Work-family programs: factors affecting employee knowledge and accuracy

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to analyze the factors contributing to employee professed knowledge of work-family practices offered by employers and the accuracy of their knowledge.

Designed/methodology/approach – Survey data from four studies (*n*s = 276, 2,877, 2,810, and 310) were used to relate employee demographics to their professed knowledge regarding the availability from their employing organizations of work-family practices. For a subset of one study ($n = 140$) the accuracy of employee perceptions was compared to the practice availability as reported by HR counterparts.

Findings – Women, employees with dependent care responsibilities and individuals with longer organizational tenure professed greater knowledge of practice availability. Employee attitudes were more related to employee perceptions than to the actual practices as reported by their HR manager. Employees who perceived their organization as family supportive were more likely to over-report practices that their HR managers said did not exist, rather than to under-report them. Professed knowledge and accuracy of the knowledge varied substantially among practices.

Research limitations/implications – This study suggests that the relationships between practices as reported by organizations and attitudes of their employees are likely attenuated by inaccurate employee knowledge.

Practical implications – Organizations likely fail to reap full benefits of their enacted practices and should have strategies to better communicate their existence.

Originality/value – In summary, the results of this research give suggestions to reap the benefits of programs, it behooves organizations to think creatively about how best to communicate their existence, as well as reduce the time and effort that employees must expend to learn about program availability.

Keywords Family friendly organizations, Benefits, Human resource management, Job satisfaction

Paper type Research paper

Organizations have become sensitized to the changing nature of their workforce and the need to accommodate employees' desires to balance work and family obligations. To assist employees in managing work and family demands, many organizations offer various formal programs and policies (e.g. flexible work schedules, on-site day care, and elder care referral services). The value of these programs and policies is reflected in

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higher levels of employee commitment to the firm, increased organizational citizenship behaviors, increased organizational attractiveness of the firm to job applicants, and lower levels of work-family conflict and somatic complaints (Grover and Crooker, 1995; Hammer *et al.*, 1997; Lambert, 2000; Rau and Hyland, 2002; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Thompson *et al.*, 1999).

Despite the potential value of work-family programs both to employees and organizations, research suggests that employees may have limited knowledge of the benefits, programs, and policies offered by their employers (e.g. Clark and Pitts, 1999; Dreher *et al.*, 1988; Ghilarducci, 1990; Hannigan, 2003; Luchak and Gunderson, 2000; Williams, 2002). Clearly, without knowledge of the types and extensiveness of benefits available, employees are unable to take advantage of them. Likewise, organizations fail to reap the potential gains: the goodwill that could result is not attained, and the costs expended in developing and implementing unused programs are for naught.

Previous research on the impact of work-family policies on individual-level outcomes (e.g. intention to quit, job satisfaction, and affective commitment) has primarily examined individuals' perceptions of program availability, with researchers sometimes distinguishing among:

- beliefs about the formal availability of a program or benefit;
- the extent to which a program was readily accessible in practice and consistently offered across geographic and functional areas of the organization and to employees of differing levels; and
- the generosity or magnitude of benefit.

The emphasis on employee perceptions is appropriate to the extent that researchers are concerned with the impact of programs on individual attitudes and behaviors. However, organizations are equally – if not more – concerned about the impact of these programs on organizational effectiveness. Organizations typically offer work-family programs with the expectation that employees will realize the programs are offered, perceive them as valuable and useful, and as a result, feel greater organizational commitment and loyalty. To the extent that employees are unaware that such programs even exist, positive organizational outcomes will be unlikely.

The purpose of the current research was to examine factors related to employee knowledge of the availability of specific work-life programs and practices, as well whether this professed knowledge is accurate. Further, we were interested in whether professed knowledge of work-life practices – irrespective of accuracy – was more predictive of employee attitudes than extant programs as reported by HR managers. Finally, we were interested in determining whether employees tend to under- or overestimate the availability of practices in comparison to HR manager reports, and whether attitudes towards their employers are related to under- or over-estimates of the existence of extant practices.

Review of related literature

To determine why many employees know very little about programs and policies offered by their organization, it may be helpful to draw on economic theory as well as motivation theory. Information theory based on microeconomic analysis (Stigler, 1961, 1962) suggests that there is a cost to acquiring information and that individuals seek additional information until the marginal cost of the added information is equal to the expected marginal utility of the incremental information. While much of the research on information acquisition has focused on the search for wage-related information in

labor markets, Stigler (1962) argued that the relationships between marginal costs and utility of employment-related information would extend to benefits and other conditions of employment.

Similarly, Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation suggests that the effort made to acquire information would be related, among other factors, to the perception of the instrumentality or usefulness of such effort. Kopelman (1977) extended the conceptualization of expectancy theory to recognize that individual decisions are based on the highest marginal return on effort, rather than the greatest overall return. In fact, perceptions of the return on incremental effort were found to influence choice behavior.

Both theories predict that individuals will seek out information on work-family benefits offered by their organizations if they perceive that the incremental information would be valuable or useful to them. For example, we would expect that employees with a single child might actively seek out information related to programs that provide referrals (e.g. childcare services), emotional support (work-family support groups), financial assistance (childcare subsidies or vouchers), scheduling flexibility (job sharing, part-time work, flextime), or direct services (after school programs, summer camps) and that as the number of dependents increased so might the need for the programs and the effort extended to learn about them. Older employees with parents in failing health, on the other hand, might perceive utility in programs that could assist with anticipated eldercare needs. In contrast, younger employees without children and with self-sufficient parents might envision some future interest in the aforementioned programs, but would likely see other organizational practices (such as promotions) to be of more immediate relevance and utility.

Research by Luchak and Gunderson (2000, p. 665) supports the notion that individual salience predicts knowledge of benefits. They asked 529 employees of a single organization about seven features of their pension program, and found that their level of knowledge was related to the perceived individual salience of the feature. Knowledge about specific features ranged from 28 percent for the contribution formula to 70 percent for the age of mandatory retirement – the overall average being 51 percent correct. As expected, older workers had superior knowledge about pension benefits, and the researchers concluded that "pension knowledge is acquired in a reasonably rational fashion that pays attention to costs and benefits of acquiring that knowledge". Sinclair *et al.* (1995) surveyed 298 employees and found that they were poorly informed about some of their benefits (e.g. 47 percent did not know about adoption leave). Williams (2002) compared the extent to which 148 librarians and their employers agreed about the presence of 14 different benefits. While agreement was above 90 percent for seven benefits (e.g. medical insurance, life insurance), it was substantially lower for other benefits (e.g. 5 percent for unpaid family leave).

Although there is a small but growing body of research on the accuracy of employee knowledge of traditional fringe benefits such as pension plans and medical insurance, less is known about employee knowledge of work-family programs, policies, and benefits. For example, Hannigan (2003) found that among college employees, awareness of work-family benefits ranged from 12 percent for family care referral service to 71 percent for tuition assistance. Haar and Spell (2004) collected data on program knowledge from employees of a government agency in New Zealand. Employees were asked about six benefits offered by the agency, and whether they were "aware of the appropriate steps to take in order to use the following benefits". On average, the employees knew how to use 4.3 of the six programs.

Given that perceived salience appears to be central to understanding which employees seek what information, we predicted that women, because they are more

often responsible for managing their children's schedules (e.g. doctor appointments, sick days), and because they are more frequently responsible for caring for elderly relatives (Bond *et al.*, 2003), will have greater professed knowledge than men about family supportive programs offered by their employer. Similarly, the more dependents employees have, the more likely they will be to seek out information about family supportive programs, and thus have greater professed knowledge than employees without dependents. Therefore, we predicted the following.

H1. Female employees will profess greater knowledge of existing family supportive practices offered by their employer than will male employees.

H2. There will be a positive relationship between the number of dependents employees have and their professed knowledge of family supportive practices.

In addition, the longer an individual's organizational tenure, the more likely the person is to need and seek knowledge about benefits offered. Additionally, organizational tenure may be associated with increased opportunities to acquire information with minimal marginal effort or cost. For example, although an employee without children might not be motivated to seek out information on child sick care policies, the person might vicariously learn of their existence by observing their use by co-workers. Therefore, we predict the following:

H3. Organizational tenure will be positively related to employees' professed knowledge of family supportive practices offered by their employer.

The theoretical underpinnings of the relationships between work-family practices and employee attitudes are based on social exchange theory and the norms of reciprocity (Blau, 1994; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Social exchange theory suggests that employees and employers are in an exchange relationship such that when employers provide a benefit, employees will feel obligated to reciprocate in some way. When employers provide work-family benefits, the expectation is that employees will perceive the organization as family-supportive. In fact, research suggests that there is a positive relationship between the number of family-friendly benefits offered and employee perceptions of organizational family supportiveness (Allen, 2001; Thompson *et al.*, 1999). In exchange for offering benefits, employees may reciprocate by putting forth more effort and by increasing their commitment (both affective and continuance) to their employer (Lambert, 2000; Thompson *et al.*, 2004).

Research shows that employees who know about and have access to family-supportive programs, in fact, are more likely to be committed to their organization (Grover and Crooker, 1995; Haar and Spell, 2004). Affective commitment, which refers to the strength of an employee's identification with, and involvement in, a particular organization (Meyer *et al.*, 1993), is likely to be higher as a result of the perceived benefit (actual or anticipated) of working for an organization that provides family-supportive programs. Continuance commitment refers to the perceived cost of leaving an organization. Using logic proposed by Haar and Spell (2004), employees are likely to perceive family supportive programs as unique to their organization, and believe that comparable programs might not be available in other organizations. As such, family supportive programs should be related to higher levels of continuance commitment. Normative commitment refers to the degree to which employees feel loyal to their employer. However, because normative commitment and affective commitment are positively correlated and have similar antecedents (Meyer *et al.*, 1993), only affective commitment and continuance commitment were investigated in this study.

Because organizational commitment has been associated with reduced absenteeism and turnover), as well as positive ratings of job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g. Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Wright and Bonett, 2002), it would be beneficial for organizations to determine to what extent employees know about work-life programs offered. Clearly, employees are unlikely to feel gratitude or a sense of obligation with respect to work-family benefits if they are unaware of the existence of such benefits:

H4. Employees' perceptions of the number of family-supportive practices available will be positively related to their attitudes towards their organization (i.e. perceived organizational family support, affective and continuance commitment).

Of course, employees' professed knowledge of work-life benefits may not be accurate. Notwithstanding the greater knowledge of HR managers compared to employees regarding the existence of specific work-life programs, it is likely that employees' perceptions will be more predictive of attitudes and behaviors than (the more accurate) perceptions of HR managers. That is, an employee's professed knowledge (or beliefs) – whether correct or incorrect – should be more strongly related to his or her attitudes than will be HR professionals' reports of practice availability. Along these lines, Dreher *et al.* (1988) found stronger relationships between policies as perceived by police officers and their attitudes than between attitudes and actual policies. Hence:

H5. The relationship between employee attitudes (i.e. perceived organizational family support, affective and continuance commitment) and employee perceptions of practice availability will be stronger than the relationship between employee attitudes and practice availability as reported by the HR professionals.

As suggested above, employees' overall perceptions of the package of work-family benefits offered will directly contribute to their attitudes and their impression of an organization's family supportiveness (Allen, 2001; Poelmans, 2003; Thompson *et al.*, 2004). However, the causal relationships are likely more complex. Employee attitudes toward their employer are shaped in part by their assessment of the number of work-life benefits offered. However, it is likely that these attitudes might lead employees to make erroneous assessments of practice availability. Specifically, employee perceptions of the existence of specific practices may be subject to two types of errors:

(1) employees may perceive that specific benefits are offered when, in fact, they are not; and

(2) they may be unaware of or underestimate the existence of specific work-family benefits that are offered.

When asked whether programs are offered, employees' responses are likely a result of specific reliable knowledge (such as having used the practice, seen a co-worker use it, or having a distinct remembrance of reading or hearing about it) or an attribution about their organization's likely behavior (i.e. offering the program) given their assessment of the organization's supportiveness. The greater the perceived supportiveness of the focal organization, the more likely it is that employees will assume the organization offers particular work-family programs. Accordingly, we hypothesized the following:

H6. Employee perceptions of organizational family supportiveness will be positively related to employee overestimation of the existence of practices, and negatively related to employee underestimation.

Method

To test hypotheses 1 through 3, we used data from four independent studies. Two of the data sets were from the 1997 and the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (Bond *et al.*, 1998; Bond *et al.*, 2003) and two of the data sets were from studies conducted by the authors to examine other work-family hypotheses (Jahn *et al.*, 2003; Thompson *et al.*, 1999). *H4*, *H5*, and *H6* were tested using a subset of data in which participants' human resource managers reported on the availability of work-family programs.

The four studies provided information on employee knowledge of programs and practices that are generally recognized as being beneficial to employees with family obligations. The majority of our analysis is based on knowledge about all programs included in each study. However, some of the programs (such as after-school programs) are useful mainly to individuals with family responsibilities while others are useful to individuals with and without such responsibilities (such as job sharing or flex place). Thus, for some analyses we distinguished between knowledge of family-specific programs (labeled "F" in the Appendix, Tables AI-III) and knowledge of programs potentially useful to all employees (labeled "G" for generic)[1]. Our classification of each practice appears the Appendix, Tables AI-III.

Study 1

Survey data from alumni of three graduate business programs at two universities in the northeast USA were used (See Thompson *et al.*, 2004 for details). Of the 276 respondents (a 32 percent response rate), the majority of respondents were Caucasian (92 percent), male (58 percent), married or living with a partner (53 percent), had children (53 percent), and had an average organizational tenure of 8.14 years. The majority (53 percent) described themselves as middle or upper-middle managers (department heads, regional managers, plant managers, etc) while 20 percent classified themselves as professional staff (attorneys, physicians, engineers, or psychologists) and 14 percent as senior managers or top-level executives. Only 18 percent worked in manufacturing with the balance in the service sector (including 16 percent in financial services and 11 percent in government. The majority (57 percent) worked in organizations with 100-4,999 employees while only 13 percent worked in organizations with fewer than 50 employees and only 18 percent worked in organizations with over 10,000 employees.

Participants were asked about the availability of 19 different work-family programs in their organizations and were given the response options of "yes", "no", or "I don't know". Work-family benefit availability was measured by asking participants whether their employer offered each of 19 work-family programs or policies. The 19 work-family programs covered a wide range of benefits offered by organizations to help individuals manage work and family obligations, including family care leave, flextime, job-sharing, and sick child care. The total number of practices for which participant responded either "yes" or "no" (rather than "don't know") was used as a measure of their professed knowledge of practice availability. Response frequencies for the 19 practices are provided in the Appendix, Table AI.

Study 2

Data were obtained from the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW), a telephone survey conducted by Louis Harris and Associates for the Families and Work Institute (see Bond *et al.*, 1998 for complete details). For the present research, we used data from 2,877 wage and salaried employees who work for others, thereby excluding the self-employed. Bond *et al.* (1998) estimated the response rate to be 53 percent. Our resulting sample was 48 percent female and 52 percent male; 65 percent were married or in a similar arrangement, 46 percent had responsibility for children under 18, and 19 percent were single parents. A majority were in non-managerial or non-professional positions (66 percent).

Participants were asked about the availability of 12 different work-family programs in their organizations. Response options were "yes", "no", or "I don't know". The total number of practices for which a participant responded either "yes" or "no" (rather than "don't know") was used as a measure of their professed knowledge of practice availability. Response frequencies for the ten practices are provided in the Appendix, Table AII.

Study 3

Data were obtained from the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW), a telephone survey conducted by Harris Interactive, Inc. for the Families and Work Institute (see Bond *et al.*, 2003 for complete details). Respondents were a nationally representative sample of employed adults ($n = 3{,}504$). For the present research, we used data from 2,810 wage and salaried employees who work for others, thereby excluding the self-employed. Bond *et al.* (2003) estimated the response rate to be 61 percent. Our resulting sample was 51 percent female and 49 percent male; 64 percent were married or in a similar arrangement, 72 percent had responsibility for children or elderly or disabled dependents, and 9 percent were single parents. The majority were in non-managerial or non-professional positions (59 percent) with 81 percent in the service rather than manufacturing sector.

Participants were asked about the availability of 12 different work-family programs in their organizations. Response options were "yes", "no", or "I don't know". The total number of practices for which a participant responded either "yes" or "no" (rather than "don't know") was used as a measure of their professed knowledge of practice availability. Response frequencies for the 12 practices are also provided in the Appendix, Table AII.

Study 4

Survey data were collected from 310 full-time employees who worked in 98 organizations in the metropolitan New York area. Individual and organizational demographic data were collected, as well as measures of attitudes towards their employer (i.e. perceived organizational family support, affective commitment, and continuance commitment). Participants were also asked about the availability of 23 work-family practices identified as being useful to working individuals. Response options included "yes," "no," and "unsure" (except for parental leaves where the "unsure" option was not provided). The total number of practices for which participants responded either "yes" or "no" (rather than "unsure") was used as a measure of their professed knowledge of practice availability.

For a smaller subset of the sample ($n = 140$), HR managers' reports of the availability of the 23 practices were obtained, along with reports provided by employees. Response frequencies for the 23 practices are provided in the Appendix, Table AIII.

To measure the total number of work-family practices available, those practices for which respondents answered "yes" were summed for both employees and HR managers (# practices-employee and # practices-HR). In addition, the number of agreements and disagreements were calculated for each individual employee. Employees had 23 opportunities to agree or disagree with their HR manager about whether a practice was offered or not. When the employee indicated that a practice existed and the HR manager said it did not, we labeled this a Type O disagreement, for "overestimate"; when the HR managers reported that a practice existed and the employee said it did not, we labeled this a Type U disagreement, for "underestimate". For the purpose of determining employee/HR manager agreement, a response of "I don't know" by the employee was counted as a "no." For each employee with an HR counterpart the number of agreements, Type O disagreements, and Type U disagreements were calculated (summing to 23 for each individual).

Perceptions of organizational family support were assessed by the nine-item perceived organizational family support (POFS) scale (Jahn *et al.*, 2003), which taps perceptions of intangible organizational support (emotional support) and perceptions of tangible organizational support (instrumental and informational support). Sample items include "My organization puts money and effort into showing its support of employees with families" and "My organization is understanding when an employee has a conflict between work and family". Affective commitment (AC) was measured using the eight-item Meyer *et al.* (1993) scale (e.g. "I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization"). Continuance commitment (CC) was measured using the Meyer *et al.* (1993) eight-item scale (e.g. "Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire"). Items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha for POFS was 0.94, for AC was 0.86 and for CC 0.85 (for all 310 participants).

Control variables for all four studies were coded in the same way (gender, 0 = male, 1 = female; marital status, 0 = single, 1 = married or in similar arrangement). Household income was log transformed for analyses.

Results

In study 1, employees had professed knowledge of 16.28 practices (sd = 3.42), or 86 percent of the 19 possible practices. Professed knowledge ranged from 68 percent (adoption assistance) to 94 percent (part-time work and flexible time) (see the Appendix, Table AI). In study 2, employees had professed knowledge of 9.05 practices (sd = 1.32), or 90.5 percent of the ten possible practices. Professed knowledge ranged from 82 percent (leave availability for males) to 100 percent (flexible time) (see the Appendix, Table AII). In study 3, employees had professed knowledge of 10.55 practices (sd = 1.50), or 84 percent of the 12 possible practices, with a range of 83 percent (part-time workers' benefits) to 100 percent (flexible time) (see the Appendix, Table AIII). In Study 4, the full set of 310 employees had professed knowledge of 16.82 practices (sd = 5.36), or 76 percent of the 23 possible practices. Their professed knowledge ranged from 61 percent (adoption assistance) to 90 percent (compensatory time) (see the Appendix, Table AIII).

On the whole, individuals had greater professed knowledge about generic practices than they did family-specific practices. Specifically, in Study 1, individuals had greater professed knowledge about the seven generic practices (89.4 percent) than they did of the 12 family-specific practices (83.5 percent) [t (276) = 6.01, $p < 0.001$)]. In study 4, individuals had greater professed knowledge about the seven generic practices (84.9 percent) than they did of the 22 family-specific practices (49.4 percent) [t (309) = 32.88,

$p < 0.001$). Given the smaller number of practices of each type in studies 3 and 4, we did not make similar comparisons.

Study 4 allowed us to compare employees' perceptions of program existence with the reports of HR managers. As shown in Table I, the average number of agreements between the subset of 140 employees and their HR managers was 14.24 (sd = 3.76), or 62 percent of the 23 opportunities to agree. The correlation between employee and HR manager reports of the total number of practices offered was 0.38 ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, even with our conservative rule of classifying an employee response of "unsure" as being equivalent to a "no", employees reported a greater number of practices than did their HR counterparts (m = 11.09, sd = 5.84 vs. m = 9.42, sd = 4.33, d = 0.33; $t = 3.40, p < 0.01$). The number of Type O disagreements was greater than the number of Type U disagreements (m = 5.21, sd = 3.98 vs. m = 3.55, sd = 2.82, d = 0.50), suggesting that employees are more likely to overestimate the number and types of benefits offered, rather than to underestimate. It appears that organizations get "a free ride" to the extent that employees ascribe value to phantom benefits.

The prediction that women would have greater professed knowledge of practices than men (*H1*) was partly supported. Zero-order correlations between gender (female = 1; male = 0) and professed knowledge were positive and significant in Studies 1 and 4 (r = 0.12, $p < 0.05$ and r = 0.25, $p < 0.001$, respectively – see Tables II to IV); this was not the case in study 2 (−0.03, ns) and study 3 (0.04, ns). In study 4, the correlation between gender and professed knowledge of family-specific practices was greater than the correlation between gender and generic practices ($r = 0.28$ vs. $r = 08$; $p < 0.05$) whereas the differences in correlations in Study 1 were not statistically significant.

The relationship between gender and professed knowledge was also examined in concert with five other biographic variables (income, employment tenure, marital status, age and number of dependents) – see Table V. The beta coefficient for gender was significant for studies 1, 3, and 4 (beta = 0.18, $p < 0.01$, beta = 0.06, $p < 0.01$, and beta = 0.27, $p < 0.001$, respectively) but not for study 2 (beta = −0.01, ns). All told, the six predictors explained similar amounts of variance (Study 1: $R^2 = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$; Study 2: $R^2 = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$; Study 3: $R^2 = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$; Study 4: $R^2 = 0.12$, $p < 0.001$). In study 4, the beta for gender was significant when professed knowledge of family-specific practices was the dependent variable but not when professed knowledge of generic practices was the dependent variable. For Study 1, the betas for gender were similar and significant for professed knowledge of both types of programs.

The prediction that number of dependents would be positively related to professed knowledge of practices (*H2*) was partially supported. Zero-order correlations between total number of dependents and professed knowledge were positive and significant in Studies 2, 3, and 4 (0.11, $p < 0.001$, 0.09, $p < 0.001$, and 0.20, $p < 0.01$ – see Tables III, IV, and V); but this was not the case for study 1 (0.11, ns). In study 4, the correlation between the number of dependents and professed knowledge of family-specific practices was greater than the correlation between gender and generic practices ($r = 0.23$ vs. $r = 0.03$) at $p < 0.05$) whereas the differences in correlations in study 1 were not statistically significant.

Further, as shown in Table VI, the beta coefficient for number of dependents was significant in studies 2 and 3 only (beta = 0.11, $p < 0.01$ and beta = 0.07, $p < 0.001$) but not for studies 1 and 3 (beta = 0.10, ns, and beta = 0.14, ns, respectively). In study 1, the beta for number of dependents was significant when professed knowledge of generic practices was the dependent variable but not when professed knowledge of family-specific practices was the dependent variable. For study 4, the betas for number

Table I.
Study 4 (Subset of cases with HR manager counterparts, $n = 140$): basic statistics and correlations

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Gender	0.54	0.50	–													
2. Household income	60,093	32,995	−0.05	–												
3. Tenure	6.09	6.10	0.01	0.32***	–											
4. Marital	0.52	0.50	−0.03	0.38***	0.15	–										
5. Dependents	0.91	1.12	0.08	0.09	0.15	0.27**	–									
6. # Practices – employee	11.09	5.84	−0.07	0.05	0.08	0.03	−0.06	–								
7. # Practices – HR manager	9.42	4.33	0.08	0.41***	0.30***	0.02	−0.09	0.38***	–							
8. POFS	3.67	1.43	−0.05	0.08	0.20*	−0.00	0.02	0.45***	0.28**	(0.94)						
9. Affective commitment	4.16	1.23	0.07	0.19*	0.15	0.04	0.04	0.23**	0.09	0.32***	(0.86)					
10. Continuance commit	4.54	1.32	−0.05	0.12	0.25**	0.03	0.14	0.06	0.10	−0.03	0.01	(0.85)				
11. Professed knowledge	16.37	5.45	0.12	0.11	0.17*	0.01	0.20*	−0.81***	−0.18*	−0.21*	0.06	0.03	–			
12. Agreement emp/HR	14.24	3.76	0.06	0.18*	0.05	0.07	0.17*	−0.52***	−0.22*	−0.13	−0.00	−0.06	0.57***	–		
13. Type O disagreement	5.21	3.98	−0.12	−0.27**	−0.13	−0.02	−0.08	0.77***	−0.16	0.24**	0.12	0.02	−0.76***	−0.74***	–	
14. Type U disagreement	3.55	2.82	0.10	0.14	0.11	−0.06	−0.12	−0.40***	0.52***	−0.17*	−0.16	0.05	0.33***	−0.29**	−0.43***	–

Notes: Categorical variables: gender, 0= male, 1= female, marital status, 0= single, 1= married or living with partner. Professed knowledge is number of practices (out of 22) to which participants chose responses of "yes" or "no" rather than "unsure". Household income log transformed for correlation. POFS = Perceived organizational family support. Type O disagreement = employee reported practice existed, HR manager indicated it did not. Type U disagreement = employee reported practice existed did not, HR manager indicated it did. N for variables =140 (except Income =135 and Tenure =137). Cronbach alpha reliabilities for n=310 appear in parenthesis in the diagonal.
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Variables	M	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	0.42	0.50	274	–								
2. Household income	101,876	54,770	262	−0.07	–							
3. Tenure	8.14	7.40	274	−0.12*	0.21***	–						
4. Marital	0.74	0.44	274	−0.23**	0.41***	0.12*	–					
5. Age	40.15	7.70	274	−0.05	0.18**	0.39***	0.01	–				
6. # Dependents	1.03	1.08	274	−0.22***	0.24***	0.01	0.36***	0.03	–			
7. Professed knowledge	16.28	3.42	276	0.12*	0.15**	0.20**	0.12*	0.16**	0.11	–		
8. # Prof. knowledge F	10.02	2.47	276	0.13*	0.17**	0.16**	0.12*	0.14*	0.07	0.96***	-	
9. # Prof. knowledge G	6.26	1.26	276	0.09	0.08	0.22***	0.10	0.16**	0.15*	0.83***	0.64***	–

Notes: Categorical variable: gender, 0= male, 1= female; marital status, 0= single, 1= married or living with partner. Household income log transformed for correlations. Professed knowledge (all) = number of practices (out of 19) to which participant replied "yes" or "no" rather than "unsure". "Prof. Knowledge F" refers to the number of family-specific practices (out of 12). "Professed Knowledge G" refers to the number of generic, non-family-specific practices (out of 7). * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table II.
Study 1 basic statistics and correlations

Table III.
Study 2 basic statistics and correlations

Variables	M	SD	*N*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	0.48	0.50	2,877	–						
2. Household income	58,490	65,086	2,697	−0.09***	–					
3. Tenure	7.45	8.11	2,869	−0.05*	0.25***	–				
4. Marital	0.65	0.48	2,874	−0.06**	0.36***	0.15***	–			
5. Age	36.91	15.65	2,839	0.02	0.16***	0.26***	0.17***	–		
6. # Children	0.80	1.06	2,877	−0.02	0.04*	−0.05*	0.27***	0.05*	–	
7. Professed knowledge	9.05	1.32	2,877	−0.03	0.21***	0.19***	0.10***	0.11***	0.11***	–

Notes: 1997 National Study of the changing workforce. Categorical variables: gender, 0= male, 1= female; marital status, 0= single, 1= married or living with partner. Household income log transformed for correlations. Professed knowledge = number of practices (out of 10 to which participant replied "yes" or "no" rather than "don't know".) * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Variables	M	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	0.58	0.49	2,810	–						
2. Household income	64,132	57,959	2,674	-0.08^{**}	–					
3. Tenure	7.93	8.48	2,810	-0.07^{***}	0.28^{***}	–				
4. Marital	0.64	0.48	2,803	-0.09^{***}	0.49^{***}	0.09^{***}	–			
5. Age	41.71	12.59	2,785	0.04^{*}	0.33^{***}	0.46^{***}	0.12^{***}	–		
6. # Dependents	0.92	1.19	2,808	-0.02	0.10^{***}	-0.05^{*}	0.24^{***}	-0.12^{***}	–	
7. Professed knowledge	10.55	1.50	2,810	0.04	0.26^{***}	0.18^{***}	0.10^{***}	0.04	0.09^{***}	–

Note: 2002 National study of the changing workforce. Categorical variables: gender, 0= male, 1= female; marital status, 0= single, 1= married or living with partner. Household income log transformed for correlations. Professed knowledge = number of practices (out of 12 to which participant replied "yes" or "no" rather than "don't know".) $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$

Table IV.
Study 3 basic statistics and correlations

Independent variables	Dependent variable: professed knowledge Study 1 ($n = 276$)	Study 2 ($n = 2{,}877$)	Study 3 ($n = 2{,}810$)	Study 4 ($n = 310$)
Gender	0.18^{**}	-0.01	0.08^{***}	0.27^{***}
Household income	0.06	0.16^{***}	0.27^{***}	0.12^{*}
Tenure	0.16^{*}	0.14^{***}	0.16^{***}	0.09
Marital	0.09	-0.03	-0.04	-0.02
Age	0.09	0.06^{**}	-0.10^{***}	n/a
# Dependents	0.10	0.11^{**}	0.07^{***}	0.14
R^2	0.10	0.08	0.10	0.12
F	4.54^{***}	36.60^{***}	48.55^{***}	7.97^{***}
DF	6,252	6,2657	6,2644	5,287

Notes: Categorical variables: gender, 0= male, 1= female, marital status, 0= single, 1= married or living with partner. Professed Knowledge refers to the number of practices (out of 19 for study 1, out of 10 for study 2, out of 12 for study 3, and out of 22 for study 4) to which participants responded "yes" or "no" rather than "don't know" or "unsure." Dependents for study 2 are children only; for the other studies it includes care of at least one adult as well as children. For study 1, professed knowledge of 12 D practices only, R^2 =0.08, F(6,252)=3.69^{**} with B: gender, 0.16^{*}; income, 0.10; tenure, 0.12; marital, 0.09; age, 0.08; dependents, 0.05. For study 1, professed knowledge of 7 G practices only, R^2 =0.10, F(6,252)=4.82^{***} with B: gender, 0.17^{**}; income, -0.04; tenure, 0.20^{**}; marital, 0.07; age, 0.08; dependents, 0.17^{**}. For study 4, professed knowledge of 15 D practices only, R^2 =0.14, F(5,287)=9.50^{***} with B: gender, 0.29^{***}; income, 0.13^{*}, tenure, 0.05, marital, -0.02, dependents, 0.18^{**}. For study 4, professed knowledge of 7 G practices only, R^2 =0.05, F(5,287)=3.02^{*} with B: gender, 0.10; income, 0.06, tenure, 0.19^{***}, marital, -0.01, dependents, -0.03. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$

Table V.
Studies 1, 2, 3, and 4: predictors of employee professed knowledge about program availability

of dependents were similar and significant for professed knowledge of both types of programs.

H3, which predicted that organizational tenure would be positively related to professed knowledge of practices, was largely supported. Zero-order correlations between tenure and professed knowledge were positive and significant in all four studies ($r = 0.20, p < 0.01$, $r = 0.19, p < 0.001$, $r = 0.018, p < 0.001$ and $r = 0.13, p < 0.05$ – see Tables II to V). The differences in correlations between tenure and type of programs (family-specific vs. generic) were not statistically significant. As shown in Table VI, the coefficient for organizational tenure was significant in studies 1, 2, and 3 (beta = 0.16, $p < 0.05$, beta = 0.14, $p < 0.001$ and beta = 0.16, $p < 0.001$, respectively) but not for study 4 (beta = 0.09, ns).

H4 predicted that employee perceptions of practice availability would be positively related to attitudes towards the organization (i.e. perceived organizational family support (POFS), affective commitment, and continuance commitment). Zero-order correlations were largely positive for the full sample in study 4: ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$, $r = 0.01$, ns, respectively – see Table V). Results were slightly stronger for the 140 respondents that could be matched with HR managers: ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.23$ $p < 0.05$, and $r = 0.06$, ns, respectively – see Table I).

H5 predicted that relationships between employee perceptions of work-family practices and employee attitudes would be stronger than relationships between employee attitudes and HR reports of practice availability. *H5* was largely supported for perceived organizational family support, but not for either form of commitment. As shown in Table I, the correlation between the number of practices reported by the 140

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender	0.60	0.50	–											
2. Household income	63,333	34,008	−0.04	–										
3. Tenure	6.45	6.45	0.00	0.20**	–									
4. Marital	0.56	0.50	0.01	0.33***	0.18**	–								
5. Dependents	0.90	1.13	0.04	0.06	0.17**	0.22***	–							
6. # Practices – employee	10.63	5.52	−0.17**	−0.00	0.03	0.02	−0.15**	–						
7. POFS	3.69	1.46	−0.01	0.06	0.12*	0.06	0.03	0.41***	(0.94)					
8. Affective commitment	4.18	1.32	0.05	0.12*	0.11	0.07	0.06	0.15**	0.41***	(0.86)				
9. Continuance commit	4.47	1.34	0.06	0.03	0.27***	0.10	0.06	0.01	0.03	0.01	(0.85)			
10. Professed knowledge	16.82	5.36	0.25***	0.13*	0.13*	0.06	0.20**	−0.81***	−0.20***	−0.00	0.04	–		
11. F Prof. knowledge	10.87	4.32	0.28***	0.13*	0.10	0.07	0.23***	−0.80**	−0.21***	0.00	0.03	0.98***	–	
12. G Prof. knowledge	5.95	1.43	0.08	0.08	0.17**	0.04	0.03	−0.57***	−0.10	−0.02	0.04	0.73***	0.56***	–

Notes: Categorical variables: gender, 0= male, 1= female, marital status, 0= single, 1= married or living with partner. Professed knowledge is number of practices (out of 22) to which participants chose responses of "yes" or "no" rather than "unsure". "Prof. knowledge F" refers to the number of family-specific practices (out of 15). "Professed knowledge G" refers to the number of generic, non-family-specific practices (out of 7). Household income log transformed for correlation. POFS = Perceived organizational family support. *N* for variables =310 (except Income =300 and Tenure =302). Cronbach alpha reliabilities for n=310 appear in parenthesis in the diagonal. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table VI.
Study 4 (all cases, $n = 310$): basic statistics and correlations

employees (# Practices-Employee) and POFS ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$) was greater than the correlation of the number of practices reported by HR managers (# Practices-HR) and POFS ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$; $t = 1.75$; $p < 0.05$). Relatedly, Table VII shows the results of regressing employee demographics and # Practices-Employee (model 1) and # Practices-HR (model 2) on each employee attitude (i.e. POFS, affective commitment, and continuance commitment). For both POFS and affective commitment, the regressions were significant for model 1 ($R^2 = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$, respectively) with the beta coefficient for # Practices-Employee significant (beta = 0.44, $p < 0.001$ and beta = 0.23, $p < 0.05$, respectively). The model 1 regression with continuance commitment as the dependent variable was not significant; neither were any of the model 2 regressions between employee attitudes and # Practices-HR.

We found support for *H6*, which predicted that employees' perceptions of overall supportiveness would be positively associated with the magnitude of overestimation of work-family practices and negatively associated the magnitude of underestimation of such practices. As shown in Table I, the zero-order correlation of POFS with the magnitude of Type O disagreement was $r = 0.24$ ($p < 0.01$); the zero-order correlation with the magnitude of Type U disagreement was $r = -0.17$ ($p < 0.05$).

H6 was also examined after controlling for demographic variables using hierarchical regression. As shown in Table VIII, we added # agreements, # Type O disagreements, and # Type U disagreements as step 2 in three different hierarchical regression models with POFS as the dependent variables. For # Type O disagreements, the R^2 was 0.15 ($p < 0.001$) with a beta of 0.31 ($p < 0.001$) while for # Type U disagreements, the R^2 was 0.09 ($p < 0.05$) with a beta of -0.20 ($p < 0.05$). It appears that there is positive relationship between individuals' perceptions of the overall supportiveness of their organization and their overestimating the availability of practices, and a negative relationship with their underestimating the availability of practices. Although the zero-order correlations were, as shown in Table I, significant between # practices-employees and # agreements (-0.52, $p < 0.001$), Type O disagreements (0.77, $p < 0.001$), and Type U disagreements (-0.40, $p < 0.001$) caution is required in interpreting the results because of the possibility

Table VII.
Study 3: comparison of practices as perceived by employees vs. practices as reported by hr managers as predictors of perceived organizational support, affective commitment, and continuance commitment

	Dependent variables					
	Perceived organizational family support		Affective commitment		Continuance commitment	
Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Gender	−0.04	−0.11	0.11	0.09	−0.05	−0.06
Household income	0.01	−0.10	0.18	0.18	0.06	0.04
Tenure	0.18*	0.17	0.08	0.11	0.21*	0.21*
Marital	−0.08	−0.02	−0.07	−0.07	−0.07	−0.07
# Dependents	0.06	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.11	0.11
# Practices – employee	0.44***		0.23**		0.04	
# Practices – HR		0.28**		−0.02		0.04
R^2	0.24	0.12	0.11	0.06	0.07	0.07
F	6.723***	2.70	2.48*	1.21	1.60	1.59
DF	6,125	6,125	6,125	6,125	6,125	6,125

Notes: N=140. Categorical variables: gender, 0= Male, 1= female, marital status, 0= single, 1= married or living with partner. Models 1 and 2 differ only with respect to whether # Practices as reported by employees or by HR counterpart are included with as independent variables. * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed; ** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed; *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed

Independent variables	Dependent variable perceived organizational family support Model 1	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c
Step 1:				
Gender	−0.08	−0.07	−0.03	−0.05
Household income	0.02	0.04	0.11	0.06
Tenure	0.23*	0.22*	0.23**	0.24*
Marital	−0.07	−0.07	−0.10	−0.09
Dependents	0.02	0.05	0.04	−0.00
Step 2:				
# Agreements		−0.17		
# Type O disagreements			0.31***	
# Type U disagreements				−0.20*
ΔR^2	–	0.03	0.09	0.04
ΔF	–	3.73	12.81***	4.97*
R^2	0.06	0.09	0.15	0.09
F	1.56	1.95	3.56**	2.17*
DF	5,126	6,125	6,125	6,125

Notes: N=140. For Model 2a, # Agreements between employees and HR counterparts is added as step 2 after the control variables. For models 2b and 2c, #Type O. Disagreements (Employee yes, HR no) and # Type U Disagreements (Employee no, HR yes), are added, respectively, as step 2. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table VIII.
Study 4: hierarchical regression – agreements and types of disagreement regarding 23 practices as predictors of perceived organizational family support

of multi-collinearity. When we repeated the hierarchical regressions with # practices-employee included in step 2, the beta weights for disagreements ceased to be significant, and the collinearity tolerance statistics were 0.28 for # Type O disagreements, and 0.75 for # Type U disagreements.

General discussion

The present research contributes to the work-family literature in several respects and has implications for both researchers and practitioners. First, while prior research has collected data on work-family benefit knowledge from employees and employers within single organizations (Haar and Spell, 2004; Hannigan, 2003) and inquired about knowledge of a relatively small number of benefits offered by each organization, we examined responses from employees who worked for many different organizations and inquired about a wider variety of benefits. Additionally, prior research only assessed practices that were actually offered by the organization (e.g. Haar and Spell, 2004) or included just a few fictitious or unavailable programs in their list of benefits (e.g. Hannigan, 2003). In contrast, our study provided more variation in the number of practices to be assessed by the respondent, and presented more opportunities for respondents to erroneously acknowledge the existence of non-existent practices. Second, by acquiring data on extant programs from human resource managers on a program-by-program basis, we were able to compare employee perceptions of program availability with the reality as reported by human resource managers. As a result, we were able to ascertain not only the extent of agreement, but the types of disagreements as well.

Although past researchers have demonstrated that organizational culture may represent an obstacle to individuals attaining work-family balance (e.g. Allen, 2001; Hyman and Summers, 2004; Thompson *et al.*, 1999), the present research suggests an

additional potential impediment – namely, employees may have limited or inaccurate knowledge of available practices. When looking at specific programs, we found, for example, that employees on the whole had little knowledge of the availability of adoption assistance benefits. Evidently, fewer employees were considering adoptions than might be interested in on-site childcare. Along these lines, because part-time or flexible work place programs might be useful both to employees with family care responsibilities as well as those without dependent-care needs, it is not surprising that most employees in our samples reported they knew whether or not flexible work scheduling benefits existed.

From a practitioner perspective, the data suggest that organizations with established work-family programs may need to put additional resources into communicating the existence of these programs and to reducing the effort that employees need to expend to obtain such information. Information about the existence of an adoption assistance program, for example, may signal to employees that their organization values and respects employees' family needs and this might, in turn, increase the affective commitment of all employees, even those with no intention to use adoption assistance. Because relatively few employees consider adoption, only a small minority would exert much effort to learn of such a program's existence – and part of the potential benefit to the employer would be lost. While the employing organization may not be able to influence the salience of benefits to employees, it may want to lower the time and effort employees must exert to acquire information by adjusting its internal communication strategies and practices. For example, the visibility of work-family programs can be enhanced by placing a link to the company's work-life website in a prominent position on the company intranet home page. The work-life website should describe the company's work-life balance programs and best practices, stories of employees successfully using work-life programs such as telecommuting, as well as general information about work-life balance.

As some employees might never visit a work-life website, general corporate communication media should also be used, especially to publicize existence of programs that might be used by few but which – if known of – would be viewed by many as an expression of organizational concern. For example, a story in a corporate newsletter of an employee who used the adoption assistance program might be read by many who would never investigate whether such a program existed. In addition, communications from top management, including the CEO, that emphasize the availability of work-life programs would likely enhance the acceptability of these programs. Former CEO Phil Laskawy, for example, contributed to the visibility of work-life programs at Ernst & Young by discussing the importance of work-life balance in his frequent firm-wide voice mails (Friedman *et al.*, 2000).

The present research suggests that the relationship between formal practices and employees' perceptions of a supportive organization is likely reciprocal and complex. The existence of formal programs may be seen as surface-level "artifacts" of an underlying system of shared organizational values that are supportive of employees' family and professional interests and obligations. Employees then interpret the offering of formal programs as representing the organization's concern with the employee qua family member. In fact, recent research suggests that there is a relationship between the number of practices that employees perceive the organization offers and employees' evaluation of the organization as being supportive (Kopelman *et al.*, 2006). The present research also suggests that employees' perceptions about specific practice availability may be affected by their view of how supportive the organization is in general toward family and personal needs. When asked if a practice

exists, an employee is unlikely to consult a complete and accurate record of the practices and programs offered by the employer. Rather, the employee will respond with confidence about some programs and policies (based perhaps on having used them, or seen them being used by coworkers) and may guess about others for which he or she has less knowledge. Our data suggest that when employees see the organization as generally supportive, they are more likely to give the organization the benefit of the doubt regarding unknown work-family practices. And the opposite seems to occur when employees perceive low overall family supportiveness. There may be a halo effect such that some organizations get a "free ride" because employees assume the existence of phantom policies, while other organizations fail to gain because benefits go unacknowledged and unseen – yet paid for.

Our research also raises questions about the relationship between work-life programs and types of organizational commitment. While past research suggests that both affective and continuance commitment have negative relationships with turnover intentions and turnover (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990), they appear to differ with respect to other work-related behaviors and attitudes (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Affective commitment has been shown to be positively related to outcomes that are favorable for organizations (e.g. job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, identification with organizational goals and values) as well as for individuals (e.g. stress and work-family conflict), while continuance commitment had nil or even negative relationships with performance, absenteeism, organizational citizenship behavior, stress, and work-family conflict (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Iles *et al.*, 1996; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; O'Driscoll and Randall, 1999; Organ and Ryan, 1995; Randall and O'Driscoll, 1997). Along these lines, our results are consistent with Haar and Spell's (2004) findings that perceived organizational support and program knowledge were positively related to affective but not continuance commitment. As such, policies and practices that increase affective commitment but not continuance commitment might be especially valuable, as organizations not only want their employees to stay, but also contribute to the organization by performing well, exhibiting citizenship behaviors, and having lower levels of absenteeism.

Yet, we need to understand more fully why relationships with continuance commitment are weaker or non-existent. While social exchange theory would predict positive relationships between affective commitment and the number of work-life practices, continuance commitment may be more related to the perceived value of the practices to the employee as well as their perceptions of how available the practices would be from alternative employers. Although some work-family benefits may be appreciated as signals of concern, others may be viewed as having relatively low economic or practical value to employees (or are seen as being easily obtainable from alternative employers). To better understand the different relationships between work-life benefits and both forms of commitment, future research should examine the perceived value of various benefits as well as perceptions of their availability from other potential employers.

Future researchers may also want to consider how the motives employees impute to the organization's decision to offer benefits may affect their reactions (Koys, 1991). One employee might believe that an organization is offering on-site childcare out of genuine concern for the well being of the employee and his or her family, while another employee might view it simply as a response to competitive conditions in the labor market. Some employees may even believe that some benefits (such as paid parental leave) are required by law or government regulation. Employees may view flexible

scheduling arrangements as being offered to enhance organizational performance rather than to benefit them individually.

One of the strengths of this research is the use of multiple studies conducted over the period from 1996 to 2002. However, as the studies differed substantially with respect to the practices they addressed, our ability to interpret differences between studies is limited. Compared to studies 2 and 3, studies 1 and 4 not only inquired about more practices but also asked for more finely tuned distinctions (e.g. childcare vouchers versus childcare discounts), as well as about practices for which there was less general knowledge (such as adoption assistance). In study 1, of the 19 practices, the mean professed knowledge was 85.7 percent, and for the 22 practices in study 4, the mean professed knowledge was 76.3 percent; the mean percentages for studies 2 and 3 were each 94 percent. Not surprisingly, the coefficients of variation (i.e. standard deviation divided by the mean, which allows one to compare variation within variables) differed: Study 1, 21.0 percent; study 2, 14.6 percent; study 3, 14.2 percent; and study 4, 31.9 percent.

It is possible that employee knowledge might have improved over the time span of the four studies (1996 to 2002). As organizations were becoming increasingly sensitive to changing employee demographics and needs, one might expect that more programs and benefits would be introduced, and information about work-life programs would be more widely disseminated. However, in their studies of two representative samples of workers in the US, Bond *et al.* (1998, 2003) found that availability of family-specific programs such as childcare services and resource and referral services was unchanged during the ten-year period from 1992 to 2002, although the availability of flextime programs increased. They found a slight increase in the perceived supportiveness of supervisors and the organizational culture over the ten-year period. Thus, it appears unlikely that the relative lack of knowledge of work-life programs will correct itself as a result of dramatic changes in organizational cultures or as family-specific programs become institutionalized.

Several limitations of the present research should be mentioned. First, there has been some controversy about relying on single sources of information on human resource practices. For example, Gerhart *et al.* (2000) were critical of reliance on a single source and argued for multiple sources and tests of interrater reliabilities, while Huselid and Becker (2000) argued that the practice was reasonable within limits. While acknowledging that having multiple HR managers report on practices might allow us to be more confident that their responses represent reality, we note that Gerhart *et al.* (2000) and Huselid and Becker (2000) disputed the reliability of finer grained information than we asked our HR managers. For example, Huselid and Becker asked informants to indicate, for both exempt and non-exempt categories of employees, "What proportion of the workforce is promoted based primarily on merit (as opposed to seniority)" and, "If the market rate for total cash compensation is considered to be the 50th percentile, what is your firm's target percentile for total cash compensation?" The information requested for the present research is far coarser, as informants were asked whether specific programs were officially offered or not. Multiple respondents (employees as well as HR managers) would be desirable if we were attempting to calibrate information in terms of the percentage of employees covered, but we were only interested in assessing whether specific work-family practices were offered.

Additionally, to the extent that there might be a bias towards HR managers overstating benefit availability, our finding that employees on average thought there were more programs than were actually available suggests otherwise. Similarly, instructions to employees in study 1 and study 4 were silent as to whether they should

consult policy manuals or other sources of information when they were responding to items regarding benefit availability. While we think it unlikely that respondents would put such effort into completing the surveys, that possibility would introduce a conservative bias into our assessment of their level of knowledge.

The present research also relied on data collected at one point in time. Therefore, we cannot say conclusively that biographic factors (e.g. dependent children, gender) were causally related to work-family benefit knowledge. However, it seems reasonable to assume that family situation (e.g. number of dependent children) had more impact on benefit knowledge than benefit knowledge had impact on family situation.

Additionally, while we posited that the women would be more knowledgeable about work-family benefits because they bear greater responsibility for family care, it is possible that the gender-related differences as measured by the response of "don't know" or "unsure" about programs are artifacts, possibly related to (or explained by) other factors. It might be the case, for example, that women are less likely to choose a response that indicates uncertainty, at least with respect to work-family benefits. However, with respect to the subset of persons whose reports were matched with their human resource managers, gender was unrelated to agreements or disagreements. Similarly, employees with longer tenure might have felt they should know their employers' programs and therefore been less willing to admit they did not. Again, with respect to the subset of employees with human resource counterparts, organizational tenure was unrelated to agreements or disagreements.

In summary, the results of our research suggest that knowledge of work-family programs is highest among employees for whom such programs would be most salient. However, regardless of salience, employee knowledge of the existence of family-friendly benefits is positively related to perceptions of how family-supportive the organization is, as well as affective commitment to the organization. To reap the benefits of these programs, it behooves organizations to think creatively about how best to communicate their existence, as well as reduce the time and effort that employees must expend to learn about program availability.

Note

1. We thank one of the reviewers for suggesting we use this classification of work-life benefits for further analyses.

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Further reading

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Appendix

Type	Practice	% Don't know	% Professed knowledge	% Yes	% No
G	Absence autonomy (ability to take absences when needed, work fewer hours one day, make up another day)	6	94	67	28
F	Adoption assistance (financial aid)	32	68	16	52
F	Emergency child care (to supplement normal childcare)	15	85	31	54
F	Family leaves (for maternity, paternity, adoption)	7	93	88	5
F	Family resource center (information and referrals)	20	80	45	35
G	Flexible place (work at home or telecommuting)	8	92	43	49
F	Flexible spending accounts (pre-tax dollars for childcare)	8	92	59	33
G	Flexible time (ability to set start/stop time)	6	94	62	32
F	Handbooks describing companies WF programs	12	88	52	36
G	Job sharing	15	85	31	54
F	Manager training to sensitive them to WF issues	20	80	20	59
F	Mission statement acknowledging employees' family lives	17	83	14	70
F	On- or near-site child care sponsored by employer	7	93	14	79
G	Part-time return-to-work provisions	26	74	46	28
G	Part-time work	6	94	75	19
G	Stress management training	9	91	53	38
F	Sick child care	21	79	26	52
F	Time off for dependent care (child or eldercare)	17	83	60	23
F	Work family support group	19	81	28	53
	All 19 practices, means and sds	14.26 (7.54)	85.74 (7.54)	43.68 (21.68)	42.05 (18.31)
	12 F practices, means and sds	16.25 (7.17)	83.75 (7.17)	37.75 (23.20)	45.92 (20.49)
	7 G practices, means and sds	10.86 (7.40)	88.33 (7.76)	51.67 (15.41)	36.67 (13.14)

Table AI.
Study 1: employee response as to practice availability

Notes: *N*=276. *F*= Family-specific practice. *G*= Generic and non-family specific practice. Professed knowledge refers to the percentage of participants who responded "yes" or "no" rather than "don't know".

Table AII.
Studies 2 and 3: employee response as to practice availability

		Study 2 (1997 NSCW)				Study 3 (2002 NSCW)			
Type	Practice	% Don't know	% Professed knowledge	% Yes	% No	% Don't know	% Professed knowledge	% Yes	% No
F	Childcare financial assistance	4	96	13	83	8	92	11	82
F	Childcare referral service	7	93	18	74	9	91	19	72
F	Eldercare referral service	9	91	23	69	12	88	22	66
F	Family health insurance through job	1	99	95	5	2	98	95	3
F	Family health insurance paid entirely or partially by employer	4	96	84	13	5	95	84	14
F	Family leave – males	18	82	65	17	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
F	Family leave – females	7	93	87	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
F	Flexible spending account (pre-tax dollars for childcare)	7	93	27	66	11	89	33	55
G	Flex time (can choose own start/quitting times)	0	100	44	46	0	100	46	54
F	Onsite childcare center	3	97	11	87	3	97	12	85
G	Compressed work week	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	97	41	56
G	Part-time work schedules	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	99	71	28
G	Part-time workers receive comparable benefits	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	18	83	32	51
G	Seasonal work possible	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	99	20	80
	All practices, means and sds	6.00 (5.10)	94.00 (5.10)	46.70 (33.12)	46.50 (33.42)	6.08 (5.55)	94.00 (5.36)	40.50 (28.38)	53.83) (26.29)
	F practices, means and sds	6.67 (4.92)	93.33 (4.92)	47.00 (35.12)	46.56 (35.45)	7.14 (3.89)	92.86 (3.89)	39.43 (35.11)	53.86 (32.70)
	G practices, means sds	0.0 (na)	100 (na)	44 (na)	46 (na)	4.60 (7.14)	95.60 (6.71)	42.00 (18.86)	53.80 (18.47)

Notes: F= Family-specific practice. G= Generic and non-family specific practice. For the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce, n=2,877; For the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce, n=2,810 (n for some individual items less). There were ten practices assessed in 1997 and 12 practices assessed in 2002. Professed knowledge refers to the percentage of participants who responded "yes" or "no" rather than "don't know".

Table AIII.
Study 4: employee and HR manager responses as to practice availability, agreements, and types of disagreement

Type	Practice/program	% Employees professing knowledge	% Reporting practice Emp	HR	% Emp/HR agreement	% Type O disagree	% Type U disagree
Type	Practice/Program						
F	Adoption financial assistance	61	10	64	44	0	56
F	After school programs	78	4	6	76	22	1
F	Caregiver fair (on-site event for caregivers to distribute information)	76	8	13	59	33	8
F	Child care discounts	65	9	24	64	28	9
F	Child care resource center (information and counseling for childcare needs)	63	20	56	54	24	22
F	Child care vouchers	65	1	6	66	31	2
G	Compensatory time (extra hours worked may be used as time off)	90	49	62	71	14	15
G	Compressed work week	88	23	44	58	16	26
F	Eldercare resource center (information and counseling for eldercare needs)	64	16	58	54	21	24
F	Family leaves (unpaid time off)	100	75	39	59	39	3
F	Family picnic or other social events	87	39	58	53	21	26
G	Flexible benefits (menu of benefits)	86	51	65	56	21	22
G	Flex place (work at home or satellite locations)	86	19	27	64	22	14
F	Flexible spending accounts for childcare expenses	73	35	69	63	14	23
G	Flex time (flexible starting/quitting)	88	54	51	58	27	15
G	Job sharing	78	15	39	55	22	23
F	On- or near-site childcare center	80	18	28	69	21	9
G	Part time work schedules	83	60	75	72	18	10
F	Sick/emergency child care (help or cost-coverage for emergency care)	69	9	15	60	34	6
F	Sick child extra days off	62	24	64	61	29	9
F	Summer camp programs for children	80	5	6	71	26	3
F	WF seminar (informational sessions)	79	19	57	67	9	24
F	WF support group (employee run discussion groups)	77	11	17	69	26	4
	All 22 practices, means and sds	76.2 (9.60)	22.68 (17.55)	41.09 (23.45)	62.00 (7.78)	21.77 (7.95)	15.95 (12.32)
	15 F practices, means and sds	71.93 (8.25)	15.20 (10.98)	36.07 (24.94)	62.00 (8.32)	22.60 (9.19)	15.07 (14.50)
	7 G practices, means and sds	85.57 (3.99)	38.71 (18.89)	51.86 (16.62)	62.00 (7.09)	20.00 (4.36)	17.86 (5.81)

Notes: *N*=140, Employees and HR Managers. F= Family-specific practice. G= Generic and non-family specific practice. Employees were given response options of yes, no, or not sure for all practices (except for family leaves where only yes or no were response options). "Sure" responses were those in which employees responded "yes" or "no" rather than "not sure". For purposes of determining agreement between employees and corresponding HR managers, "unsure" responses counted as a "no." Type O Disagreement = employee reported practice existed, HR Manager indicated it did not. Type U Disagreement = employee reported practice existed, HR Manager indicated it did

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