions of employees' organizational citizenship behaviours. They found that men who took family leave were assessed as being less likely to work overtime, less likely to be punctual, and less likely to help their colleagues, despite identical performance ratings to men having taken no family leave. As individuals' citizenship behaviours have been shown to influence managerial decisions regarding their performance appraisals and promotability (see Organ, Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 2006, for a review), results such as these reflect another way in which work-life balance initiative use has the potential for negative repercussions. In Nord et al.'s (2002) study of management consultants, some participants cited instances of colleagues stig-



matizing those using flexible work hours and telework initiatives with comments such as “Nice of you to show up today” and “What is he doing all day?” (p. 229). Remarks such as these reveal an underlying resentment toward those using work-life balance initiatives, characterized in the popular press as “backlash”. An account of the effects of initiative use on the outcomes of managers and professionals would not be complete without an examination of this phenomenon, presented in the next section.

### **Equity concerns and “backlash” among non-users**

Despite recommendations for approaching work-life balance from a perspective of inclusion, many organizations and individual employees continue to see work-life balance initiatives as intended for parents of young children, and particularly for mothers (Visser and Williams, 2006). In some cases, this may be an accurate perception; practices such as on-site childcare centres and financial assistance with dependent care are necessarily targeted at the subset of the employee population with caregiving responsibilities, usually for children. In other cases, even “caring-neutral” practices such as flexible work hours and telework may be marketed to employees as “family-friendly” programs designed primarily for those with family responsibilities, and consequently may be used predominantly by working parents.

According to Adams’s (1965) Equity Theory, individuals compare their ratio of outcomes to inputs to that of others in a simi-

lar situation, or to a given standard. In other words, they assess the positive or negative returns they receive from a relationship relative to the contributions or investments they make in that relationship. If their inputs exceed those of another individual with the same outcomes, or if their outcomes are less than those of another individual with the same inputs, they will perceive that they are under-rewarded and that inequity exists (Adams, 1965). Responses to inequity include distress, anger, and behavioural reactions such as reduction of inputs (Hegtvedt et al., 2002). Perceptions of injustice in organizations have been found to predict deviant workplace behaviour among under-rewarded employees, as well as emotional exhaustion, depression, and anxiety (Aquino et al., 1999; Tepper, 2001). Some argue that work-life balance initiatives create inequities in the workplace, as only a subset of employees – usually parents of young children – are provided with these extra options. For instance, Burkett (2000) argues that on-site childcare centres are financed by all members of the organization, but used primarily by white, middle-class parents. Those who do not (or cannot) use work-life balance initiatives may bear an increased workload (Young, 1999), such as covering for co-workers who take time off to care for sick children, or serving as representatives at early-morning or late-afternoon meetings eschewed by those using flexible work hours. Employees who are unable to make use of the extra benefits provided by work-life balance initiatives may thus perceive themselves as being under-rewarded, and so might those who perform extra duties so that their co-workers may use work-life balance initiatives to

attend to family concerns (Galinsky, Bond and Swanberg, 1997; Hegtvedt et al., 2002).

Research demonstrates that organizations offering work-life balance initiatives can indeed incur perceptions of injustice among single employees and/or those without children (Kirby and Krone, 2002; Parker and Allen, 2001). In Nord et al.'s (2002) study, management consultants who were not using any work-life balance initiatives reported that their own work-life balance needs were neglected, and those without children remarked that their organizations' work-life balance initiatives led to unjust burdens on employees with fewer family responsibilities (for instance, requiring them to travel for business more often than consultants with children). Similarly, participants in Kirby and Krone's (2002) study reported that single workers without children were required to travel more often on business than their colleagues with families. Perceptions of unfairness can sometimes be attributed to self-serving bias. Researchers often find that employees who use or who would in future use work-family benefits tend to perceive them as more fair, as do employees with spouses and/or children (Casper, Weltman and Kwesiga, 2007; Parker and Allen, 2001). In contrast, forty percent of respondents in the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce agreed that they would resent their employers' provision of work-life balance practices that did not help them personally (Galinsky et al., 1997). However, as the population of the Western world ages and the trend toward and importance of eldercare increases, the continuing emphasis of work-life balance initiatives on childcare issues may prove

especially frustrating for workers with caregiving responsibilities for elderly relations, contributing to greater inequities and resentment on their part.

The way in which organizations frame their provision of work-life balance initiatives can also influence employees' perceptions of how equitable those practices are. According to Lewis, Kagan and Heaton (2000), work-life balance initiatives can be construed by organizations as favours rather than as entitlements. As a result, these initiatives are often viewed by both employers and employees as a cost to the organization that cannot be afforded in times of economic difficulties (Lewis, 1997). This too can result in feelings of inequity among those who do not have family responsibilities and/or those who are not using the initiatives on offer.

Aside from equity issues surrounding employees' familial commitments and the improved access to work-life balance initiatives that these commitments might entail, eligibility for use of work-life balance initiatives can also be dependent upon employees' position within the organization and their immediate supervisors. Due to the relatively high levels of autonomy inherent in their work, managers and professionals tend to enjoy greater access to telework and flexible work hours than support staff, clerical employees, and manufacturing workers (Brewer, 2000; Casper et al., 2007; Golden, 2001; McDonald et al., 2005). Despite these advantages, managers and professionals are still subject to problems associated with the implementation of work-life balance initiatives. In a large-scale study of over 30,000 Canadian workers, Duxbury, Higgins and

Coghill (2003) found evidence of inconsistent application of initiatives across departments within the same organization. For example, some departments provided access to voluntary reduced hours and paid time off for children's medical appointments, while others did not. The authors also discovered that the initiatives were subject to a large amount of interpretation by individual supervisors. Supervisors often act as gatekeepers to an organization's work-life balance initiatives, adding to the potential for inequitable distribution of practices among employees. Drawing on evidence from case studies of four companies in the Scottish financial sector, Bond and Wise (2003) reported that despite managerial discretion being built into a number of work-life balance initiatives and codified in staff handbooks, awareness of statutory family leave provisions was variable and often quite poor among managers, who frequently had limited training in work-life balance-related human resource policies. Research has demonstrated that factors completely unrelated to employees' requests to use work-life balance initiatives can have a profound influence on the likelihood of those requests being granted. For example, female managers are more likely than male managers to grant requests for alternative work arrangements (Powell and Mainiero, 1999). Supervisors with greater parental responsibility have been found to exhibit more flexibility in helping employees balance their work and home commitments, while supervisors with a greater need for control have been found to display less flexibility in this regard (Parker and Allen, 2002).

## **Conclusions**

From a review of the literature, it seems clear that work-life balance initiatives have the potential to ease the pressures experienced by busy managers and professionals trying to combine challenging, time-consuming jobs with family responsibilities and personal commitments outside of work. Users of initiatives appear to enjoy improved work-life balance and greater productivity on the job. According to the research, however, these gains can too easily be offset by organizational climates that fail to fully support the initiatives on offer. Managers and professionals using work-life balance initiatives may encounter resentment from colleagues who feel they are shouldering an unfair workload, professional isolation and reduced networking opportunities, a reputation among peers and superiors for being less committed to the firm, and ultimately, damaged prospects for career advancement.

How can these issues be addressed? Organizations may need to pay more attention to aligning workload distribution and compensation with the different schedules and hours put in by individual workers. For instance, single employees who are assigned the lion's share of business travel could be compensated with time off in lieu or the equivalent of overtime pay, thus reducing perceptions of inequitable treatment. Those working voluntary reduced hours could receive task assignments and goals commensurate with the hours they are paid to work, rather than the hours worked by their colleagues. A concerted effort could be made to include individuals using telework in more activities involving social interaction, such

as weekly face-to-face team meetings or participation in organization-level committees or conferences. Improved organizational communication regarding the aim of work-life balance initiatives – to help individuals balance their work and non-work responsibilities in order to facilitate optimal performance in each domain – might help to reverse perceptions that users of these initiatives lack commitment to their careers and to their employers. This, in turn, may help create a more work-life balance friendly organizational climate, and turn the tide against the negative career consequences suffered by some users of work-life balance initiatives.

The research reviewed in this chapter indicates that the beneficial outcomes of work-life balance initiatives for managers and professionals may not be realized if the initiatives are implemented in an organizational climate unsupportive of work-life balance issues. As employees with greater access to work-life balance initiatives and greater levels of power relative to those at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy, managers and professionals have a responsibility to themselves and to their subordinates to take an active role in changing perceptions of work-life balance initiatives and their users. Unapologetic use of initiatives combined with sincere efforts to allay colleagues' concerns regarding workload distribution may go some way toward normalizing initiative use, especially for men. Managing client and colleague expectations can help assuage others' unease regarding the availability of the work-life balance initiative user; according to management consultants interviewed by Nord et al. (2002, p. 232), clients are "fine if you just tell them"

which days the consultants will be working, and from what location. Role modelling effective management of employees using work-life balance initiatives is vital to changing perceptions among peers that initiative users are “a pain in the neck to have...working for you” (Nord et al., 2002, p. 234). By ensuring these employees are equitably treated with regard to task distribution, compensation, appraisal, and promotion opportunities, and by placing an emphasis on efficiency and results rather than face time and hours worked, managers and professionals can dispel apprehension among subordinates that work-life balance initiative use spells career derailment. Finally, providing emotional and instrumental support for subordinates who seek to use work-life balance initiatives is key to ameliorating the outcomes of initiative use for employees at all levels of the organization.

Taking on this responsibility for change is obviously challenging for managers and professionals operating in an environment where the use of work-life balance initiatives is associated with a reputation for low commitment to the organization and reduced prospects for career advancement – not least because of the implications for their own reputation and career prospects. Waiting patiently for organizations to change from the very top down is not, however, a viable option. Managers and professionals must play a role in effecting this transformation themselves if work-life balance initiatives are ever to achieve their full potential.



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