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CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE WORK-FAMILY PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Defining and determining the responsibility of business organizations to provide and assist employees with work-family programs and initiatives (e.g., employee assistance programs, parental leave extensions, childcare, elder care benefits, flextime, compressed workweek, and telecommuting) is a current critical issue that has ignited controversy during the past few decades. The author argues that work-family programs (at some level) should be a part of every company and should be strongly linked to employer benefits. To expand and implement work-family programs and services in companies today, she argues that training and educating business leaders about work-family options and benefits is the best solution. This paper presents the author's opinions as she discusses and defines work-family programs and services, presents arguments in favor and against incorporating work-family programs, and offers suggestions and conclusions regarding how to find a balance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Work-family programs and services are designed to assist, support, and/or encourage employees in effectively balancing their family and work responsibilities. These programs (e.g., employee assistance programs, parental leave extensions, childcare, elder care benefits, flextime, compressed workweek, and telecommuting) may offer physical, emotional, mental, financial, or even social support to employees and their families. A current critical issue that has ignited controversy during the past decade is defining and determining the responsibility of business organizations to provide and assist employees with work-family programs. The debate surrounding the passage of the U.S. Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in 1993 and the continual legislation proposing various mandates for employers to provide paid leave for pregnant mothers and others are just a few components of this issue. Traditionally, workplace work-family programs and initiatives have not been prevalent, but because of the continual changes in the needs of families these programs are becoming an essential part of changing, effective organizations throughout the world. In fact, Anderson, Morgan, and Wilson (2002) explained that with the rising number of dual-

career families many employers have paid more attention to policies focused on helping employees manage their work and family needs.

There is little doubt that employees are confronting new and unparalleled challenges in meeting the demands of work and family (Jacobs & Gerson, 1998). Prior to the Second World War, most families had a wife/mother at home full time. From 1950 to 1991, the number of married women in the U. S. with paying jobs more than tripled. In 1995, wives account for nearly three-fifths of all employed women. Bravo (1995) reported that

In 1950, only 12 percent of women with children under the age of six were in the paid labor force. In 1990, that figure had skyrocketed to 57 percent—due in part to the increasing need of families for the wives' income and to the growing number of family's dependent of women's income alone. (p. 12)

In Finland, the female participation rate in the workforce is even higher. In fact, in 1993 nearly 73 percent of women with preschool children were employed, most of whom were full-time (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). In addition to the increase in employed mothers throughout many parts of the world, other workforce changes include the transformation of family and household structure, the increase of stress and working hours (Jacobs & Gerson, 1998), the changing roles of men and women, and the adjustment of job requirements (e.g., increased travel). In addition, it is estimated that one out of five U. S. Americans will be over 65 years of age by the year 2030 (Commission, 1996) which will add more challenges for employers and employees.

Along with the changes in the workforce, many countries (e.g., Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Japan, Kenya, Netherlands, Sweden, U.K., U.S.A.) already have current regulated policies related to numerous work-family needs and challenges (e.g., maternity and paternity leave, parental leave, sick child) (Bravo, 1995; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). These policies reflect increasing and continuous work-family changes and challenges (e.g., childcare, elder care) throughout the world.

It is clear that more employees today need (and many are demanding) more work-family programs and services. In fact, many employees change jobs based on a company's work-family initiatives. However, according to the Families and Work Institute's (2002) *National Study of the Changing Workforce*, "work-life supports on the job—both specific benefit entitlements and less formal policies and practices—have increased somewhat, although not a lot, in the past decade" (p. 2). Interestingly, MetLife released their 2003 *Study of Employee Benefits Trends* which reported that for 43 percent of employers surveyed (the largest group) "helping employees achieve work-life balance is their most important employee benefits strategy" (The Work and Family Connection, 2004). Apparently, at least some research has found that this is an important issue to both employers and employees, but there appears to be a gap between the recognition of the need and the implementation of work-life support

programs. Then again, there are millions of employees working for companies who do not even recognize the need to provide such support.

One major outcome of the inability to balance the demands of work and family is work-family conflict (Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, & Keough, 2003; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). Studies have reported substantial work-family conflict among employees in the United States (e.g., Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994), Finland (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998), Hong Kong (Aryee, Luk, Leung, & Lo, 1999), Australia (Abbot, De Cieri, & Iverson, 1998), and Singapore (Aryee, 1992). Conflict between work and family life often manifests itself in excessive work time demands, incompatible schedules, and fatigue, irritability, and stress (Eagle, Miles, Icenogle, 1997). These outcomes can then lead to marital and family problems, illness and other health concerns, absenteeism, high turnover intentions, and instability. When a single parent or both parents are employed full-time, difficulties arise when there are problems, sickness, or concerns in the family. If the workplace is not flexible, the employee will experience increased levels of stress and conflict. Importantly, these concerns are also present for non-emergency situations, such as attending parent-teacher conferences, attending plays or programs during school hours, volunteering to chaperone a field trip, performing community service, or even doing something special on a child's birthday. Similar struggles can also occur with an ailing parent who has special needs and concerns. Many leaders feel that if employees participate in these types of activities, they are not focusing 100 percent of their efforts for their employers. In today's society, there is a strong family and societal need for employees to participate in these activities. If designed appropriately, however, this participation should not preclude an employee from continuing to accomplish desired objectives and results in the workplace (Bond et al., 1997). Edwards (2000) explained that

Many organizations are expanding operations globally and therefore, require key employees to travel or work abroad. These assignments can strain family relationships and compel employees to withdraw or resign which, in turn, hinders global operations. Analogously, many families required income from both parents to cover expenses, and these dual-earner families place pressure on organizations to implement family-friendly policies. (p. 178)

Because of expanding and continuous research in this area, full justification of the need for work-family programs is detailed and complex. Although there are other reasons for this increased need, the ones I have noted remain at the forefront of this debate. There is a need for work-family programs and this need will continue to grow as the workforce demographics and job requirements continue to develop and change.

Some work-family proponents argue that all organizations have the responsibility to provide work-family programs regardless of the cost or impact they may have on the organization. However, I will argue that all organizations can and should provide some form(s) of work-family programs and/or initiatives but that these

should be linked to (support and benefit) the organization's missions and goals. In today's business environment it is crucial for work-family consultants/specialists to show a link between these programs and benefits to the employer. In fact, if more employers were trained and educated about these programs and their benefits to the organization, more would be willing to implement effective work-family programs for their employees. I will present my opinions and these arguments by discussing and defining work-family programs and services, presenting arguments in favor and against incorporating work-family programs, and offering suggestions and conclusions regarding how to find a balance.

II. WORK-FAMILY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

As previously discussed, work-family programs and services are designed to assist, support, and/or encourage employees in effectively balancing their family and work responsibilities. These programs may offer physical, emotional, mental, financial, or even social support to employees and their families. Schmidt and Duenas (2002) studied various organizational responses to current work and family challenges. They found that companies were creating and expanding programs such as employee assistance programs, parental leave extensions, childcare, elder care benefits, flextime, compressed workweek, and telecommuting. Many companies use the term *work-life* instead of *work-family* programs. The Work & Family Connection (2004), a well-known work-life company, defined work-life as “the practice of providing initiatives design to create a more flexible, supportive work environment, enabling employee to focus on work tasks while at work. It includes making the culture more supportive, adding programs to meet life event needs, ensuring that policies give employees as much control as possible over their lives, and using flexible work practices as a strategy to meet the dual agenda—the needs of both business and employees” (p. 1). They categorized potential work-life initiatives into the following areas: work practices; leave; everyday issues; emotional wellbeing; financial issues; legal issues; relocation issues; addiction and recovery; wellness; parenting, childcare, and child development; and caregiving, eldercare, and older adults. Friedman and Johnson (1997) outlined seven “emerging themes in corporate work-family activity” (p. 196-197): school-age childcare, short-term and emergency child-care, elder care, assisting low-income workers, dependent care development funds, corporate collaboration, community mobilization, and flexible work arrangements. They also provided a list of programs (to which I have added a few—see No Data) that include some regulated policies and laws as well as other unregulated initiatives (see Table 1).

Table 1: Work-Family Programs and Services

| <i>Program or Service</i> | <i>% of Companies Offering</i> | <i>Program or Service</i> | <i>% of Companies Offering</i> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Adoption Benefits | 15.7 | Health/Wellness/Child Care Fairs | No Data |
| Cafeteria Benefits | 25.1 | Job-Sharing Arrangements | 47.9 |
| Career Development Opportunities | No Data | Lactation Programs | No Data |
| Child Care Centers | 13.0 | Long-Term Care Insurance | 2.1 |
| Child Care Resource and Referral | 54.5 | Part-time Schedules | 87.8 |
| Community Partnership Programs | No Data | Personal Days | 77.4 |
| Compressed Work Week | No Data | Personal Leaves of Absence | 70.4 |
| Concierge | No Data | Scholarship Programs | No Data |
| Consortium Centers for Child Care | 1.6 | Sick Child Care | 4.3 |
| Corporate Foundation Giving | 5.3 | Spouse Employment Assistance | 51.9 |
| Dependent Care Assistance Plans | 49.5 | Telecommuting | 35.1 |
| Discounts for Child Care | 4.8 | Vouchers for Child Care | 1.1 |
| Elder Care Consultation and Referral | 21.1 | Wellness/Health Programs | 23.4 |
| Employee Assistance Programs | 85.6 | Work-Family Coordinators | 3.2 |
| Family, Child Care Leaves | 28.0 | Work-Family Handbooks | 2.7 |
| Family Counseling in Relocation | 26.9 | Work-Family Management Training | 9.6 |
| Family Illness Days | 4.8 | Work-Family Seminars | 25.7 |
| Flexible Hours | 77.1 | Work-Family Support Groups | 5.3 |

* Adapted from Friedman, D. E., & Johnson, A. A. (1997). Moving from programs to culture change: The next stage for the corporate work-family agenda. In S. Parasuraman & J. H. Greenhaus (Eds.), *Integrating work and family: Challenges and choices for a changing world* (pp. 192-208). Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

Some of these programs and services do take a financial investment and commitment while others can be implemented without any cost to the employer. Some can be developed and implemented on a wide-scale basis with substantial marketing and promotion. Others can be handled personally as each situation is considered, taking into account the individual employee, his/her needs, and the current job requirements. Individual manager flexibility in unplanned situations may be able to benefit the organization and the employee as well. For instance, an employee who works in an office full-time may have a child home from school for three days with an illness. If possible, allowing this employee to do some of his/her work at home during these days may be beneficial for both parties. U.S. West, Aetna, Pacific Bell, Johnson and Johnson, AT&T, NCR, and Colgate Palmolive all have similar flexible work schedules (Wagner & Hohenbeck, 1995). At Colgate Palmolive, all employees are required to be at the office from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., but each can decide which eight-hour shift to work anywhere between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. These are only a few of the family-work programs that can be considered in becoming a more family-friendly organization.

A thorough discussion of which work-family programs are best is beyond the scope of this paper. This includes answers to questions such as: How can employers differentiate which programs might be best for them? Each company is different in various ways including size, industry, location, and types of positions. As a work-life scholar and consultant I have learned that specifically designed and customized work-family initiatives work best. For example, while onsite childcare works well for some large organizations, it would clearly be a disaster for others. While telecommuting works well for certain types of positions, it does not work at all for others. And, while spouse employment assistance and work-family seminars may be effective for some large corporations, they may not be feasible and even helpful for smaller companies. However, Kirchmeyer (1995) provided a general framework based on her research which assessed organizational responses that assist employees in managing the work-family boundary. The three types of researched responses included *separation* (i.e., employers act as if workers' nonwork worlds do not exist), *integration* (i.e., employers treat work and nonwork as related worlds and act to reduce the gap between them), and *respect* (i.e., the employer provides workers with the personal resources to fulfill such responsibilities themselves). She found that respect responses were the most preferred and beneficial to employees in the long-term. Employees favored receiving support and resources from their employers but wanted not only to control the decisions, but also to fulfill the responsibilities on their own. This type of assistance (e.g., resources, referrals, workshops) is actually more economical for an organization than the integrated approach (e.g., on-site childcare).

A number of years ago I worked with a large company (West Publishing, St. Paul, Minnesota) that offered most of the programs and services previously mentioned. They employed a work-life specialist who designed and published

booklets and handouts about these initiatives and also coordinated related efforts and events. Some programs (e.g., work-family seminars, employee assistance programs) were available to all employees. Others, such as telecommuting and part-time employment, were available for certain positions. If employees were interested in a program/service, they would talk to their managers and the work-life specialist to explore the possibilities. Next, the employees were instructed to draft a proposal describing the program or service requested with details regarding how he or she could effectively and efficiently continue to perform the job (currently and/or in the future) while taking advantage of the requested program or service. Final decisions were then made by their managers after consultation with the human resource director or vice president and the work-family specialist. This approach worked well for this company and they continue to rank in Fortune magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For."

Again, there are many types of programs or initiatives an organization can consider implementing. It is important, however, that employee needs be thoroughly assessed so that appropriate and effective decisions can be made. Programs and services that should be considered are those that meet the needs of the employees, are linked to the organization's goals and strategies, have the support of top management and, given the existing organizational culture, have a high probability of success.

III. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF INCORPORATING WORK-FAMILY PROGRAMS

Every business organization has certain responsibilities to its employees. Obviously, an organization needs to abide by the basic employment policies and laws that have been put in place for the protection of the company and its employees. The organization also has responsibilities to its employees that may go beyond these laws or policies. Some experts (Marchase, Bassham, & Ryan, 2002) refer to these as *virtue ethics* or *ethical management*. They purport that "if the financial outlay is fairly minimal, virtue ethics would clearly counsel adoption" (p. 150) of various family-friendly policy. They also explained that, from this perspective, "the 'bottom line' must include human profits and losses, not merely financial ones." It is important to note that many ethic responsibilities can often be linked to some kind of benefit to the employer. Admittedly, most for-profit business organizations exist to make a profit and, even if this is not their primary goal, they are at the very least concerned about the wise use of funds (cost-benefit). Hence, it is important that programs be designed to assist the company in accomplishing its mission and goals. The problem comes, however, when the organization's leadership wants to provide only programs and services that have a direct, visible, short-term relationship to financial gains. In my view it is the social and moral responsibility of all employers to become educated about services and programs that can improve the effectiveness and morale of their

employees and decrease the unnecessary stress, medical costs, employee turnover, and absenteeism that may be present (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1997). Further, it is not only the social responsibility of all employers, but also their professional business responsibility, to take the time to analyze the short and long-term positive effects these programs and services can have on the bottom line.

In promoting work-family programs and services to organizational leadership, it is essential that the benefits to the employer be clearly presented. We cannot expect all top managers (whose primary responsibility is to see that the organization is successful and profitable) to be supportive of programs that do not initially appear to benefit or support the organization's mission and goals. Yet, research (e.g., Bond et al, 1997) does show that there are links between these programs and the organization's bottom-line. Although organizations *should* implement some programs for the sole reason that it is ethically or socially responsible, this reason may not be sufficient. Many studies report documented evidence of employer benefits. One study (Dutton, 1997) reported that a 30 percent decrease in absenteeism was shown when "flexible work schedules, mutually agreed upon 'quiet times' when all interruptions are banned, and a wide range of work/family initiatives, such as child and elder care referrals, adoption subsidies and counseling, and education information" (p. 18) were implemented. She also reported that there was an increased worker loyalty, enhanced productivity, and, sometimes, reduced sick leave and healthcare costs "when pressure is taken off workers' personal lives and with policies that allow greater employee autonomy are implemented" (p. 18). Levi Strauss & Company started a lactation program and found that the program reduced medical expenses for infant illness and breast cancer treatment by encouraging women to breast feed from two to nine months longer than they would without the program (Anonymous, 1997).

Xerox and others believe by relieving some of the employee's stresses they are helping employees become more focused on their work. These companies also hope that the improved workplace environment will attract and retain the highest caliber people (Dutton, 1997). Herman and Gionia (1998) explained that top employees now and in the future will be seeking balance, growth, and fulfillment in both their work and home environments. They advised that the "corporation of the future must respond to these needs and desires; otherwise, they will find themselves hampered by a lack of qualified people to accomplish the organization's work" (p. 36). Lau and May (1998) reported that employee satisfaction is essential to implementing high-performance or high-commitment work systems and that these systems often contribute to an organization's financial performance. Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness (1999) reported that work and family tensions may affect an employee's ability to concentrate and be creative and productive while at work. Not only can work-family programs or resources improve the quality of work and home life for employees, but they also benefit the organizations financial bottom-line.

Shanley, Carbb and Kamiya (1998) agreed that family-friendly policies give an organization an advantage in the competition for talent. They also stated that "open communication and flexible work hours cut down on lengthy leaves of absence, as well as contractor hiring and training costs. . . employer flexibility enhances employee loyalty and attracts new recruits" (p. 44). A survey showed that 79 percent of company managers who have work-life policies found that they had a positive impact. The survey found that employees who utilized work-life programs and policies were 20 percent more likely to put forth extra work and effort to meet business needs than those who did not. Shanley et al. (1998) also reported that a growing number of employers are realizing that, when they help workers balance pressures within and without the workplace, they can improve productivity, keep good employees, and attract the best new talent. They also reported that organizations that remained set in the old approach actually thwarted employee creativity and hampered productivity.

According to Scandura and Lankau (1997), results show that women who perceived that their companies offered flexible work hours reported higher levels of job satisfaction and organization commitment than women who did not. Dutton (1997) explained that the loyalty of employees to their company and of a company to its employees builds trust. This trust goes hand in hand with profitability. She also added that "there are many elements involved in creating a more worker-friendly environment, but the most important ones don't cost a thing" (p. 20).

It is clear that for an organization to provide a global, sustainable, competitive advantage, its workforce must be productive (Lau & May, 1998). The *1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce: Synthesis of Findings* (Bond et al., 1997) reported that "when workers feel burned-out by their jobs, when they have insufficient time and energy for themselves and their families, when work puts them in a bad mood-- these feelings spill back into the workplace, limiting job performance" (p. 1). Bond et al. also explained that

...to improve and sustain productivity over the long run, employers must not only create supportive workplace environments, but also work with employees to keep job demands in check so they do not endanger personal and family well-being. Promoting work-life balance appears to be good both for employees and the bottom line. (p. 2)

The most powerful predictors of productivity (i.e., job satisfaction, commitment to their employers, and retention) are the supportiveness of the environment and the quality of workers' jobs. These appear to be far more important predictors than pay and benefits.

In many workplaces today single employees, as well as couples without children, may perceive their colleagues with children have more programs and options to utilize. However, many of the items listed in Table 1 are programs and services that any employee can use if needed and/or desired. If these types of programs are offered, companies need to be cautious about their administration so that all employees have

the same program advantages. For example, employees without children often find they are more productive when they telecommute two day per week or use employee assistance programs for personal challenges. Overall, work-family programs and services can also benefit employees without spouses or children.

Finally, companies may receive tax credits for work-family initiatives. Tax credits have “successfully induced corporate social responsibility through the ages and recently has addressed family needs” (Schmidt & Duenas, 2002, p. 296). Schmidt and Duenas (2002) explained that “Clinton proposed a 25 percent tax credit for businesses that provide childcare services on-site, training childcare workers, and providing resources and referral services to employees needed childcare” (p. 296). Some states have also passed credits for childcare facilities expansion, employer health insurance, job training and retraining, childcare, and more.

These are just a few of the numerous benefits researchers have found that can positively influence the overall performance of individual employees and the organization as a whole. The bottom line is that becoming a family-friendly workplace can benefit the employer.

IV. ARGUMENTS AGAINST INCORPORATING WORK-FAMILY PROGRAMS

Although there are many benefits for employees and employers in providing work-family programs, it is also important to address some of the associated problems. As stated previously, many companies acknowledge the importance of assisting employees in balancing their work and family responsibility so that they continue or improve job performance and productivity. Yet, many companies do not provide their employees with any type of support in these areas. This section will discuss a few of these employer concerns: costs of providing programs; employee misuse; lack of fairness perceived by single individuals without young children; balancing wages, salaries, and work-family benefits; and organizational culture.

One of the primary concerns employers have with work-family initiatives is the perceived cost of implementing programs as well as the administrative and legal challenges of maintaining them. Often, when practitioners consider work-family programs, they think of on-site daycare. Admittedly, some initiatives do have high costs for employers. However, many programs are of little cost to companies. It is important that companies perform a thorough analysis to study the benefits and challenges for both employees and employers. The administrative costs of such initiatives should also be considered as some programs and services do take considerable time, especially if they are not designed effectively. Some programs, such as onsite daycare, also have additional costs like liability insurance. Legal assistance may also be required for some high cost and high maintenance programs. For some companies, these types of initiatives would be difficult (and often

ineffective) to design, develop, and maintain.

Unfortunately, some employees do misuse work-family programs and services. Hence, it is understandable that some corporate leaders may be leery to implement family-work programs and services. However, it does appear that misuse is neither common nor widespread in most organizations (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997). Even with only a few infractions, sadly, uneducated company leadership can be influenced by non-supporters to eliminate work-family programs. Many work-family programs do not succeed in companies with autocratic and untrusting leadership.

It does appear that, in some organizations, single individual employees or couples without children do perceive a lack of fairness with regard to some work-family programs. Often barriers are created by misunderstandings. According to Kropf (1997), "Myths and stories circulate through organizations and are used as explanations for events. Often misconceptions are circulated affect behaviors and limit the use of flexible arrangements" (p. 74). In other cases, these perceptions may be accurate as some companies have designed programs specifically for employees (often women) who have pre- and school-aged children. If co-workers feel they work harder and longer and are inconvenienced because of their colleagues who are given additional flexibility and/or benefits, feelings of resentment will emerge. In today's diverse workplace it is important to design work-family initiatives to benefit all employees. Managers should be trained to recognize these challenges and to design alternatives and solutions.

Along with this concern is the challenge of balancing wages, salaries, and benefits (including work-family). Today, more than ever before, employees are looking at the entire employment package when considering job offers and decisions to remain with companies. Benefits are now considered when employees are considering internal and external equity. If employees feel their co-workers with children or elder care needs are being provided more benefits and flexibility than they are being given, feelings in inequity arise. Human resource professionals and managers must be educated in these issues and compensation and benefits packages need to be designed with equity in mind (Mathis & Jackson, 2004). Many organizations are now providing employees with a number of benefit options to choose from. An option ceiling is typically enforced so that approximately the same cost (or at least cost availability) is accrued for each employee.

Finally, an organization's culture may also be a barrier toward implementing work-family programs. In some of these organizations these challenges are so difficult that programs, when implemented, are not successful. Long-standing companies that have a history of married men whose wives are full-time homemakers (especially in leadership and management) have difficulty understanding and supporting efforts to help their employees in work-family challenges (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1997). Unfortunately, there are still many companies with these leadership perceptions, and many continue to equate "time and physical presence at the workplace with

productivity and commitment” (p. 223). This type of workplace environment typically does not “provide employees with sufficient flexibility and authority to manage the tensions that arise at the intersection of their work and family lives” (p. 233). In these types of companies, creating work-family programs may not be effective or even useful (at least until there is a change in leadership and/or perspectives).

V. FINDING THE BALANCE

An increasing number of companies throughout the world are recognizing the competitive advantage afforded by work-family initiatives and are implementing appropriate strategies (Vincola, 1998). In many of these organizations, however, the programs are not properly embedded in the business strategy and corporate culture. Because of this, many organizations are not deriving the strategic benefits of such programs. Corporate cultures can either advance or thwart work-family program's development and effectiveness. Employees, however, are not satisfied if programs are offered but the organization's culture is not supportive. Thompson et al. (1999) studied work-family culture and its relationship to work-family benefit utilization, organizational attachment, and work-family conflict. They found that perceptions of work-family culture were related to the actual use of work-family benefits and that benefit availability and a supportive work-family culture were related to increased organizational commitment and decreased work-family conflict and intentions to leave the organization.

Often employers need to recognize the strategic value of addressing work-family issues before they can be convinced that this can be beneficial for the organization. It is important that employers and employees understand how such programs can be mutually beneficial. By doing this, business can be more sensitive to employees' work-family needs, and solutions can be aligned with business goals. These strategies can be flexible to meet changing organizational and employee needs. By doing this an employer's commitment to addressing work-family issues is viewed as a long-term value in the organization and the employees (Bankert & Lobel, 1997; Friedman & Johnson, 1997).

Kugelmass (1995) suggested that managerial resistance is the most problematic barrier to flexible work. Managers are provided little or no training about work and family options, researched benefits, results of pilot studies, and flexible work management strategies. It is no wonder managers are sometimes opposed to these programs. Implementation of these programs signifies change. Employers and employees alike are often fearful of change. Educational and training opportunities can assist managers in acquiring the confidence, knowledge, and skills needed to adjust, implement, and manage such programs. Only then can the company's family-friendly culture begin to form so that long-term positive change can take hold (Friedman & Johnson, 1997).

Some managers are beginning to open lines of communication with their employees offering case-by case flexibility that still meets bottom-line goals (Shanley et al., 1998). Berg, Kalleber, and Appelbaum (2003) found that "helping workers balance work and family responsibilities is not just a matter of benefits and formal family-friendly policies. Rather, it also depends on the characteristics of jobs within the business enterprise" (p. 168). We need to continually balance work coverage needs and flexibility provided. It is obligatory for managers and employers to develop solutions. One option might preclude virtual working that can be done at home on a situational basis. In addition, more employers are offering employees help with critical life issues--finding good local childcare or services for elderly parents. This appears to increase employee loyalty while decreasing absenteeism and stress. Stress is known to decrease work effectiveness and increase in health problems. Some managers are now being encouraged to have personal development plans with employees to include their knowledge, skills, schedules, and employment needs, as well as their family and life needs. Managers need to recognize, as Herman and Gioia (1998) stated, "that the top employees of the coming century will be flexible, creative, and motivated toward making a positive difference in the world. They will seek balance, growth, and fulfillment in both their work and home environments" (p. 36).

According to Bankert and Lobel (1997), one important principle in the management of work and personal life effectiveness is a shared responsibility. The goal behind this principle is to emphasize the need for employee ownership of personal life balance and the management of work. Managers and employees can be empowered to develop solutions that address both business and personal objectives. Managers and employees can then be held accountable for their behavior in relation to the success or failure of these objectives. This empowerment and accountability are obviously management challenges that extend far beyond the issue of work and family: "Companies appear to be making greater progress in the area of empowerment, providing managers and employees with considerable autonomy in developing reasonable solutions" (p. 189).

In RJR Nabisco's "Management Statement on Worklife" (Bankert & Lobel, 1997), one of the four guidelines listed reads

Balancing work with family and personal obligations is a shared responsibility involving the company, its managers and employees. Successfully balancing family and personal needs of the business requires a cooperative effort between the employee and his or her manager. Fundamentally, the company's role is to provide the tools and support that will help employees find solutions to their own problems--not to solve their problems for them. (p. 188)

In addition to family and corporate responsibility, there is a necessity for limited government legislation on behalf of employees throughout the world. Many policies in various countries have been successful in assisting families in better balancing their lives. It is difficult, however, to make a generalization as to how much

responsibility governments should have in assisting in work-family challenges. Because of the vast differences in families, cultures, companies, and communities, this shared responsibility may need to extend beyond work and family to the government and community. It is my belief, however, that extensive legislation is not the solution to long-term culture change in most organizations.

VI. CONCLUSION

Even with the on-going debate concerning what an organization's responsibility to its employees is, prominent and successful corporate leaders have spoken clearly about this issue. In 1994, the chairman and CEO of IBM, Louis Gerstner, explained that

We're in a period of frenetic change, with enormous pressures on people. A lot of our people are dealing with the problems of elderly and sometimes ill parents, they're dealing with the everyday demands of managing two-income families. In our work environment, with the pressure we're putting on people, we've got to be even better at helping them deal with those issues. We need the very best people as the foundation on which we build everything else, and we've got to be smart enough to figure out ways to address their requirements and their needs. (Commission on Family and Medical Leave, 1996, p. 3)

The optimal work environment *can* support individual work and personal life effectiveness. The employer's informal culture *can* support a healthy work/life balance. The employer *can* provide meaningful work/life programs and policies and ongoing education of its employees. The employer *can* strive for on-going improvement through continuous evaluation and assessment. The employer *can* develop community relationships to strengthen external work and life resources. The employer *can* work with the public sector to strengthen policy that benefits both employers and individuals (Bankert & Lobel; 1997; Christensen, 1997; Friedman & Johnson, 1997).

These are wonderful efforts and should be pursued and implemented by employers if there is a link between these benefits for the employees and the benefits for the organization. The key lies in educating employers about the options and benefits for developing and implementing these programs. While this may not work in all situations, I would hope that the majority of corporate top management would be logical and professional enough at least to consider the possible financial benefits these programs and initiatives can have on their organizations and employees. However, if this is truly the answer then how do we get companies to begin making these changes? Who will conduct this type of training, and who will pay for it? Should the government subsidize this training to encourage its adoption? These are questions to consider as we move forward with future research, discussions, and practice in this area. In my opinion, shared responsibility among employees, employers, community,

and government will prove to be most effective and beneficial in the long-term. For example, I serve on a Utah State Department of Workforce Services committee called the *Utah County Employers Council*. We assist this government agency in providing monthly workshops taught by local experts for small business owners and employees in the county on a variety of human resource and management topics. Owners and employees pay a small fee and the rest of the cost is subsidized by the Department of Workforce Services. Past topics have included work-family challenges and solutions. Other programs may be offered by the company with funding requests from the employees. Whatever the case, it is important to remember that there are short and long-term benefits for all the constituencies mentioned.

Again, employees must not expect these programs from their employers without taking joint responsibility for them and without ensuring that the organization will benefit in some way. As Christensen (1997) stated, "Companies that proactively address issues of work/life balance as part of their business strategy will be at an advantage in generating the kind of trust and employee commitment needed to compete effectively in the global marketplace" (p. 36). The beauty of this relationship is that there are benefits--we just need to help management see them.

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