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Introduction

The documentation of the organizational outcomes associated with workplace-based policies and programs continues to be important to employers and researchers alike.

The following summary is based on an article written by Sharon Lobel and Leslie Faught (1996), "Four Methods for Proving the Value of Work/Life Initiatives," Compensation and Benefits Review, 28 (6), p. 50-57.

Basic Concepts and Definitions

Organizational outcomes, such as absenteeism and morale, can be distinguished from individual and family outcomes, such as mental health or marital satisfaction. Although workplace policies and programs may have broad impacts outside of work, in this section we will focus primarily on organizational outcomes.

As conceptualized by Lobel and Faught (1996), there are four basic approaches to measuring organizational outcomes.

1. The human-cost approach, adopted by authors such as Konrad & Mangel, 2000 and Kossek & Grace, 1990, focuses on the savings associated with reduced labor costs (for example, as indicated by: absenteeism, turnover, productivity) that result from employer-supports.

2. The human-investment approach, outlined by Cohen, 1999, attempts to document the long-term financial benefits that are related to employer-supports (for example, as indicated by: recruitment, retention, morale, productivity).

3. The stakeholder approach to measurement, described by authors including Litchfield, 1999 and Mirvis, 1999, considers the different types of benefits that are gained by members of stakeholders groups including not only employees and employers, but also other firm stakeholders such as customers (for example, as indicated by: attitudes, reputation, commitment to company or project satisfaction).
4. Finally, the strategy approach assesses the extent to which work/life initiatives facilitate the company's ability to make progress on key business strategies (for example, as indicated by the congruence of work/life objectives and globalization, growth, etc.). This approach has been discussed by Lambert, 1999 and others.

It is important to understand that the research has measured both positive as well as negative outcomes associated (directly and/or indirectly) with employees' work/life experiences and with the establishment of work/life initiatives.

**Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies**

An employee's work/life challenges affect workplace performance and experiences. Similarly, organizational policies can have an impact on employees in and out of the workplace. Organizational impacts are more likely to be beneficial when the policies aim to support employees in meeting their work/life goals.

**State of the Body of Knowledge**

As work/life policy makers know, some organizational decision-makers are reluctant to invest in developing policies and programs until clear benefits to the organization can be demonstrated. Many studies have been conducted that document some organizational benefits. Research has measured the impact of programs, such as on-site child care, flextime, parental leave, work-family workshops, and other work/life supports on: employee attitudes, individual and team performance, human resource management indicators (e.g., absenteeism, turnover, etc.), and organizational strategic goals (see discussion in Lobel, 1999). For example, Catalyst (1998) found that use of flexible work arrangements was associated with improved individual performance. Grover and Crooker (1995) found that the availability of family responsive practices was associated with increased attachment to the organization.

It should be noted that some studies have noted neutral or negative outcomes associated with particular work/life supports. For instance, Kossek and Nichol (1992) found that the use of on-site child care was not related to absenteeism.

As the bibliography for this section demonstrates, research methods have improved to the extent that we no longer need to rely on anecdotal evidence or a small sample of case studies.

**Implications for Practice and Research**

Employers often confront significant obstacles as they attempt to measure organizational outcomes of work/life programs, policies, and strategies.
1. It is a challenge to separate and isolate the effects of particular dimensions of work/life initiatives (e.g., distinguishing improvements in workplace climate from the utilization of a specific benefit).

2. Although there has been some effort to apply different types of social accounting techniques to the measurement of organizational outcomes (see Cohen, 1999), the clarification of costs/benefits has with regard to work/life initiatives has remained somewhat elusive. In part, the difficulties are associated with the complexities associated with quantifying some of the outcomes as well as the processes/policies, such as flexibility, that are central to many work/life initiatives.

3. It is difficult to gather data about many of the informal arrangements and relationships that play a role in an employer's response to employees' work/life situation.

4. From a methodological perspective, it is difficult to measure the contribution that work/life initiatives make to employees' performance, much less to organizational productivity since a number of other factors also affect these outcomes.

Researchers and practitioners need establish creative collaborations that can adapt diverse measurement approaches -- ranging from balanced scorecards to breakeven calculations to benchmarking -- to employer-sponsored work/life initiatives (see Pitt-Catsouphes, 1999).

References


**Other Recommended Readings on this Topic:**


Locations in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Studies

The Editorial Board of the Teaching Resources section of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared a Matrix as a way to locate important work-family topics in the broad area of work-family studies. (More about the Matrix ...).

Note: The domain areas most closely related to the entry’s topic are presented in full color. Other domains, represented in gray, are provided for context.

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Introduction

It was appropriate that the members of the Founding Editorial Board of the Resources for Teaching began their work in 2000, for their project represented one of the turning points in the area of work and family studies. This group accepted the challenge of developing resources that could support the efforts of teaching faculty from different disciplines and professional schools to better integrate the work-family body of knowledge into their curricula. The Virtual Think Tank began its work with a vision, a spirit of determination, and sense of civic responsibility to the community of work-family scholars.

A fundamental challenge emerged early in the process. It became clear that before we could design resources that would support the teaching of those topics, we would first need to inventory topics and issues relevant to the work-family area of studies (and begin to distinguish the work-family aspect of these topics from "non work-family" aspects).

The members of the Virtual Think Tank were well aware that surveying the area of work and family studies would be a daunting undertaking. However, we really had no other choice. And so, we began to grapple with the mapping process.

Purpose

1. To develop a preliminary map of the body of knowledge relevant to the work-family area of study that reflects current, "across-the-disciplines" understanding of work-family phenomena.

2. To create a flexible framework (or map) that clarifies the conceptual relationships among the different information domains that comprise the work-family knowledge base.

It is important to understand that this mapping exercise was undertaken as a way to identify and organize the wide range of work-family topics. This project was not intended as a meta-analysis for determining the empirical relationships between specific variables. Therefore, our map of the work-family area of study does not include any symbols that might suggest the relationships between specific factors or clusters of factors.
Process

The Virtual Think Tank used a 3-step process to create the map of the work-family area of studies.

1. **Key Informants:** The members of the Virtual Think Tank included academics from several different disciplines and professions who have taught and written about work-family studies for years. During the first stage of the mapping process, the Virtual Think Tank functioned as a panel of key informants.

Initially, the Panel engaged in a few brainstorming sessions to identify work-family topics that could be addressed in academic courses. The inductive brainstorming sessions initially resulted in the identification of nearly 50 topics.

Once the preliminary list of topics had been generated, members of the Virtual Think Tank pursued a deductive approach to the identification of work-family issues. Over the course of several conversations, the Virtual Think Tank created a conceptual map that focused on information domains (see Table 1 below).

The last stage of the mapping process undertaken by the Virtual Think Tank consisted of comparing and adjusting the results of the inductive and deductive processes. The preliminary, reconciled list was used as the first index for the Online Work and Family Encyclopedia.

2. **Literature review:** Members of the project team conducted literature searches to identify writings in which authors attempted to map the work-family area of study or specific domains of this area. The highlights of the literature review will be posted on February 1, 2002 when the First Edition of the Work-Family Encyclopedia will be published.

3. **Peer review:** On October 1, 2001, the Preliminary Mapping of the work-family area of study was posted on the website of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The members of the Virtual Think Tank invite work-family leaders to submit suggestions and comments about the Mapping and the List of Work-Family Topics. The Virtual Think Tank will consider the suggestions and, as indicated, will make adjustments in both of these products. Please send your comments to Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes at pittcats@bc.edu
Assumptions

Prior to identifying the different information domains relevant to the work-family area of study, members of the Virtual Think Tank adopted two premises:

1. **Our use of the word “family” refers to both traditional and nontraditional families. Therefore, we consider the term “work-family” to be relevant to individuals who might reside by themselves.** Many work-family leaders have noted the problematic dimensions of the term “work-family” (see Barnett, 1999). In particular, concern has been expressed that the word “family” continues to connote the married couple family with dependent children, despite the widespread recognition that family structures and relationships continue to be very diverse and often change over time. As a group, we understand the word “family” to refer to relationships characterized by deep caring and commitment that exist over time. We do not limit family relationships to those established by marriage, birth, blood, or shared residency.

2. **It is important to examine and measure work-family issues and experiences at many different levels, including: individual, dyadic (e.g., couple relationships, parent-child relationships, care giver care taker relationships), family and other small groups, organizational, community, and societal.** Much of the work-family discourse glosses over the fact that the work-family experiences of one person or stakeholder group may, in fact, be different from (and potentially in conflict with) those of another.

Outcomes

We will publish a Working Paper, "Mapping the Work-Family Area of Study," on the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in 2002. In this publication, we will acknowledge the comments and suggestions for improvement sent to us.

Limitations

It is important to understand that the members of the Virtual Think Tank viewed their efforts to map the work-family area of study as a "work in progress." We anticipate that we will periodically review and revise the map as this area of study evolves.

The members of the panel are also cognizant that other scholars may have different conceptualizations of the work-family area of study. We welcome your comments and look forward to public dialogue about this important topic.
The members of the Virtual Think Tank wanted to focus their map of work-family issues around the experiences of five principal stakeholder groups:

1. individuals,
2. families,
3. workplaces,
4. communities, and
5. society-at-large.

Each of these stakeholder groups is represented by a row in the Table 1, Information Domain Matrix (below).

Work-Family Experiences: The discussions of the members of the Virtual Think Tank began with an identification of some of the salient needs & priorities/problems & concerns of the five principal stakeholder groups. These domains are represented by the cells in Column B of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individuals' work-family needs & priorities
- Individuals' work-family problems & concerns
- Families' work-family need & priorities
- Families' work-family problems & concerns
- Needs & priorities of workplaces related to work-family issues
- Workplace problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs & priorities of communities related to work-family issues
- Communities' problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs and priorities of society related to work-family issues
- Societal problems & concerns related to work-family issues

Antecedents: Next, the Virtual Think Tank identified the primary roots causes and factors that might have either precipitated or affected the work-family experiences of the principal stakeholder groups. These domains are highlighted in Column A of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individual Antecedents
- Family Antecedents
- Workplace Antecedents
• Community Antecedents
• Societal Antecedents

Covariates: The third set of information domains include factors that moderate the relationships between the antecedents and the work-family experiences of different stakeholder groups (see Column C in Table 1).

• Individual Covariates
• Family Covariates
• Workplace Covariates
• Community Covariates
• Societal Covariates

Decisions and Responses: The responses of the stakeholder groups to different work-family experiences are highlighted in Column D.

• Individual Decision and Responses
• Family Decisions and Responses
• Workplace Decisions and Responses
• Community Decisions and Responses
• Public Sector Decisions and Responses

Outcomes & Impacts: The fifth set of information domains refer to the outcomes and impacts of different work-family issues and experiences on the principal stakeholder groups (see Column E).

• Outcomes & Impacts on Individuals
• Outcomes & Impacts on Families
• Outcomes & Impacts on Workplaces
• Outcomes & Impacts on Communities
• Outcomes & Impacts on Society

Theoretical Foundations: The Virtual Think Tank established a sixth information domain to designate the multi-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings to the work-family area of study (noted as Information Domain F).
Table 1: Matrix of Information Domains (9/30/01)

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