
The impact of work-family policies on women's career development: boon or bust?

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Abstract

Drawing on existing literature and ongoing research in large corporations, examines the impact of employer work-family policies on the career development of women. A summary of evaluation research of work-family policies and programmes, focusing on work-related outcomes, reveals that relatively few studies have been conducted. Further, the primary focus of existing research has been to examine such outcomes as recruitment, turnover, absenteeism, morale and job satisfaction; few studies have examined the impact of use of family-friendly policies on career advancement. Existing data indicate there is widespread belief that use of certain work-family policies, particularly non-traditional work arrangements, is detrimental to career advancement. Summarizes findings regarding the validity of this belief and deems them inconclusive. Discusses the influence of supervisors and corporate culture on the work-family interface, and presents recommendations for further research.

Introduction

Although women entered the paid labour force in growing numbers throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and now constitute 47 per cent of the US workforce, their progression to the ranks of senior management seems to be blocked by an invisible, rarely penetrable barrier – the glass ceiling. Within the *Fortune* 2,000 industrial and service corporations, only 5 per cent of senior managers are women[1].

Over the past decade, corporate work-family policies and programmes[2] have blossomed, and employer interest and activity in this area continue to grow, despite the difficult economic challenges confronted by most employers[3-5]. The changing demographics of the US workforce, and in particular the increased labour force participation of women, is one of the factors most commonly cited as a primary impetus for implementation of work-family initiatives[4,6].

Given that the rationale for employer response to work-family issues emphasizes women in the workforce, it is not surprising to find a seemingly logical belief is held by many – that policies and programmes which help to reconcile work and family roles will assist in the advancement of managerial women and thus contribute to dismantling the glass ceiling. After all, an immutable difference between women and men is that women experience pregnancy and childbirth. In addition, women maintain primary responsibility for child care and household duties, a difference between the sexes that, although not immutable, is persistent despite women's participation in the paid labour force[7-9]. Finally, employed women are more likely than employed men to have a spouse/partner who is employed (87 per cent versus 65 per cent).

Consider the implications of these differences between working men and working women. Achieving the level of senior executive has required unflagging focus on, and commitment to, the cultivation of workplace responsibilities and relationships. Therefore, those (women) who have outside “distractions” – a working spouse and family who exact emotional and logistical demands – are less likely to succeed in the workplace. On the other hand, those (men) who have outside “supports” – a non-working spouse and a

family who fulfil emotional and logistical needs – may be better able to compete in the workplace. Understood in this manner, the differing biological and cultural roles of men and women in family life may be seen as contributing to the disproportionate achievement by men of senior status in the workplace[10].

It would thus stand to reason that corporate work-family initiatives, designed to acknowledge and support those juggling the multiple demands of work and family life, should be particularly beneficial to women's career development. Presumably, such policies help level a playing-field that is biologically and culturally skewed in favour of men. Were it only that simple...

The impact of work-family policies and programmes on the career advancement of women is uncertain at best. Few evaluations of the impact of work-family initiatives have been conducted to date; the data that have been collected offer mixed findings regarding the impact of these efforts on the career development of employees.

A consistent theme does, however, emerge. Policies and programmes do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they exist within the context of a larger organizational system, one that assesses employees and allocates rewards and penalties according to both an explicit and an implicit set of assumptions and expectations. The consensus view of researchers and employees holds that the formal and informal operating mechanisms of most organizations exact a penalty from those who access work-family initiatives related to time and leave. Employees who use policies that allow them to reduce or restructure time spent at work may be able to salve the symptoms of work-family conflict, but in making this choice they often believe their career development is placed in jeopardy.

This article will summarize the existing research and will draw on the experience of Families and Work Institute practitioners to assess the impact of work-family policies on women's careers. The article will assert that an examination of long-standing organizational norms, values, and practices must occur, and that systemic change must be undertaken, if employer efforts to address work-family issues are to be effective in supporting both career development and family life for women and for men as well.

Research evaluating impact of family-friendly policies

A review of the research that examines the impact of family-supportive policies reveals that relatively few studies have been conducted. Further, much of the early research is methodologically weak, relying on "soft" data – perceptions of effects and employee self-reports rather than actual behavioural measures and longitudinal and comparative data[11,12]. More recent studies do provide longitudinal and comparative data, and also begin to shift the approach from the examination of single policies to a more holistic consideration of entire work-family initiatives and the larger context in which they exist.

Research to date has explored two major outcome categories: the impact of family-friendly policies on factors of concern to employers, and on factors of concern to families. Within this framework, the impact of family-friendly policies on the career advancement of those who use them remains largely unexamined.

Dearth of research

Employers possess the greatest potential ability to conduct evaluations of policies, yet they are often reluctant to undertake evaluation research. To date, such research has not been in sufficiently high demand to justify the continuation or expansion of measures implemented. Many employers who have implemented family-supportive policies express an intuitive confidence that there is a benefit to the bottom line. A 1993 Conference Board survey points out that employers would like hard data but may refrain from evaluating the impact of policies because they also realize that the outcomes they are most concerned with measuring – retention, productivity, stress levels, and employee effectiveness – require the collection of data that are difficult to obtain, often unreliable, and hard to connect with programme results[13]. This same study notes that employers feel the primary constraint limiting their willingness to conduct evaluation research is the time and effort required[13].

Primary focus of existing research

Much of the work-family evaluation research investigates the concerns of business with a focus on work-family policies' impact on

recruitment, retention, and various proxies for productivity: employee morale, absenteeism, tardiness, job satisfaction, and stress – outcomes that reflect the “business case” concerns that motivate employers to implement family-supportive policies.

Friedman's [14] review of the research pertaining to the impact of work-family policies on the bottom-line concerns of employers notes that most studies have looked at single policies, rather than at the cumulative effect of several initiatives provided simultaneously. Exceptions to this approach are the National Council of Jewish Women's (NCJW) [15] study of mothers in the workplace, and the more recent evaluations of Johnson & Johnson (J&J) [16] and Fel-Pro's [17] work-family initiatives. Overall, evaluations of single policies (child care [18–20], leave [21–23], flexi-time [24–26]) find the most consistent benefit that results in enhanced retention of employees. A positive impact on recruitment, productivity, and employee attitudes has also been cited by various studies.

Shift in focus from impact of single policies to impact of multiple workplace factors

Like previous studies of single policies, the NCJW study [15] of 2,000 pregnant women also focuses on retention, absenteeism, and productivity. However, this study is seminal in its recognition that policies do not function in isolation and outcomes are influenced by a range of factors. The NCJW study compiled a scale of eight indicators of an “accommodating workplace” that included sick leave, disability leave, parental leave, job protection and health insurance coverage during leave, a supportive supervisor, flexible scheduling, and some form of child-care assistance. The study found that women who worked for the most accommodating companies were more satisfied with their jobs, were sick less often, took fewer sick days, worked more on their own time, worked later into their pregnancies, and were more likely to return to work than women in less accommodating workplaces. Seventy-eight per cent of women in “highly accommodating” workplaces returned to their original place of work, compared with 52 per cent of women in unaccommodating workplaces [27,28].

Two more recent studies examine the impact of comprehensive work-family

initiatives. A longitudinal study of four J&J companies [16] and a study of Fel-Pro, Inc. [17] both found evidence of positive links between family-responsive programmes and a range of desired outcomes. The Fel-Pro study concluded that the company's family-supportive programmes positively affected work performance, flexibility, and openness to organization change. The J&J study found indications that the company's policies contribute to the retention of those who use them, decrease negative spillover to family and personal life, and enhance loyalty and job satisfaction.

More importantly, though, both studies acknowledge that the impact of family-supportive policies is mediated by aspects of the work environment. The J&J study examined the role of supervisors and corporate culture, as research consistently shows these elements of the work environment influence both the use of policies and the outcomes resulting from that use. The Fel-Pro study concludes that family-responsive policies must be considered as only one part of the larger context of an organization – the impact of such policies is affected by the design and nature of jobs, and the attitudes of supervisors and colleagues [17].

Scant research attention to career advancement

The predominant focus of the existing body of research on the impact of family-friendly policies has been to document the effect of these policies on employees' lives and on workplace concerns, with the “business case” issues of organizational membership and organizational effectiveness having received the most attention. The impact of policies on the career advancement of those who use them has received scant research attention to date. Yet, it stands to reason that career advancement is important to both employees and employers. Career advancement represents economic and personal achievement for the former, and the continued development of and return on an organizational asset for the latter. A strong case has been made that family-friendly benefits improve retention. While the research emphasis on retention underscores holding on to human resources, it does not ascertain whether those resources continue to be developed and fully utilized over time.

Impact of use of leaves and flexible work arrangements on career advancement

Studies consistently show that greater time flexibility, rather than specific dependent-care benefits, is the family-friendly policy most desired by employed parents[29]. The use of such policies, however, poses a question for both employers and employees: can a woman, or any employee, who uses family-supportive policies related to leave and flexibility resume career momentum and maintain opportunity for future upward mobility? This question has been discussed anecdotally in the popular press, and a few studies have begun to examine more directly the impact of the use of leaves and flexible work arrangements on career advancement.

Mommy track debate

In her 1989 *Harvard Business Review* article, "Management women and the new facts of life", Felice Schwartz ignited what became known as the "mommy track" debate[30]. The central question of this debate is whether women who seek to balance parenthood and career through the use of leave and flexibility policies must sacrifice career advancement.

In her article, Schwartz asserts that business must recognize that management women represent a critical component of its talent pool to be retained and developed. She posits that the fact of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood is "the one immutable enduring difference between men and women" [30, p. 66] and argues that this reality must be addressed. Schwartz contends that, while most women desire both career and family, some women are "career primary" – "...ready to make the same trade-offs traditionally made by the men who seek leadership positions" [30, p. 69]. Schwartz urges business to distinguish between career primary and career and family women. She recommends that the former be identified early and given every opportunity as would talented men to develop (with the implicit understanding that these women would also accept the same personal sacrifices that would be required of men). For career and family women, Schwartz advocates the provision of extended leaves, part-time work, flexibility, and family supports (parental leave for men, flexible benefits, support during relocation, and child care). These would enable companies to retain talented women who – without such mechanisms for achieving

the balance they desire – might otherwise leave. Schwartz explicitly states that women who choose to avail themselves of these accommodations would most likely be "willing to trade some career growth and compensation for freedom from the constant pressure to work long hours and weekends" [30, p. 70].

Schwartz's article and the controversy that ensued cut directly to the heart of the ongoing uneasy relationship between family-supportive policies and the upward mobility of those who use them. For purposes of discussion, Schwartz casts the issue in a polarized manner that seems to imply that making it to the top and using family-friendly policies are mutually exclusive choices for women. In her appeal to the bottom line interests of business, Schwartz focuses primarily on the retention of talented women as the objective to be attained. She explicitly assumes that women who choose to balance career and family through the use of family-friendly policies are necessarily removed from the running for upward mobility, emphasizing that employers should consider the contribution these women can offer within the ranks of middle management (p. 71). Schwartz suggests women have the option to "switch gears" again and "re-enter the competition for the top" [30, p. 71], yet she does not explore the practical viability of this option.

Several years after Schwartz's article, and in response to the increasing incidence of and attention to family-friendly policies, the question of whether employees pay a price for using work-family policies continues to be raised in the popular press. Miller and Tsiantar observed, "...a company may pay lip-service to offering alternatives for working mothers, but asking for them can be the kiss of death" [31, p. 48]. The same article quotes Corning Vice-Chairman Van Campbell, who explains why only a small percentage of employees use the company's family-friendly policies – "They tell us they think it's too risky...they're concerned that they won't be viewed as serious" [31, p. 49]. Articles in the *Wall Street Journal*[32,33] have asserted that the use of family-friendly policies can reinforce the glass ceiling, as they confirm the widely-held belief that women as a group lack career commitment. *Working Mother* magazine publishes an annual list of the "100 best companies for working mothers" that spotlights companies with family-friendly policies

and glass ceiling initiatives. Ironically, however, one of the authors who compiles this list each year, Milton Moscovitz, observes that the actual usage of these policies by employees “is so small, it’s shocking” [34].

Research findings: use of leave and flexible work arrangements

Existing research suggests that use of leave and flexible work arrangements is relatively low and attributes this to the widespread existence of concerns about career damage. On the other hand, there is some evidence that using flexible time and leave policies, which are the benefits deemed to pose the greatest threat to career advancement, may not exact penalties to the degree feared. The research results are mixed, and no longitudinal studies of the actual career trajectories of users of these policies have yet been conducted.

A number of studies document both the low levels of utilization and the existence of fears associated with the use of flexible work arrangements and leave policies:

- A 1993 report by Work/Family Directions examines data from 80 client companies and finds that, although these vanguard employers have flexible work arrangements officially “on the books”, relatively few employees use them. The report concludes that this low usage reflects both resistance of managers to unconventional work arrangements and employees’ fear of negative career consequences[35]. (It is important to point out that financial constraints may limit employees’ ability to take unpaid leave or to reduce their work hours. It is surprising, therefore, that financial considerations are not cited more readily as a possible explanation for the low utilization of reduced work schedules.)
- A Conference Board survey of its work-family research advisory panel found that nearly 70 per cent of the 152 responding panel members report that employees do not feel free to use flexibility policies as much as they would like. Again, this is attributed to both supervisor reluctance and employees’ concern that their value and commitment will be questioned, hurting their chances for advancement[13].
- A 1993 Catalyst study[36] of flexible work arrangements found that more than a

quarter of human resources professionals interviewed in 70 companies believe that use of these policies has a negative impact on career advancement.

- A 1992 study[37] of 902 women graduates of Harvard Law School, Business School, and Medical School found that 85 per cent of respondents believe reducing hours of work is detrimental to a woman’s career.
- Thirty-two per cent of employees surveyed at Johnson & Johnson felt that using the flexibility the company offered would jeopardize their careers[16]. An unpublished study by the Families and Work Institute which examines the career experiences of women in science and engineering in industry found similar widespread concern about the ramifications of using time and leave policies.

Research findings: career impact of using leave and flexible work arrangements

Several studies, described in detail below, provide a more rigorous examination of the impact of the use of flexible work arrangements and leave policies on career advancement. Together, the findings of these studies suggest that the availability of leave and flexible work arrangements enhance women’s careers by providing them a means to remain attached to the labour force. However, the findings also suggest that women perceive, and may also experience, career penalties as a result of using flexible work arrangement and leave policies. The final implication, common to all of these studies, is that the impact of using family-friendly policies is mediated by both individuals’ attitudes and corporate culture.

Parental leave

A 1986 mail survey of 319 sets of parents, conducted in Sweden, examined the impact of that country’s parental leave legislation on several factors related to women’s employment, including their labour market status[38,39]. The Swedish leave policy, available to both men and women, aims to equalize parents’ involvement in child care and in the labour market once the leave is over. Thus, the purpose of the study was to examine the impact of fathers’ participation in parental leave on mothers’ commitment to

work, participation in the labour force, and labour market status.

The study found that, whether or not fathers had taken leave, significant gender differences exist in preference for part-time work (67 per cent of mothers versus 24 per cent of fathers preferred part-time), labour force participation (22 per cent of mothers versus 3 per cent of fathers were not employed), and income (12 per cent of full-time working mothers versus 33 per cent of full-time working fathers were in the top two income levels) [38].

The study also found that parental leave have a greater tendency to reduce women's job satisfaction and promotion opportunities. Close to one-quarter (23 per cent) of mothers who returned to work reported a decrease in job satisfaction, versus 16 per cent of fathers. This drop in satisfaction is attributed to the assignment of different tasks on returning to work. The study found, however, that being assigned different tasks had no impact on men's job satisfaction, suggesting that men were perhaps being promoted to more interesting work. In support of this notion, 20 per cent of women said their promotion opportunities had worsened since taking leave, compared with 8 per cent of men. Sharing parental leave did not change this disparity.

The study did find that fathers' participation in parental leave could help equalize women's employment situation. When fathers took 20 per cent or more of the leave, mothers tended to work more days per week, earn higher incomes, and experience less of a drop in post-birth income from pre-birth level. (However, these effects were not found for a subsample of women in dual-career households with both partners working in professional, technical, or managerial occupations.) Leave-sharing couples also tended to rate work similarly in terms of personal importance; women's commitment to work was greater when fathers had taken 20 per cent or more of the leave.

In her analysis of the implications of this study, Haas[38] concludes that, despite some noteworthy positive effects on mothers' employment situations, Sweden's leave policy's goal of enhancing Swedish women's employment participation and opportunities is not being realized. She attributes this to both traditional socialization that leads women to devalue employment, and to an

awareness of poor labour market opportunities, which in turn causes women to prioritize motherhood over working.

Flexible work arrangements

Catalyst[36] conducted a longitudinal study of employees in 70 companies offering flexible work arrangements (part-time schedules, job-sharing, and telecommuting) [40]. The study sought to examine the impact of flexible work arrangements on career goals, paths, and advancement by interviewing 45 women who used flexible work arrangements between 1989 and 1992. Catalyst concluded that although flexible work arrangements result in a "slowing down" of careers, they enhance the retention of employees and allow women to maintain a career identity, professional skills, and career momentum.

More than one-half of the study participants described the impact of working reduced hours with phrases such as "on-hold career", and "a career plateau" [40, p. 34]. Participants report that the trade-offs they face include slower career advancement, limitations on types of work and responsibilities assigned during the time they were using the alternative arrangement, and negative perceptions on the part of colleagues and supervisors.

The majority of study participants reported that, in their companies, users of flexible work arrangements are ineligible for promotions. Although approximately one-half remained at the same grade level during the time they used a flexible work arrangement, 53 per cent of study participants did receive promotions during this time. The study notes that all those who were promoted were assertive in initiating discussions with their managers about their career goals, desired work experiences, and plans for advancement.

Catalyst additionally found that some women suffered permanent financial penalties – about one-quarter earned the same or only slightly higher salary in 1992 compared with 1989. Concerns were also noted about benefits – cafeteria benefits options were often unavailable to those working part-time, and the minimum number of hours required to receive basic fringe benefits varied, but in one case was as high as 30 hours a week.

Like the recent studies of Johnson & Johnson and Fel-Pro, the Catalyst study acknowledges the important impact of

company culture, which often maintains a rigid litmus test for “professional commitment”, one that is difficult for users of flexible work arrangements to pass. All of the women interviewed told of being treated as “less committed” to their careers and of not being taken seriously. This treatment was viewed as an inevitable result of using flexible work arrangements.

Despite the reported drawbacks of using flexible work arrangements, Catalyst concludes that these policies enable women, who might have otherwise dropped out of the workforce, to maintain their careers. Self-esteem and the opportunity to “keep current” in their fields were also cited as benefits.

A 1989 survey of its members by the American Woman's Society of Certified Public Accountants (AWSCPA) [41] also focuses on the career impact of using flexible work arrangements. This study examines both the perceptions about the career ramifications of using flexible work arrangements and the actual experiences of those who have used such arrangements, and concludes that a gap exists between beliefs and experiences. Responses indicate a greater concern or uncertainty about career damage than was reportedly experienced by respondents actually using flexible work arrangements. (While the issue of use of family-friendly policies was not its primary focus, a recent Korn/Ferry survey [10] of 439 executive women finds that only 10 per cent of women who had taken a leave of absence from their careers – 36 per cent of all respondents believe the effect on their career was negative. This finding, together with the relatively low incidence among this group of taking leave, may be further evidence that women may overestimate negative career repercussions associated with using leave policies.)

Users of flexible work arrangements were asked about their perceptions of effects on promotions, compensation, and co-workers' and supervisors' behaviour. Women perceived relatively little damage to promotions and little deterioration in behaviour directed towards them from co-workers and superiors (71 per cent and 63 per cent respectively said problems of this nature were minimal). Perceived negative effects on compensation were more extensive – one-third (33 per cent) of respondents believed that their first salary increase subsequent to using a flexible work arrangement was penalized [40].

In contrast with these views of actual users, respondents who were asked their perceptions of the impact of hypothetically using a flexible work arrangement were more pessimistic. For example, respondents were asked “If you were to use an alternative work schedule in your current position, would your credibility as a candidate for an upwardly mobile career path be damaged with your superiors?” Fifty-eight per cent said they believed a great deal of damage would result. The survey asked a general question about the impact on career success, defined as continuing to be a candidate for upward movement and promotion, even if at a slower pace. The majority did not believe continued career success possible after using any alternative work arrangement, except flexitime. This lack of confidence in the viability of long-run career success for users of flexible work arrangements was also expressed in comments voluntarily provided that indicated scepticism and disbelief in the overall feasibility of alternative work schedules. The report concludes that the beliefs expressed by non-users are contrary to users' perceptions of limited problems with compensation and promotion.

Part-time working

A 1990 companion report by the AWSCPA [42] examines part-time work from the perspective of employers. This report, based on phone interviews with 26 management representatives from companies in public accounting and industry, finds that employers view the provision of flexible work arrangements as a business issue. While many said that electing a part-time option should not necessarily slow a career, most agreed that some slow-down or trade-off is usually inevitable [42, p. 9]. Respondents emphasized that slow-downs that do occur should be temporary. One company representative commented: “A career is a long time. We're not talking about ten to 15 years but 40 years of work. Six months at a different pace should not be a big deal” [42, p. 10]. Another said: “There's a time in life when personal demands must take priority, but that shouldn't impede acceleration later on” [42, p. 10]. Although several of those interviewed gave examples of part-timers being promoted, most also acknowledged that supervisors and the larger corporate culture are often not completely receptive to

alternative work schedules and that training and the dissemination of information are essential.

Supervisors and corporate culture: influences on use and career impact of family-friendly policies

While definitive answers about the career impact of using family-friendly policies remain elusive, strong evidence exists that these policies do not operate in a vacuum. Researchers and individuals working to implement family-friendly policies emphasize that supervisor attitudes and company culture affect both whether policies are used and the repercussions that result for those who do use them. A consensus has emerged that, despite the support they offer, family-friendly policies will not assist in dismantling the glass ceiling (and may in fact fortify it) until attitudes of supervisors and co-workers, as well as corporate cultures and traditional career practices, begin to change[29,36,43-45].

Research findings: role of supervisors

Research consistently finds that managers and supervisors affect a range of elements of one's work experience, including work-family conflict and the use and impact of family-friendly policies. This is not surprising, as it is through these individuals that attitudes and cultural norms are transmitted to employees. Research has established a number of findings about the role of supervisors:

- Supervisors and first-line managers are the key people employees go to for assistance with work and personal problems[46].
- At Johnson & Johnson, employees who rated their supervisors as supportive reported less stress, less spillover from work to family, greater loyalty to the company, and greater job satisfaction than employees with less supportive supervisors[16].
- The National Study of the Changing Workforce[7] reports that employees find supervisors with employed spouses provide more job-related and personal/family support than supervisors who do not have employed spouses. This study also finds that having a supportive supervisor and a workplace that accommodates personal and family needs is associated with taking more initiative on the job.

- Secondary analysis of data from the National Study of the Changing Workforce[47] shows that managers with more supportive supervisors are less likely to feel they have to choose between their careers and their family/personal lives. This analysis also shows that managers with less supportive supervisors feel they have less opportunity to advance.
- Resistance of supervisors and middle managers is commonly cited by employers as a primary impediment to the use and effectiveness of flexible work arrangements[13,28,35,39,48].
- Recent evaluation research demonstrates that the impact of family-friendly policies and programmes is influenced both by supervisor support and company culture. Companies have begun to recognize the impact that supervisors have on work-family issues – 10 per cent of large employers provide some form of work-family training for supervisors and managers[49].
- At Du Pont, where work-family training is provided for supervisors, a 1992 study of 1,000 leave-takers found 86 per cent reported that their supervisor was supportive of their leave[50].
- The evaluation of Johnson & Johnson's work-family initiative, a comprehensive approach that includes training for managers, finds that between 1990 (when the initiative was implemented) and 1992 employees reported that supervisors became more supportive, both of the use of flexible time and leave policies, and more generally when work-family problems arose. During this same time period, the proportion of employees reporting that they pay a price for using flexible time and leave policies decreased from 44 per cent to 32 per cent[16].

In conclusion, the research demonstrates that supervisors are key mediators affecting a range of outcomes in the workplace – employee satisfaction and loyalty, level of work-family conflict, perceived trade-offs between work and personal life, and the impact of family-friendly policies. The research also indicates that supervisor supportiveness can be increased.

Research findings: role of company culture

In addition to supervisors, the larger work environment, or corporate culture, has

been shown to influence both the level of work-family conflict and the impact of family-friendly policies. Proprietary workplace research conducted by the Families and Work Institute across a range of companies demonstrates employees' perceptions of the messages transmitted by company culture:

- From one-quarter to two-thirds of survey respondents report that there is only one "correct" image for success within their corporate cultures.
- One-quarter to one-half of employees report that they are often in the position of choosing between their families and their jobs.
- One-quarter to two-thirds of employees feel that, if an employee has a problem managing work and family, the general attitude is that "it's not the company's problem".

While some elements of culture may vary from one company to another, entrenched tenets about work, traditional practices for developing management talent, and fairly inflexible career path options persist in most workplaces. In addition, attitudes and beliefs about gender roles, family, and careers influence employees' experiences regardless of where they work.

Despite the increasing pace of change in US companies – downsizing, flattened hierarchies, re-engineering – traditional beliefs about the nature of work persist. These include the notions that commitment to career and one's company is demonstrated by time spent in the office ("face time"), that presence and hours are the best indicator of productivity, that "real" professional work can only be accomplished on a full-time basis, and that those who are serious about advancing will make themselves available to the office at all times[29,36,43,45,51].

Rodgers & Associates[45] posit that traditional career practices and career path options remain largely unexamined and have been slow to change. Deviation from prescribed paths to the top, even temporarily, is often viewed as a lack of commitment. Thus, career paths have been mismatched to the lives of working parents. Rodgers & Associates cite a study by Robert Half International which reports that eight out of ten American men and women would sacrifice rapid career advancement to spend more time with their families. Although the employer-employee

contract (and our notions about work and careers) is now being transformed, the assumption of a continuous career without time off or temporary reductions in work, and the provision of a single "one size fits all" career ladder persist in many organizations.

Managers and professionals are often expected to work 50 to 70-hour weeks, to do all work in the office, and to be available for late night and weekend work with little notice. Travel and relocation are also often common elements of managerial jobs[45]. (Swiss and Walker[37] report that 90 per cent of respondents to their survey say that refusing to travel or to work evenings or weekends is detrimental to a woman's career.) Although corporations are moving away from bureaucratic structures to more professional and entrepreneurial job structures, resulting gains in autonomy and flexibility are often offset by the demands of the workplace and a reluctance to assess how career practices might be restructured[43,45].

Swiss and Walker explain that attitudes and beliefs about women, family, and careers influence the career experiences of those who work and also have a family. They conclude that the glass ceiling is buttressed by a "maternal wall" [37, p. 5] – once a woman announces pregnancy, her professional commitment, as well as her future productivity and performance, are called into question by supervisors and co-workers. Although the maternal wall may be camouflaged by family-friendly policy statements, Swiss and Walker assert that in reality motherhood is held against women. They conclude that, in many instances, nearly all demonstrations of parental duties (except a leave of fewer than six weeks) has a negative effect on women's careers, as behaviours different from those of men fortify the maternal wall[52]. In addition to attitudes about women's career commitment, views about gender roles may penalize both men and women. These include the assumptions that women should take primary responsibility for children and family matters, and that men have to work, while women have a choice[36,51].

In summary, basic beliefs about what is required to demonstrate career commitment and to make a valuable contribution in the workplace have not yet evolved, despite the introduction of family-friendly policies and the reconfiguration of work that is currently under way. Workplace practices for developing

employees for management, career path options, and attitudes about gender and parenting have also been slow to change. As long as these components of the workplace culture remain, family-friendly policies may be viewed largely as grafts on an unchanging core[43,45,53].

There is evidence, on the other hand, that work-family initiatives may help foster culture change. At Johnson & Johnson, both supervisors and the corporate culture became more supportive after the implementation of a comprehensive work-family initiative[16]. The evaluation of Fel-Pro's work-family initiative finds that family-supportive policies help create a culture of mutual commitment between employer and employee and seem to "...provide a foundation on which to implement organizational changes that require substantial employee involvement" [17, p. 81].

More recently, research teams from Families and Work Institute, MIT's Sloan School of Management and Artemis Consultants, funded by the Ford Foundation, have been examining work-family and gender equity issues within three companies. The researchers have found that examining and responding to these issues may lead to enhanced organizational effectiveness, as work processes and work relationships are reconfigured[47].

Conclusions and recommendations

Assessments of the impact of family-friendly policies indicate that they positively affect factors that are the necessary prerequisites for career development – recruitment, productivity, and retention. However, the effect of these policies on career advancement is uncertain. Data on the career impact of using leaves and flexible work arrangements – the policies identified by employees as most important to them in trying to balance work and family – are in short supply and remain largely anecdotal. This is both because widespread use of these policies has yet to occur, and because rigorous, longitudinal studies have yet to be undertaken.

Corporate culture – the norms and values that are communicated through supervisors' attitudes, career paths, and organizational practices for assessing and developing the potential of employees – has been shown to exert a strong influence on the use of leaves

and flexible work arrangements, the perceptions about the ramifications of using these policies, and the actual experience of employees who use these policies. The predominant view among employees and researchers is that most company cultures exact a career penalty when employees use leaves and flexible work arrangements. Researchers and company representatives concur that the various components that constitute company culture must continue to evolve in order to diminish fears about using family-friendly policies and eradicate unnecessary career penalties that may inhibit the full development and utilization of employee talents[54]. Indeed, measures of corporate family-friendliness are inadequate if they examine only the provision of policies and programmes while neglecting to assess utilization and impact.

Given the dearth of data, the uncertainty that persists about the relationship between the use of family-friendly policies and career advancement, and the consensus that company culture has a critical impact on this relationship, the following research activities are recommended:

- Conduct further research to document what actually happens to the career advancement of employees who use family-friendly policies. Studies should be longitudinal and should focus on hard data – compensation, performance evaluations, work responsibilities, and promotions – as well as perceptions of employees, co-workers, and supervisors.
- Focus more extensive research attention on workplace culture, in order to assess how its various components (supervisors, career paths, developmental practices, evaluation practices, reward systems, etc.) influence the use of family-friendly policies and the impact of use on upward mobility. Additional workplace research should examine the implementation strategies being used by employers who recognize and actively address the link between work-family issues and the career advancement of employees. The approaches used by these employers should be assessed and information on "best practices" should be disseminated[55]. Research should also examine culture change efforts to determine which factors hinder and facilitate change, and to document outcomes associated with culture change.

In addition to research, the following policy efforts are recommended:

- (1) Employers should strive to integrate their work-family and glass ceiling initiatives, both conceptually and operationally. In the most progressive companies, efforts to support work-family balance, to manage and value diversity, and to ensure equal access to upward mobility for women and minorities, reflect management's recognition and pursuit of a business imperative: the full development and utilization of employee talent. Because they share this common objective, initiatives should be developed and implemented so that their message and their impact are aligned. Policies, programmes, and training developed and rolled out in a piecemeal approach can dilute results and may work at cross purposes (e.g. a fast-track for high-potential employees that does not consider or address the potential use and impact of leaves and flexibility; or flexible work options for employees that do not address their desire for career advancement).
- (2) Employers should assess the continued appropriateness of existing career practices. Modifications of previously unquestioned and perhaps outdated structures and requirements that determine career advancement (career ladders, career "clocks", relocations, etc.) would benefit all employees, regardless of gender, who would be given wider latitude to make a contribution, receive professional recognition, and meet family responsibilities.
- (3) Employers should examine the way in which they measure performance. A sharper focus on contribution and results, rather than time invested, presence in the office, and subjective assessments of commitment, would benefit both company and employees who wish to be judged objectively on the merit of their work. (Many companies have already begun to reconfigure both their career ladders and the means by which they assess and reward employees. The radical restructuring of corporations has produced an emphasis on lateral movement and skill development, rather than advancement, and pay for performance rather than position.)
- (4) Policymakers should create incentives for employers to pursue an integrated,

holistic approach to their management and development of human resources. Incentive and enforcement measures may be used to assess not only desired outcomes, but also the processes which companies have implemented in pursuit of those outcomes. For example, examine whether work-family programmes are linked to initiatives for the upward mobility of women and minorities, and how these links are operationalized. Questions such as the following could be examined:

- Is training provided for employees to explain the relationship between the two concepts and to discuss implementation issues?
- Do policy guidelines for leaves and flexible work arrangements address career-impact issues and the concerns held by both employees and managers?
- Do companies track employees who use flexible work arrangements and leaves in order to collect data to guide policy making and refine implementation?
- Does internal communication support no-fault usage of policies?
- Do career development and succession-planning procedures support or penalize people who use flexible work arrangements?

The suggested research and policy efforts represent activities that should be pursued concurrently and have the potential to inform and enrich one another. Additionally, these activities offer opportunities for co-operation and collaboration among employers, researchers, and policymakers. A partnership approach to achieving a fuller understanding of the issues presented in this article, and to effecting change, represents the best method for making strides to dismantle the glass ceiling.

Notes and references

- 1 Glass Ceiling Commission, *Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital*, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, March 1995.
- 2 Broad definitions of "family-friendly" or work-family policies encompass the provision of traditional benefits, such as health insurance and paid vacation. This article, however, will focus on policies

- that fall within three categories most commonly discussed as work-family benefits: leave, dependant care assistance, and flexible or alternative work arrangements.
- 3 In 1991 Families and Work Institute published the first major findings on the prevalence of work-family programmes in large companies[4]. This study found that dependant care supports offered included child care resource and referral (54.5 per cent), Dependant Care Assistance Plans (DCAP) (49.5 per cent), elder care consultation and referral (21 per cent), adoption benefits (16 per cent) and child care centres (13 per cent). Although the Family and Medical Leave Act was not in effect at the time of this survey, all of the respondent companies provided disability leave for maternity and 28 per cent offered family or child care leaves for mothers. Flexible work arrangements were also available – part-time schedules (88 per cent), flexitime (77 per cent), job-sharing (48 per cent), and work at home (35 per cent).
A 1994 survey of 1,035 major US employers conducted annually by Hewitt Associates[5] includes a wider range of company sizes. This study found that 84 per cent offer some form of child care assistance to their employees, up from 74 per cent in 1992. DCAPs were most prevalent (95 per cent), while resource and referral services were offered by 40 per cent and child care centres by 9 per cent. Twenty-five per cent of employers offered elder care programmes, up 8 per cent from 1992. Flexible scheduling arrangements were provided by 66 per cent of employers, up from 58 per cent in 1992. Flexitime was most common, offered by 71 per cent; part-time was offered by 65 per cent of employers; job-sharing was offered by 34 per cent; compressed work weeks were provided by 21 per cent; and work at home was offered by 16 per cent.
 - 4 Galinsky, E., Friedman, D. and Hernandez, C., *The Corporate Reference Guide to Work-Family Programs*, Families and Work Institute, New York, NY, 1991.
 - 5 Hewitt Associates, *Work and Family Benefits Provided by Major US Employers in 1995*, Hewitt Associates, Lincolnshire, 1995.
 - 6 Additional factors that have been cited as motivations for responding to work-family issues include concern about labour shortages/labour mismatches, recognition of the shifting values and expectations of employees, the need to develop supplemental incentives or rewards given diminishing pay and promotion opportunities, and the desire for good public relations and the competitive advantage this provides[5].
 - 7 Galinsky, E., Bond, J.T. and Friedman, D.E., *The Changing Workforce: Highlights from the National Study*, Families and Work Institute, New York, NY, 1993.
 - 8 Hochschild, A., *The Second Shift*, Viking Penguin, New York, NY, 1989.
 - 9 Adding together time spent doing paid work, housework, and child care, Hochschild[8] averaged estimates from major studies on time use done in the 1960s and 1970s, and found that women worked a “second shift” – approximately 15 hours longer each week than men. Over a year they worked the equivalent of an extra month of 24-hour days. Families and Work Institute surveyed a representative sample of the US workforce and found that men in dual-earner families without children spent significantly less time on both work days (1.73 hours) and off-days (4.39 hours) on chores than women in dual-earner families without children spend on work days (2.41 hours) and off-days (5.31 hours). Among dual-earner families with children under 18, men again spent less work day time (2.00 hours) than women (2.67 hours). Overall, this study found that employed women are much more likely than employed men to have the main responsibility within their families for the most demanding household chores – cooking, cleaning, shopping – as well as for child care[7].
 - 10 Korn/Ferry International and UCLA Anderson Graduate School of Management, *Decade of the Executive Woman*, Korn/Ferry International, New York, NY, 1993. There is some evidence to suggest that men's and women's differing family profiles contribute to the existence of the glass ceiling. For example, this study of executive women in *Fortune* 1,000 industrial and *Fortune* 500 service companies, conducted in 1992, found that among women at the executive level 69 per cent were married and 58 per cent had children. In contrast, among a comparable group of executive men, surveyed in 1989, 91 per cent were married and 91 per cent had children. Among married females, the vast majority (93 per cent) had spouses who worked outside the home. Among married men, nearly half (45 per cent) had a spouse who did not work outside the home.
 - 11 Raabe, P.H., “The organizational effects of workplace family policies: past weaknesses and recent progress toward improved research”, *The Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 11 No. 4, December 1990, pp. 477-91.
 - 12 Friedman, D.E., *Linking Work-Family Issues to the Bottom Line*, Report Number 962, The Conference Board, New York, NY, 1992.
 - 13 Johnson, A. (Ed.), *Work-Family Roundtable: Evaluating Programs*, Vol. 3 No. 2, The Conference Board, New York, NY, Summer 1993.
 - 14 Friedman, D.E., “The productivity effects of workplace centers”, paper presented at conference in Chicago on “Child Care Centers at the Workplace” sponsored by Resources for Child Care Management, June 1989.
 - 15 Bond, J.T., *Accommodating Pregnancy in the Workplace*, National Council of Jewish Women, New York, NY, 1987.
 - 16 Families and Work Institute, *An Evaluation of Johnson & Johnson's Work-Family Initiative*, Families and Work Institute, New York, NY, 1993.
 - 17 Lambert, S.J., Hopkins, K., Easton, G., Walker, J., McWilliams, H. and Chung, M.S., *Added Benefits: the Link between Family Responsive Policies and Job*

- Performance*, University of Chicago Study of Fel-Pro Incorporated, Chicago, IL, 1993.
- 18 Employer-sponsored child care has received the most research attention, despite this benefit's relatively low prevalence. Actual outcomes most significantly associated with employer-sponsored child care include reduced turnover and improved recruitment[12]. Studies have also examined *perceived* benefits of employer-sponsored child care, concluding that improved morale, reduced absenteeism, and improved productivity are viewed as the primary positive outcomes associated with employer-sponsored child care[12]. Other outcomes assessed included motivation, satisfaction, attitudes towards work, loyalty, stress, commitment, and returning from leave. Galinsky and Stein's[19] discussion of the impact of work-family programmes provides further evidence that the measures that have received the most attention in evaluation of corporate child care programmes are recruitment, absenteeism, and employee attitudes. They cite a study of 58 employers that found these factors to be the perceived benefits of company child-care programmes[20].
- 19 Galinsky, E. and Stein, P.J., "The impact of human resource policies on employees", *The Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 11 No. 4, December 1990, pp. 368-83.
- 20 Perry, K., *Employers and Child Care: Establishing Services through the Workplace*, US Department of Labor, Washington, DC, 1982.
- 21 A US Chamber of Commerce study (cited in [12]) found half of responding employers had formal parental leave plans. Of these, 61 per cent said leave plans improve their ability to recruit and retain employees. A study by Aetna Life & Casualty Co. found that offering generous family leave of up to six months reduced attrition of new mothers from 24 per cent to 12 per cent. Research has quantified the benefit of retaining employees. Cost/benefit analyses reveal that it is cheaper to grant a leave (32 per cent of employee's annual salary) than to replace an employee (75 per cent to 150 per cent of employee's annual salary)[22]. A survey[23] of supervisors of leave-takers found that approximately 75 per cent reported the employee's leave had no negative effects on office productivity.
- 22 Marra, R. and Lindner, J., "The true cost of parental leave: the parental cost model", in Friedman, D.E., Galinsky, E. and Plowden, V. (Eds), *Parental Leave and Productivity: Current Research*, Families and Work Institute, New York, NY, 1992.
- 23 Staines, G.L., and Galinsky, E., "Parental leave and productivity: the supervisor's view", in Friedman, D.E., Galinsky, E. and Plowden, V. (Eds), *Parental Leave and Productivity: Current Research*, Families and Work Institute, New York, NY, 1992.
- 24 Like studies of child care and leave, research that has looked at the impact of flexitime – the most commonly examined flexible work arrangement – focuses on retention and productivity indicators. Friedman[12] notes that a review of 43 studies of flexitime showed that companies were most concerned with the impact on tardiness, commuting and morale. Pierce *et al.*[25] report that the research on flexitime focuses on employee performance, attitudes, organizational attachment, and attendance. Their review of the research concludes that flexitime has a neutral to positive impact on these outcomes. Christensen and Staines[26] summarize findings on the impact of flexitime, stating that it tends to be positively associated with various indicators of organizational effectiveness, including productivity, scheduling, work coverage, and cost. They note that flexitime also has been found to yield a favourable impact on absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover, and that changes in job satisfaction and morale are consistently positive, except in cases where employees are unable to participate in an existing flexitime programme. Overall, however, Christensen and Staines conclude that the magnitude of flexitime's impact is modest and its benefits limited.
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- 26 Christensen, K.E. and Staines, G.L., "Flexitime: a viable solution to work/family conflict?", *The Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 11 No. 4, December 1990, pp. 455-76.
- 27 Secondary analysis[28] of the NCJW data examines which policies and practices are related to the different outcomes observed. This analysis finds flexible scheduling is related to a host of positive outcomes for both employers and respondents. Supervisors are found to be important determinants of schedule flexibility. Additionally, both flexibility and supportive supervisors are cited as factors that tend to mitigate the negative impact of shift work, which emerges in this study as a barrier to family-friendly policies and practices.
- 28 Piotrkowski, C.S., Hughes, D., Pleck, J.H., Kessler-Sklar, S. and Staines, G.L., *The Experience of Childbearing Women in the Workplace: The Impact of Family-friendly Policies and Practices*, National Council of Jewish Women, New York, NY, 1993.
- 29 Galinsky, E., *Work and Family: 1992, Status Report and Outlook*, Families and Work Institute, New York, NY, 1992.
- 30 Schwartz, F.N., "Management women and the new facts of life", *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1989, pp. 65-76.
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- 32 Shellenbarger, S., "Averting career damage from family policies", *Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 1992, p. B1.
- 33 Shellenbarger, S., "Flexible policies may slow women's careers", *Wall Street Journal*, 22 April 1992, p. B1.
- 34 Shellenbarger, S., "Concerns fight to be called best for moms", *Wall Street Journal*, 14 September 1993, p. B1.
- 35 Work/Family Directions, *Workplace Flexibility: A Strategy for Doing Business*, Work/Family Directions, Boston, MA, 1993.

- 36 Catalyst, *Flexible Work Arrangements II: Succeeding with Part-time Options*, Catalyst, New York, NY, 1993.
- 37 Swiss, D.J. and Walker, J.P., *Women and the Work/Family Dilemma*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY, 1993.
- 38 Haas, L., "Gender equality and social policy: implications of a study of parental leave in Sweden", *The Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 11 No. 4, December 1990, pp. 401-23.
- 39 Sweden's national paid leave policy provides job security and nearly full-income compensation, and allows both mothers and fathers to share a full year of leave from employment to take care of their babies or newly adopted children. In contrast with the USA, where leave policies are implicitly viewed as an accommodation to be used primarily by women, the explicit intent of Sweden's policy is that both men and women make use of leaves. The goal is to facilitate gender equality as a means to enhance women's attachment to the labour force, an outcome deemed important to Sweden's economy[38].
- 40 This research was initiated after completion of a 1989 study on flexible work arrangements. This earlier study found that companies were motivated to provide flexible work arrangements in order to retain employees, and that use of these arrangements contributed to improved productivity, morale, and retention, especially of women who returned to work following the birth of a child. The 1993 follow-up study revisited the original 70 participating companies and found that the percentage of companies with formal policies or guidelines increased from 50 per cent to 61.4 per cent. Employee usage of policies also increased, with 39 per cent of companies reporting they had 100 or more employees working non-traditional schedules. Although the practice of tracking employees who use flexible work arrangements increased, only 17 per cent of companies reported that they use a formal system to do so.
- 41 Hooks, K.L., *Alternative Work Schedules and the Woman CPA: A Report on Use, Perception, and Career Impact*, American Woman's Society of Certified Public Accountants, Chicago, IL, 1989.
- 42 Curry, J.M., *Alternative Work Schedules from the Employer's Perspective*, American Woman's Society of Certified Public Accountants, Washington, DC, 1990.
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- 52 Although most family-friendly policies and legislation are gender-neutral with regard to eligibility requirements, informal norms and practices and wage differentials result in men being less likely to use policies than women[51]. Because norms that limit men's role in family work persist, men may suffer greater career fallout than women if they articulate parental responsibilities (Pleck, 1989, cited in [51]).
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- 54 This focus on corporate culture corresponds to the third stage of development in how companies approach work-family issues[4]. Companies in this stage take a holistic approach in which they link work-family policies and programmes to other corporate initiatives, including gender equity, and articulate a commitment to change company culture.
- 55 For example, Bank of Montreal has implemented its work-family policies and practices as an integral component of its comprehensive initiative "Advancing Workplace Equality". All communications materials position work-family issues and policy responses within the broader context of the bank's commitment to create a level playing-field for a diverse workforce. Descriptions of flexible work arrangements available specifically discuss career implications.

Further reading

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