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## Getting There from Here: Research on the Effects of Work–Family Initiatives on Work–Family Conflict and Business Outcomes

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### Abstract

Many employing organizations have adopted work–family policies, programs, and benefits. Yet managers in employing organizations simply do not know what organizational initiatives actually reduce work–family conflict and how these changes are likely to impact employees and the organization. We examine scholarship that addresses two broad questions: first, do work–family initiatives reduce employees’ work–family conflict and/or improve work–family enrichment? Second, does reduced work–family conflict improve employees’ work outcomes and, especially, business outcomes at the organizational level? We review over 150 peer-reviewed studies from a number of disciplines in order to summarize this rich literature and identify promising avenues for research and conceptualization. We propose a research agenda based on four primary conclusions: the need for more multi-level research, the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach, the benefits of longitudinal studies that employ quasi-experimental or experimental designs and the challenges of translating research into practice in effective ways.

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## Introduction

The last decades have seen dramatic changes in family life, including increases in dual-earner households and single-parent families as well as greater numbers of employed adults who are also caring for elderly or infirm relatives (Casper & Bianchi, 2002; Neal & Hammer, 2007), that mean many employees are simultaneously juggling paid work and unpaid family work. Work–family conflicts are a common source of stress and have been linked to employees’ health and family functioning (e.g., Almeida, Wethington, & Chandler, 1999; Frone, 2000; Greenhaus, Allen, & Spector, 2006; Grzywacz & Bass, 2003;), as well as labor market decisions and fertility decisions (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Stone, 2007).

Many industrialized nations have changed public policies—expanding family leaves, changing work time regulations, and adding public child care for young children—to try to help “reconcile” work and family, but the USA has mandated only short, unpaid family leaves and otherwise encouraged employers to step in and provide work–family policies and benefits (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Kelly, 2005). In a fashion reminiscent of health insurance and other social welfare policies, the US strategy has been to treat employers as key stakeholders who are asked to respond to the needs of their employees while the government provides only minimal and targeted public programs for the most needy (Hacker, 2002; Kelly, 2005). Many US organizations, although certainly not all, have responded to public pressure, to the changing demographics of their workforces, and to the advocacy of work-life practitioners by adopting a number work–family policies and benefits for at least some of their employees. A national sample of medium and large private-sector employers finds widespread adoption of flextime (68%), part-time work (53%), job sharing (46%), compressed work weeks (39%), occasional teleworking (35%), partially paid family leaves (46%), pre-tax spending accounts for dependent care (45%), information and referral accounts to find care (34%), and the occasional provision of on-site child care (7%) (Bond, Galinsky, Kim, & Brownfield, 2005).

Despite the proliferation of these policies, the growing media attention to them, and a burgeoning, interdisciplinary literature on work–family issues (Kossek, Sweet, & Pitt-Catsoupes, 2006), managers in employing organizations simply do not know whether and which organizational initiatives actually reduce work–family conflict and how these changes are likely to impact employees and the organization as a whole. In order to begin to address this gap, the overarching goals of this paper are to (a) examine the consequences of these policies for individuals and organizations; and (b) develop an integrative theoretical model and also conceptual frameworks for multi-level studies of these policies as organizational interventions.

We examine scholarship that addresses two broad questions: First, do work–family initiatives reduce employees’ work–family conflict and/or improve work–family enrichment? Work–family enrichment refers to the extent to which work experiences improve the quality of life in the family domain and vice versa (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Second, does reduced work–family conflict improve employees’ work outcomes and, especially, business outcomes at the organizational level such as performance or turnover? We believe it is important to simultaneously consider the potential benefits of work–family initiatives for employees—as suggested by a broad stakeholder theory that prioritizes the health and well-being of workers and their families—and for organizations—as suggested by a shareholder perspective that emphasizes the economic value of workplace initiatives and policies. As we describe later, the empirical evidence that work–family initiatives have strong economic pay-offs for organizations is fairly weak and yet many organizations have put these policies and programs in place (cf. Dobbin & Sutton, 1998; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Organizations with work–family initiatives in place may be responding to emerging norms that “good employers” are “family friendly”. Their adoption of these initiatives likely signals that they are seeking

legitimacy and recognition as a good corporate citizen, rather than waiting for clear evidence of returns on investment (March, 1994; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). Yet, even if strict economic rationality does not always explain the adoption of these initiatives, it is valuable to the field and to management practitioners to investigate the economic returns of these initiatives for organizations in conjunction with the broader benefits to employees and their families. Furthermore, to the extent that some organizations are reluctant to add work–family policies and programs until a better “business case” is built, pointing the way towards stronger research on these questions may help broaden employees’ access to these initiatives.

We distinguish our focus from two other major streams of research on work–family policies and programs. Over the past 15 years, there have been many studies of *adoption* of these policies (e.g., Glass & Fujimoto, 1995; Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simmons, 1995; Kelly, 2003; Kelly & Dobbin, 1999; Kossek, Dass, & DeMarr, 1994; Milliken, Martins, & Morgan, 1998; Osterman, 1995). More recently, scholars have paid more attention to the *implementation* of work–family initiatives, including barriers to employees’ utilization of policies and benefits once they have been adopted (e.g., Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, 2004; Eaton, 2003; Gerstel & McGonagle, 1999; Kelly & Kalev, 2006; Kossek, 2005, 2006; McDoald, Brown, & Bradley, 2004; Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Van Dyne, Kossek, & Lobel, 2007).

In addition to critically reviewing recent empirical studies on the consequences of work–family initiatives for employees and organizations, we clarify existing concepts and provide a new conceptual model to guide future research. Our central argument is that scholars should pursue more multi-level research that views work-life policies as organizational interventions. By doing so, research would better connect organizational changes (i.e., new policies or practices) to employees’ experiences of managing work and family responsibilities (a macro-to-micro move) and also connect employees’ attitudes and behaviors on the job to organizational outcomes (a micro-to-macro move).

There has been a rich body of research linking employees’ perceptions of the work environment to their work–family conflict and employees’ work–family conflict to their attitudes towards work, but it has been more difficult to determine the organizational conditions and initiatives that foster positive perceptions of the work environment and lower levels of work–family conflict. This challenge is due, in part, to the scarcity of longitudinal data and/or quasi-experimental designs to assess how the same individuals or organizations change when exposed to work–family initiatives. Although many disciplines recognize the value of experimental and quasi-experimental designs with longitudinal data for making strong causal claims, research in the work–family field very rarely utilizes these designs when investigating work–family initiatives. While there are some exceptions of studies based on longitudinal data in the work–family field (e.g., Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997; Hammer, Neal, Newsom, Brockwood, & Colton, 2005), these still lack the use of experimental or quasi-experimental designs. The vast majority of studies employ cross-sectional data because it is easier to collect from employees and organizations. Yet studies of other worksite interventions—notably health promotion programs—often involve longitudinal data and quasi-experimental or experimental designs with randomized assignment to treatment even when the intervention targets the broader work environment as well as individual behaviors (e.g., Bennett & Lehman, 2002; Sorensen, Barbeau, Hunt, & Emmons, 2004; Sorensen, et al., 2002; see also Sorensen, Emmons, Hunt, & Johnston, 1998). Because the topic at hand is determining the effects of work–family initiatives for employees and organizations, we consider these types of research designs as an ideal for moving both research and practice forward.

In the following sections, we describe our strategy for identifying the relevant literature and the terminology that we employ in this article. We then provide a critical review of literature

examining the effects of work–family initiatives on work–family conflict and enrichment, including directions for future research. Next we turn to a critical review of academic research on the work-related and business outcomes of work–family conflict and work–family initiatives, including directions for future research. Finally, we summarize our conceptual contributions and discuss the rewards and challenges of moving this field forward.

## Review Methodology and Terminology

Because research on the consequences of work and family policies has been conducted by researchers in a number of disciplines, our review was deliberately interdisciplinary. The review was conducted by authors representing organizational sociology, human resources, organizational behavior, industrial-organizational psychology, economics, and public health. We worked together as members of the national Work, Family, and Health Network funded by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We conducted broad searches in several databases including Business Source Premiere, PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, and Medline. We concentrated on empirical articles in peer-reviewed journals that have been published between 1996 to 2006 (with some additional studies published in 2007 and early 2008), but also included key reviews and theoretical articles. We wanted to complement critical reviews on the effects of work–family conflicts on employees' health (e.g., Allen & Armstrong, 2006) and family relationships (e.g., Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000) as well as reviews of the theories utilized in work–family research (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Voydanoff, 2005a) and broader reviews of the work–family field (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kossek, 2005, 2006; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998, 1999).

For the first question about the effects of work–family initiatives on work–family conflict and enrichment, the search strategy was to identify articles that included both an organizational independent variable (including specific work–family policies, work–family supports, or the work–family culture) and the descriptor work–family relationship (which encompasses work–family conflict and related terms) as the dependent variable. A subset of authors reviewed 576 abstracts and then identified 119 articles that addressed modifiable work conditions and their impact on the work–family interface. These authors read and summarized these articles and we concentrate here on the 73 articles rated as most relevant to this question.

For the second question about the effects of work–family conflict (and programs designed to alleviate that conflict) on business outcomes or work outcomes, the search strategy was to identify articles that included both the work–family relationship and terms denoting business outcomes (such as organizational performance) or employees' work attitudes (including satisfaction, commitment, turnover intention, job involvement, etc.). A second subset of authors reviewed 579 abstracts and then identified 163 articles that address our specific concerns. We concentrate here on the 82 articles rated by these authors as most relevant to this question.

Because of the wide variation in research design, conceptualization, measurement, and analytic strategies, it is not possible to make formal comparisons or perform a meta-analysis on these articles. Instead we conducted a broad, critical review and supplement that with our assessment of future directions for the field. Before beginning that review, we clarify our use of key terms.

*Work–family initiatives* are deliberate organizational changes—in policies, practices, or the target culture—to reduce work–family conflict and/or support employees' lives outside of work. Note that we define *family* quite broadly, to include spouses, extended family, and other close relationships, as well as children. This broad understanding means that work–family

issues are relevant to a broad cross-section of the workforce, but may exclude employees with important non-work concerns such as continuing education or a volunteer commitment. Work-family initiatives include the familiar work-life policies and benefits (such as family leaves, flexible work arrangements, and dependent care supports) that have been widely adopted in many organizations. We also include work redesign initiatives that ask employees to look at the way work is performed and coordinated in order to identify concrete changes (e.g. “no meeting Mondays”) that might simultaneously increase effectiveness at work and reduce work-family conflicts (e.g., Perlow, 1997; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). The term work-family interventions may also be used to refer to these deliberate organizational changes; however, intervention terminology is much more familiar to public health scholars than to management scholars and so we do not use it here.

*Work-family conflict* is probably the most frequently studied construct in the work-family field. It has its origins in the work of Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal’s (1964) discussion of role theory and is related to Goode’s (1960) claim that multiple roles create strain. Work-family conflict is understood as a type of inter-role conflict that occurs when role demands in one domain (i.e., work or family) are incompatible with role demands in the other domain (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Moen, Kelly, & Huang, 2008). Furthermore, work-family conflict consists of two broad dimensions: work-to-family conflict (i.e., work interfering with family) and family-to-work conflict (i.e., family interfering with work) (Frone et al., 1997). These two dimensions are now usually examined separately to better understand their specific antecedents and independent effects. While the field has devoted most of its attention to the strains that often arise from managing both work and family roles, recently there has been more attention to the benefits of combining work and family responsibilities (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). These benefits have been referred to as *work-family enrichment* (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), work-family facilitation (Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004), and positive spillover from work to family and from family to work (Hammer, Cullen, Neal, Sinclair, & Shafiro, 2005; Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006). It is still true, though, that there is little empirical research on the questions of what organizational changes promote work-family enrichment and what are the pay-offs, in terms of employees’ work outcomes and for the business as a whole, of increased work-family enrichment.

The effects of work-family initiatives and work-family conflict on employees and the organization as a whole are designated by the terms work outcomes and business outcomes, respectively. We distinguish between them according to the level of analysis (i.e., individual-level and organizational-level). We use *work outcomes* to refer to the individual-level employee attitudes and behaviors on the job that tend to be the traditional subject of research by industrial-organizational psychologists, as well as management scholars interested in employees’ experiences. These outcomes are frequently based on employee self-reports and include assessments of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions as well as self-reported engagement, job performance, and absenteeism. These individual-level outcomes may also be reported in the form of supervisor ratings of performance or other personnel data such as individual absenteeism. (Our review does not address important questions about work-family conflict and employees’ health as measured by psychological distress, depressive symptoms, health behaviors such as sleep and exercise, or cardiovascular disease. For more on this research, see Allen et al. [2000], Allen and Armstrong [2006], Bianchi, Casper, and King [2005].)

The *business outcomes* of work-family conflict or the initiatives that aim to reduce work-family conflict refer to the aggregate impact of many of these individual-level work outcomes on overall organizational-level performance. (In a later section, we discuss the likely mechanisms by which individual-level work outcomes are related to organizational performance.) The business outcomes we consider include productivity measures and financial



performance, including stock market performance, as well as return on investment (ROI) information that can directly assess both the costs of work–family initiatives and the financial benefits associated with those organizational changes. They may also include aggregated absenteeism or turnover rates at the department or organizational level, as well as healthcare costs.

## What are the Effects of Work–family Initiatives on Work Family Conflict and Enrichment?

The first question we address is whether and how organizational work–family initiatives impact employees' work–family conflict and enrichment. Figure 7.1 emerged from our review as a way to summarize and distinguish between the many studies that address this question. Previous research has examined the direct effects of work–family initiatives on work–family conflict (pathway A, Figure 7.1) and evaluated the relationship between employees' perceptions of support, flexibility, overload, or a family-supportive organizational culture and work–family conflict (pathway B, Figure 7.1). The findings from studies examining the direct effects of work–family initiatives on work–family conflict are mixed, in part because of methodological limitations discussed later. The findings from studies of the relationship between employees' perceptions of support, flexibility, overload, or a family-supportive organizational culture and work–family conflict are more consistently positive, but they beg the question of how organizations can foster positive perceptions among their employees.

### Research on Work–family Initiatives and Work–family Conflict (Pathway A)

Studies examining the effects of work–family policies on work–family conflict and work–family enrichment (pathway A, Figure 7.1) are decidedly mixed. Recall our general criticism that this may be due to the large number of studies that are based on cross-sectional, correlational designs. Some studies do find a significant, negative relationship between work–family initiatives and work–family conflict (e.g., Allen, 2001; Madsen, 2003; Mennino, Rubin, & Brayfield, 2005; O'Driscoll et al., 2003; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999) or a positive relationship between work–family initiatives and work–family balance (e.g., Ezra & Deckman, 1996; Hill, 2005; Hill, Ferris, & Martinson 2003; Hill, Martinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004). However, other studies do not find significant relationships (e.g., Batt & Valcour, 2003; Behson, 2005; Dikkers, Geurts, den Dulk, Peper, & Kompier, 2004; Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1996; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Moen & Yu, 1999; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001; Thompson & Prottas, 2006), and some research even suggests that there is a positive relationship between these work–family initiatives and work–family conflict (e.g., Brough, O'Driscoll, & Kalliath, 2005; Hammer, Neal, et al., 2005a). There are several measurement issues to consider, however, before we accept that these policies have minimal or unpredictable effects on work–family conflict.

First, this is a case of comparing apples and oranges because some studies evaluate the impact of having work–family policies *available* to employees while other studies evaluate the impact of employees' *use* of these policies. We would expect that studies on the availability of work–family policies would be less conclusive than those comparing users to non-users because these policies are expected to make life more manageable *when they are used*; however, there has been more attention in the literature to the availability of policies than to their use (Hammer, Neal, et al., 2005). Table 7.1 indicates that most use studies find significant relationships in the expected direction (i.e., use reduces work–family conflict or improves work–family balance), while the availability studies are more mixed in significance. A notable exception to the positive findings in the use studies is Hammer, Neal, et al.'s (2005) longitudinal examination of the relationship between utilization of flexible work arrangements and dependent care supports among dual-earners with both child-care and elder-care

responsibilities. This research revealed that employees' use of more work–family supports was not significantly related to later work–family conflict and wives' use actually increased *family-to-work* conflict (Hammer, Neal, et al., 2005). It may be that the women in this dual-earner sample took on more day-to-day responsibilities for family care once they began using work–family supports.

A second measurement issue arises from the fact that some studies focus on one or two specific policies or arrangements (e.g., telework, child-care center) but other studies utilize a count of the policies and arrangements that are available or used as the independent variable, as noted in Table 7.1. It is not clear whether having many policies available is useful, since the one option that would meet an employee's needs (e.g., telework for some, child-care center for others) may not be available. Also, employees who are using multiple work–family policies and benefits may not have lower levels of work–family conflict than others because employees who use multiple policies and benefits probably have the highest family demands (Batt & Valcour, 2003, p. 201–202). These employees may experience high work–family conflict regardless of what the organization offers. Brough et al. (2005) find that employees with more frequent usage of a number of work–family policies report *greater* work–family conflict, although the effects of more policy usage are not significant three months later.

A third measurement issue is related to the accuracy of measures of policy availability. Availability is often assessed by employees' reports of what policies are in place and what arrangements are allowed in their organizations (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Behson, 2005; Galinsky et al., 1996; Halpern, 2005; Hill, 2005; Voydanoff, 2005b) but employees' knowledge of existing work–family policies varies widely (Baird & Reynolds, 2004; Still & Strang, 2003; cf. Thompson, Jahn, Kopelman, & Prottas, 2004). There may be systematic biases in employees' familiarity with work–family policies and benefits (e.g., those in higher-status occupations are more aware) that are correlated with work–family conflict. Additionally, some authors present their findings as evidence of the impact of “time-flexible work policies” (Halpern, 2005) or “formal organizational support” (Behson, 2005) for work–family concerns, but the measures used in these studies do not provide information on organizational policies or formal supports, even as reported by employees. These studies (and many others) use the National Study of the Changing Workforce, a nationally representative survey conducted by the Families and Work Institute that asks whether respondents can change their work times and how much control respondents have over their schedules, but it does not ask about formal flexible work policies. These data therefore provide valuable information on employees' perceived flexibility and their experiences of work–family conflict but do not help us investigate the consequences of formal policies for employees or document when formal policies are more tightly linked to employees' perceptions and when there is dramatic decoupling between what is on the books and what employees report they can do. These latter questions are important for research that aims to guide management practice.

Fourth, measurement of work–family policy use could be improved by greater specificity. It is important to document which specific arrangements or policies are used because some work–family policies facilitate more time in the workplace (e.g., child-care centers) while others reduce the time spent in the workplace (e.g., telework, reduced hours) and the different policies may have varying effects on employees' experience of work–family conflict (Hammer, Neal, et al., 2005) and on users' careers (Glass, 2004; Kelly, Kalev, & Dobbin, 2007). Measures should also be more specific in documenting the frequency or extent of usage; for example, we might hypothesize that the effects of working at home twice a month differ from those of working at home four days per week. Two recent studies (Kossek, Lautsch, et al., 2006; Madsen, 2003) illustrate strategies for capturing the frequency and duration of telework and, interestingly, do not find that more time off-site is related to less work–family conflict (although Kossek and colleagues only examine the effects of telework volume for mothers). Similar

questions could be investigated regarding the number of hours children spend in employer-sponsored child-care settings (Kossek & Nichols, 1992), the length of family leaves, or the number of hours worked by those on reduced schedules.

Finally, we address two broader methodological issues that limit the conclusions that can be drawn from this stream of research: the paucity of longitudinal research and the selection of samples. Unfortunately, there is very little longitudinal research in this field, with even fewer studies that compare organizations before and after they adopt new work–family policies or initiatives or compare employees before and after they begin using these policies or participating in these initiatives. Some of the strongest longitudinal research uses the Maastricht Cohort Study of Fatigue at Work (Jansen, Kant, Kristensen, & Nijhuis, 2003; Jansen, Kant, Nijhuis, Swaen, & Krsitensen, 2004; van Amelsvoort, Jansen, Swaen, van den Brandt, & Kant, 2004). Because this research was conducted in the Netherlands, which has more generous public policies supporting working families and therefore less variation in organizational work–family policies, it does not address the effects of work–family initiatives directly. However, Jansen et al. (2004) examine several modifiable work conditions—which might be affected by corporate policies as well as public policy—and find that employees doing shift work at baseline and employees working full-time at baseline reported more work–home interference eight months later. Additionally, among full-time workers, work–home interference decreased for those who knew their schedules one month in advance, those who said they had the ability to take a day off when needed, and those who had reduced their work hours at their own request. Work–home interference increased for those who worked overtime and full-time workers with longer commutes (Jansen et al., 2004). These findings provide suggestive longitudinal evidence about the value of policies regarding work time.

There are also questions about the relevant samples for appropriate comparisons. Many studies of the effects of work–family initiatives use national or company samples of employees, rather than limiting the sample to employees who have caregiving responsibilities or are parents (exceptions include Anderson et al., 2002; Erdwins, Buffardi, Casper, & O’Brien, 2001; Frone & Yardley, 1996; Hammer, Neal, et al., 2005; Hill, Martinson, & Ferris, 2004; Hill, Timmons Mead, et al., 2006; Lee & Duxbury, 1998; Luk & Shaffer, 2005; MacDermid & Williams, 1997; Neal & Hammer, 2007; Noor, 2002; Secret, Sprang, & Bradford, 1998). While flexible work initiatives can be helpful to a broad spectrum of employees (e.g., those caring for an infirm parent, those facing their own health challenges), child-care subsidies, resource and referral services for child care, and parental leaves are obviously of use only to parents. Some studies count both types of policies together, but do not acknowledge employees’ varying risk of use because of their varying family roles. The provision of work–family initiatives may have positive impacts on organizational commitment even for those with few family responsibilities (Grover & Crooker, 1995), but these initiatives are not likely to reduce work–family conflict among employees with very low baseline levels of conflict. Kossek and Nichols (1992) conducted the only study we identified that compared users to non-users with similar needs and resources. This study compared users of two employer-sponsored child-care centers to those on the waiting list for those centers. Kossek and Nichols (1992) found that parents using the centers reported fewer child-care problems and more positive attitudes about managing work and family than employed parents on the waiting list; similar relationships were found when the researchers used the number of hours that the on-site centers were used as the independent variable. Kossek, Lautsch, et al. (2006) also considered the question of appropriate comparisons when they compared professionals who telework regularly to other professionals who likely have the option to work off-site at least occasionally.



## Research on Support, Flexibility, and Overload and Work–family Conflict (Pathway B)

There is strong evidence of relationships between employees' assessment of their work environments and perceived work–family conflict and work–family enrichment (pathway B, Figure 7.1). We focus in particular on four aspects of the psychosocial work environment that seem to be associated with work–family conflict: perceived supportiveness of one's supervisor, perceptions of the organizational culture, perceived control over work time, and perceived overload.

First, many studies show a significant relationship between employees' perception of the supportiveness of their supervisor with regard to work and family issues and lower levels of work–family conflict (e.g., Allen, 2001; Barrah, Schultz, Baltes, & Stolz, 2004; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Behson, 2005; Frye & Breaugh, 2004; Grosswald, 2003; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Mauno, Kinnunen, & Pyykko, 2005; Secret & Sprang, 2001) or more work–family balance (Hill, 2005). Supportive supervisors are also positively related to perceived success in work and life (Moen & Yu, 1999), the organization's helpfulness in balancing work and family (Berg, Kalleberg, & Applebaum, 2003), loyalty to the organization (Roehling, Roehling, & Moen, 2001), and job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Anderson et al., 2002). Supportive supervisors also facilitate employees' usage of formal work–family policies (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Casper, Fox, Sitzmann, & Landy, 2004; Kelly & Kalev, 2006).

Second, there are consistent findings about the positive impact of a supportive organizational culture regarding work and family on employees' perceptions of work–family conflict and enrichment (e.g., Allen, 2001; Barrah et al., 2004; Galinsky et al., 1996; Mauno, Kinnunen, & Piitulainen, 2005; Mennino et al., 2005; O'Driscoll et al., 2003; Thompson et al., 1999; Thompson et al., 2004; Thompson & Prottas, 2006). One study (Hill, 2005) finds a significant relationship between positive perceptions of the work–family culture and work–family conflict for mothers, but not among fathers (cf. Batt & Valcour, 2003, who find that the relationship between supervisor support and work–family conflict is significant for women but not men). Much of the research in this area has used Thompson et al.'s (1999) measure of work–family culture, which captures the three dimensions of career penalties, time demands, and management support for work and family issues (e.g., Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, Kutcher, Indovino, & Rosner, 2005; Dikkers et al., 2004; Mauno, Kinnunen, & Piitulainen, 2005; Mauno, Kinnunen, & Pyykko, 2005; Thompson & Prottas, 2006). Other scholars prefer to examine management support separately, as discussed previously, and some have also assessed the primacy of work (over family) in the culture (e.g., Allen, 2001; O'Driscoll et al., 2003). Thompson et al. (2004) have also distinguished between perceptions of the instrumental support, informational support, and emotional support that is available within an organization and found that emotional support (“intangible” support) is an important predictor of work–family conflict and affective commitment.

The evidence clearly indicates the important impact of perceived support—from supervisors and in the broader organizational culture—on work–family conflict, but additional research is needed to fully understand these processes and how organizations can create supportive environments. First, it is not clear what specific *behaviors* constitute supportiveness on the part of supervisors (Hammer, Kossek, Zimmerman, & Daniels, 2007). Hammer et al. (2007) identify four types of family supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB), i.e., emotional support, instrumental support, role model behaviors, and recognition of the strategic importance of work–family issues, also called proactive integration. The role of managers also varies according to their position in the hierarchy, with lower-level managers providing more instrumental support (e.g., approving a schedule change or a flexible work arrangement) and upper management doing more to influence the organizational culture through their role modeling, their explicit recognition of work–family needs, and the rewards they bestow on supportive supervisors. Second, it is not clear what organizational initiatives might promote a

supportive organizational culture or increase supervisors' support of their employees. Some authors seem to pit formal work–family policies against informal organizational supports (i.e., perceived supervisor support or work–family culture) and argue that work–family policies are less helpful (e.g., Behson, 2005) or at least insufficient for producing reduced work–family conflict (e.g., Batt & Valcour, 2003; Thompson et al., 1999). As we discuss later, we believe the crucial question to ask next is what work–family policies or other initiatives will increase employees' sense of support.

Third, employees' sense of how much flexibility they have and specifically how much control they have over the time and timing of their work is also negatively associated with work–family conflict (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002; Galinsky et al., 1996; Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Kossek, Lautsch, et al., 2006) and positively related to work–family balance (e.g., de Luis Carnicer, Sanches, & Perez, 2004; Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001; Hill, Martinson, & Ferris, 2004; Hill, Martinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004; Hill, Timmons Mead, et al., 2006; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Scholars have often described this construct as perceived flexibility, although flexibility is a broad term that is sometimes used to refer to management's ability to control labor costs by changing work hours and laying off workers rather than employee-driven flexibility regarding work hours (Henly, Schaefer, & Waxman, 2006; Kelly & Moen, 2007). We prefer the term *control over work time* to emphasize employees' latitude over when they work, how many hours they work, and sometimes where they work. The concept of control over work time builds on existing research on the effects of *job control*, which refers to employees' control over how work is done (Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Kelly & Moen, 2007). Thomas and Ganster's (1995) influential article argued that perceived control (over both work time and dependent care arrangements) mediated the relationship between the flexible schedules and supportive supervisors and the outcome of work–family conflict. This study of parents (predominantly mothers) working in health care found that (1) flexible schedules and supervisor support increased perceived control; (2) perceived control significantly predicted work–family conflict; and (3) work–family conflict was significantly associated with depressive symptoms, somatic complaints, cholesterol, and job satisfaction (Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

As with supervisor support and supportive organizational cultures, the importance of perceived flexibility or control over work time is clear, but the “factors that contribute to this perception are not clearly understood” (Hammer et al., 1997, p. 197). Some research has found that flexible work options and supervisor support predict perceived control (Thomas & Ganster, 1995) but other studies do not find significant associations between perceived control and the number of dependent care benefits available, the number of flexible work options available, or perceived supervisor support (Batt & Valcour, 2003). Higher levels of control over work time were found among employees who reported more autonomy in their jobs, used more technologies such as email, cell phones, and beepers, and reported that their jobs could be done with less coordination with colleagues (Batt & Valcour, 2003). These findings suggest that there is a tight link between work–time control and independence on the job in traditional work environments (cf. Swanberg, Pitts-Catsoupes, & Drescher-Burke, 2005), but do not provide guidance on how organizations could deliberately broaden the experience of work–time control to include employees who would normally have less autonomy and whose work is more interdependent.

Kelly and Moen (2007) describe a culture change initiative known as the Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE), which directly attempts to increase employees' control over work time at Best Buy (see also [www.culturerx.com](http://www.culturerx.com) for recent press coverage of ROWE). This initiative takes work teams through a participatory process of learning about the ROWE philosophy (briefly: “Employees can do whatever they want, whenever they want, as long as the work gets done”), noting elements of current interactions and work practices that do not match this

philosophy, and identifying new ways to work together that facilitate more work–time control and autonomy. On-going research uses a longitudinal, comparative change design to examine whether ROWE reduces work–family conflict, improves employees' health and well-being, and impacts work outcomes such as job satisfaction, engagement, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions, compared to employees who remain in the traditional work environment. Adams and Jex (1999) point to another approach to increasing perceived control over one's time in their study showing that employees engaged in more time-management behaviors had higher perceived control and less work–family conflict than respondents scoring lower on the time-management scales.

The fourth aspect of the work environment that seems to be related to work–family conflict is perceived work load. Studies that examine the impact of hours worked (e.g., Batt & Valcour, 2003; Berg et al., 2003; Clark, 2001; Frye & Breugh, 2004; Grosswald, 2003; Kossek, Lautsch, et al., 2006; Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002; Noor, 2002; Thompson et al., 1999; Thompson & Prottas, 2006; Voydanoff, 2005c) and studies that focus on perceived overload or time pressures (e.g., Linzer et al., 2002; Major et al., 2002; Parasuraman, Pruhit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996; Wallace, 1997) both find positive associations with work–family conflict. Overtime or extra hours are also associated with more work–family conflict, particularly when the hours are unexpected or the overtime is involuntary (Berg et al., 2003; Jansen et al., 2004; Voydanoff, 2005c). Required work hours function as an objective demand that directly impacts work–family conflict (as do family responsibilities), but often work hours are affected by employees' sense of what is required to demonstrate commitment, protect one's job, or stay afloat during busy times. Individuals who feel there is too much to do increase their time commitment to work (Parasuraman et al., 1996; Wallace, 1997), suggesting that perceived overload influences work hours. There has been limited research on how organizations might reduce perceived overload (besides increasing staffing), although some innovative, participatory, action research has been conducted by Lotte Bailyn, Rhona Rapoport, and their colleagues (Rapoport et al., 2002; see also Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Perlow, 1997). For example, employees in one unit at Fleet Bank decided to have a single manager monitor work overload and make appropriate adjustments and to rotate this task among managers on a monthly basis (Bailyn, Rayman, Bengtsen, Carre, & Tierney, 2001). These work redesign projects suggest new strategies—moving beyond the common work–family policies and benefits—for changing the work environment to reduce work–family conflict.

The evidence for the influence of perceived supervisor support, a supportive organizational culture, perceived flexibility, and perceived overload on work–family conflict and enrichment is plentiful. We do note, however, that this research could be improved by addressing some methodological concerns. First, none of the research findings summarized in this section are based on longitudinal studies, except Jansen et al. (2004). Cross-sectional data raise questions about causal order, particularly when both proposed independent variables and proposed dependent variables are employee perceptions. Second, this research generally relies upon self reports of the work environment and work–family conflict or enrichment. There are important issues related to common method variance and few of these studies control for respondent's temperament or negative affect (cf. Barnett & Brennan, 1997; Batt & Valcour, 2003). Third, many studies use either national samples or employees in a single organization, which makes it difficult to examine organizational context in multi-level models. Despite the challenges of negotiating access to multiple organizations, this design will be particularly important for researchers who wish to identify how variation in organizational policies, programs, or cultures influences employees' perceptions of support, control, and overload.

## Directions for Future Research on Work–family Initiatives and Work–family Conflict

As we have shown, there is mixed evidence about the direct efficacy of work–family initiatives on work–family conflict and enrichment, with more consistent results about the impact of employees' perceptions of the work environment (in terms of supervisor support, the organizational culture regarding work and family, flexibility, and overload) on work–family conflict and enrichment. However, much of the latter body of research begs the question: How do we get there from here? How do we create environments with supportive supervisors, a supportive culture, more control over the time and timing of their work, and less overload? These conditions currently vary due to interpersonal differences among managers, existing organizational cultures, and organizational strategies for managing the employment relationship, but more research is needed to learn how to create these conditions and to determine the critical components of work–family initiatives that can reduce work–family conflict, improve work–family enrichment, and thereby improve the health and well-being of employees and their families.

To guide this research, we propose a multi-level, mediational model (shown in Figure 7.2) in which changes in organizational policies, practices, and benefits affect employees' perceptions of the support that their supervisors and co-workers provide (consistent with Hammer et al., 2007), the control they have over the time and timing of work (consistent with Kelly & Moen, 2007), the cultural expectations and norms about how work and family should be combined, and whether or not they feel overloaded by the demands of their job. These perceptions about the psychosocial work environment then affect employees' experience of work–family conflict and work–family enrichment. Conflict and enrichment are also determined by both the demands that the employee faces at home (e.g., number and age of dependents) and the resources available to the employee at home (e.g., a spouse who does not work for pay, total family income, emotional support from family), but our model concentrates on aspects of the work environment that may be modified in an effort to reduce work–family conflict and increase work–family enrichment.

A related issue is what organizational changes—work–family initiatives—are proposed and evaluated in the effort to reduce work–family conflict and encourage work–family enrichment. We propose broadening the conceptualization of work–family initiatives, considering a wider range of workplace changes than the common set of formal work–family policies. As a starting point, we have identified common and innovative work–family initiatives and categorized them in Table 7.2 according to the substantive goal of these change, i.e., foster support, increase control over work time, or manage work load. The italicized initiatives in Table 7.2 are those that are more familiar to scholars and practitioners. We attempted to identify changes that would be useful across a wide range of occupations, not just those that would work for professionals or managers. Making the goals of these initiatives explicit suggests that employees' perceptions of support, control over work time, and work load should be measured and analyzed as proximate outcomes in studies evaluating these initiatives and in internal assessments of these changes. Our brief descriptions of the training to increase supervisor support (Hammer et al., 2007), the ROWE initiative to increase control over work time (Kelly & Moen, 2007), and the work redesign project to reduce overload (Bailyn et al., 2001) provide some examples of work–family initiatives that are explicitly oriented to the three goals identified in Table 7.2.

We have also categorized these initiatives by the level, within the organization, where the intervention would be *delivered*, although we expect that most of these initiatives would have implications across multiple levels. For example, the hiring of work-life staff is an organizational decision (normally vetted by top management) that sends a message about the importance of work-life challenges to the organization as a whole, but this change also facilitates work-group changes such as training supervisors to be more supportive and

individual changes such as greater use of flexible work arrangements because individuals can seek guidance on how to pursue one of these arrangements. To take a second example, when individual co-workers willingly back-up those working reduced hours (e.g., handle an unexpected call from a client), they are helping to create a more supportive culture overall; this individual change is easier to accomplish when there has been appropriate cross-training within the work group.

Finally, we suggest that it is essential to conduct research that closely investigates the implementation of work–family initiatives within particular worksites. Inconsistent results in earlier studies may reflect unmeasured variation in the content and administration of work–family policies (in addition to the measurement issues discussed previously). A family leave policy that clearly communicates the legal right to leave work because of a serious health condition restricting a person from performing his/her job, to give care for a sick family member, or to care for a new child (by birth, adoption, or foster care) is the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. It explains the company-provided benefits available to employees during a leave, and guides employees and managers through the necessary paperwork, which will likely reassure employees that the organization is supportive of family care giving, particularly if it is coupled with a supervisor who knows enough to apply the policy comfortably and to model this support in front of co-workers. A flexible work policy that clearly communicates the various options to employees, provides guidance on how to request an arrangement, and encourages supervisors to approve requests (on a trial basis, at least) whenever possible will likely convey more support and increase perceived control over work time more effectively than a two-line policy that says flextime, telecommuting, and reduced-hours arrangements are allowed at the discretion of one's supervisor (Kelly & Kalev, 2006). In order to hone in on the organizational initiatives and contexts that are more or less effective in reducing work–family conflict, researchers must gather more detailed information on the content of work–family policies and on the way these policies *and* unwritten arrangements play out within the organization.

Recent scholarship provides some guidance on what information to collect about the content of policies and the implementation of both written and unwritten rules within organizations. Ryan and Kossek (2008) identify implementation attributes that affect employees' utilization of work–family policies and the creation of an inclusive organizational culture. These attributes are (1) supervisor support for policy use; (2) policies that are universally available across levels, jobs, and geographic locations; (3) degree of negotiation with supervisors before one can utilize these policies and the perceived fairness of those negotiations; and (4) the quality of communication regarding policies (Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Other implementation decisions that may affect employees' perception of their work environment and experience of work–family conflict include transparent access to negotiated policies (including whether managers are required to explain their decisions and whether managers are encouraged to approve employee requests) as well as the tracking of policy use so that internal advocates can target further education to departments with unusually low usage or unusually high turnover (Kelly & Moen, 2007). It is also important to know whether supervisors have received training about the work–family policies, including how these policies and benefits should be integrated with existing processes such as the performance review system. For example, managers are often unsure how to compare employees on a reduced-hours schedule with employees working full time (Kelly, 2005; Kossek & Lee, 2008). Studies that are sensitive to variation in the implementation of work–family initiatives require data collection within a number of worksites or organizations, and ideally include data from multiple informants at multiple levels (e.g., Lee, MacDermid, & Buck, 2000). Such data collection is relatively intensive but it is required to fully investigate questions such as what particular policies and implementation strategies are most promising from the perspective of both employees and management.



## What are the Effects of Work–family Initiatives or Reduced Work–family Conflict on Organizational-Level Business Outcomes and Individual-Level Work Outcomes?

Thus far, we have summarized the literature about organizational antecedents—both work–family initiatives and work environments—to work–family conflict. Our second question addresses the consequences of work–family conflict for organizational-level business outcomes, such as productivity, labor costs, or financial performance (pathways C and D, Figure 7.1), and individual-level work outcomes, such as job satisfaction and turnover intentions (pathway E). Some previous research has examined the direct effects of work–family initiatives on business outcomes (pathway C, Figure 7.1), but these studies rarely specify the mechanisms by which organizational initiatives are thought to affect the business outcomes. There is also little research that provides hard financial analysis of the costs and benefits of these initiatives, in the form of ROI analyses. Additionally, we see a gap in the literature on the relationship between work–family conflict and organizational-level business outcomes (pathway D). By contrast, there are a large number of studies that address the effects of work–family conflict on employees' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, individual productivity, and absenteeism (pathway E, Figure 7.1). As with the research linking employees' perceptions of the work environment to employees' perceived work–family conflict (pathway B), the majority of the studies in pathway E are cross-sectional and utilize only self-report measures.

### Research on Work–family Initiatives, Work–family Conflict, and Business Outcomes (Pathways C and D, Figure 7.1)

The widespread adoption of work–family initiatives suggests that many human resource managers and corporate executives believe in the value of policies and programs that aim to reduce the conflict between work and family demands, even though they are unsure of the actual ROI for their company (Corporate Voices for Working Families, 2005; Ferris et al., 1998). Galinsky and Bond (1998), for example, found in a representative sample of businesses that employ more than 100 people that the overwhelming majority of companies believe there is either a cost-neutral (42%) or a positive (42%) ROI from policies that help workers reduce the potential conflict between work and family obligations. Yet, our review of the literature suggests there is little hard evidence on the relationship between work–family initiatives and business outcomes (pathway C, Figure 7.1) to back this up.

From an economic perspective, the lack of strong “business case” evidence is worrisome because organizations may decide to back away from work–family policies and initiatives if the ROI evidence is not clear. Even though different flexible work arrangements have been incorporated into strategic human resources models (Brewster, Mayne, & Tregaskin, 1997; Huselid, 1995; Van Dyne, Kossek & Lobel, 2007), there have been only limited attempts to investigate which of these initiatives provide the “active ingredient” that makes the difference to business profitability and shareholder value. In an era of global competition and out-of-control medical costs, employers may rush to focus on outsourcing or reducing healthcare costs instead of investing in their workforce. Work–family researchers can help demonstrate the value of these initiatives in this environment, and thereby encourage continued and additional investments in work–family initiatives. From an institutional perspective, organizations may have adopted work–family initiatives because of normative pressures to demonstrate their concern for employees and these initiatives may be hard to remove, once institutionalized and expected by employees and the public alike, regardless of the actual payoff to the organization (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 2001). Nonetheless, advocates and interested managers in these organizations are likely to promote the economic rationality of these policies and

programs (regardless of the available evidence) as part of their work to legitimate their activities (Dobbin & Sutton, 1998).

The empirical evidence about the effects of business outcomes has primarily considered whether work–family initiatives and work–family conflict are related to firm productivity and firm financial performance (e.g., Arthur, 2003; Arthur & Cook, 2004; Clifton & Shepard, 2004; Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Lau, 2000; Lau & May, 1998; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000; Stavrou, 2005) and turnover (e.g., Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Clifton and Shepard's (2004) innovative study measures the impact of work–family initiatives on productivity at the firm level. Using an empirical model based on the economic theory of firm behavior and using a large sample of Fortune 500 companies, they show that work–family initiatives can result in increases in firm-level productivity. Their results indicate a 1–3% increase in output per employee for each 10% increase in the constructed family-friendly index. They infer that work–family initiatives work because they increase the applicant pool and thereby allow employers to choose more productive workers, but they are not able to evaluate the mechanisms in their research. Similarly, a cross-national study of organizations in the European Union also found statistically significant correlations between certain work–family initiatives and improved organizational performance (Stavrou, 2005). But this study does not elucidate the specific mechanisms that might be at work and neither study mentions work–family conflict as a possible mediator. Also, the studies do not provide estimates for the costs to firms of increasing their family-friendly score, so no ROI can be calculated. Finally, Perry-Smith and Blum (2000) found that organizations with more work–family initiatives had higher perceived organizational-level performance, based on personnel directors' reports, compared to those companies with fewer initiatives. The authors also found value in having multiple, related work–family initiatives (i.e., bundles), rather than adopting a single policy.

There is little research on the impact of work–family initiatives on firms' financial performance, but some recent work finds intriguing links between announcements of new work–family policies and increases in stock prices (Arthur, 2003; Arthur & Cook, 2004). For example, Arthur (2003) examined the stock market response to Fortune 500 firms' announcements of the adoption of a work–family initiative in the Wall Street Journal (between 1971 and 1996). Higher shareholder returns were found on the day of the announcement. As stated by Arthur (2003), "The average dollar value of the change in share price associated with a work–family initiative is approximately 60 million dollars per firm" (p. 504). Note that research on the effects corporate announcements of work–family policies—the perceived value that the general public places on family-friendliness—does not demonstrate actual increases in value through increased productivity or reduced costs due to work–family initiatives. Instead, it is consistent with either an economic explanation (that these policies improve productivity or reduce costs) or an institutional explanation (that certain publics reward organizations that signal their responsiveness to emerging norms of family-friendliness). We also found two studies that demonstrated a significant relationship between the perceived image of an organization's quality of work-life and business performance in terms of growth and profitability (Lau, 2000; Lau & May, 1998). Employees in organizations reporting better quality of work-life reported more job satisfaction, growth potential and job security, and these were related in turn to firm profitability.

Research that addresses turnover has primarily concentrated on employee self-reports of turnover intentions (see citations in next section). The literature consistently shows a correlation between work–family conflict and employees' turnover intentions (e.g., Allen, 2001; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Researchers often calculate the change in turnover intentions attributable to work–family conflict, then either explicitly or implicitly use government and business journal estimates of average costs of employee turnover to make the business case. These costs vary greatly, ranging anywhere from 50 to 200% of an employee's

annual salary (see, for example, “NCQA to require health plan audits” [1998, p.11], Fitz-enz [1997, p.50], Johnson [1995, p.53]). However, employee self-reports of turnover intentions are less convincing than experimental or quasi-experimental studies that use administrative data on actual employee turnover.

Although the academic literature is limited, some organizations conduct internal evaluations of work–family initiatives. Much of this data, however, is proprietary and the programs and findings are rarely detailed in published documents. An exception is recent work conducted by Corporate Voices for Working Families, a non-profit, non-partisan corporate membership organization headed by Donna Klein. Based on the accumulation of data from 29 US firms, this report groups the business outcomes for flexibility into the following categories: talent management (i.e., retention), financial performance, operational and business outcomes (i.e., cycle times, increased revenue generation), and human capital outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, engagement) similar to the individual-level work attitudes we discuss later. These benefits are documented in both hourly and salaried employees. While this important research provides insights into firms’ assessment of the impact of work-life initiatives on organizational outcomes, most of these studies lack sound experimental designs that truly allow for causal interpretations to be made.

To summarize, the main problem with research on the effects of work–family conflict or work–family initiatives on business outcomes such as productivity, financial performance, and costs associated with turnover is that there are few rigorous, peer-reviewed studies on this topic. Secondary concerns include the limited discussion of mechanisms by which work–family initiatives are thought to affect business outcomes, including limited attention to work–family conflict as a mediator. This is an area ripe for additional research.

### **Research on Work–family Conflict and Employees’ Work Attitudes and Behaviors (Pathway E)**

In contrast to the limited research on the relationships between work–family conflict, work–family initiatives, and business outcomes, there are many studies of the relationship between work–family conflict and individual-level work outcomes such as employees’ attitudes towards their work and self-reported behaviors such as absenteeism and performance (pathway E, Figure 7.1).

According to the Allen et al. (2000) review, job satisfaction is the most heavily researched work attitude. Most studies find a negative relationship between work–family conflict and job satisfaction such that, as work–family conflict increases, job satisfaction decreases (e.g., Adams & Jex, 1999; Adams, King, & King, 1996; Allen, 2001; Aryee, Luk, & Stone, 1998; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Drory & Shamir, 1988; Kopelman, Prottas, Thompson, & Jahn, 2006; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Moen & Sweet, 2002; O’Driscoll, Ilgen, & Hildreth, 1992; Shamir, 1983).

There is also clear evidence that employees with higher work–family conflict report less organizational commitment (e.g., Berg et al., 2003; Cannon, 1998; Casper, Martin, Buffardi, & Erdwins, 2002; Lambert, Pasupuleti, Cluse-Tolar, Jennings, & Baker, 2006; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996; Rothbard, Philips, & Dumas, 2005; Siegel, Post, Brockner, Fishman, & Garden, 2005). This reduced commitment is also seen in studies of turnover intentions in particular, where employees with higher work–family conflict are more likely to report intentions to leave the organization (e.g., Balmforth, & Gardner, 2006; Barrah et al., 2004; Boyar, Maertz, Jr., Pearson, & Keough, 2003; Grandey, & Cropanzano, 1999; Good, Page, Jr., & Young, 1996; Greenhaus, Collins, Singh, & Parasuraman, 1997; Haar, 2004; Hang-yue, Foley, & Loi, 2005; Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley, & Luk, 2001; Wang, Lawler, Walumbwa, & Shi, 2004).

In addition to these attitudes related to organizational attachment, work–family conflict also affects employees' performance on the job and their work stress. Many studies show that employees with more work–family conflict also have higher levels of self-reported absenteeism (e.g., Boyar, Maertz, Jr., & Pearson, 2005; Gignac, Kelloway, & Gottlieb, 1996; Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Hammer, Bauer, & Grandey, 2003; Jacobson et al., 1996; Vaananen et al., 2004). Research also suggests that organizations may be able to reduce tardiness and absenteeism by providing flexible work schedules and part-time options (e.g., Baltes et al., 1999; Dalton & Mesch, 1990; Hill, Jackson, & Martinengo, 2006; Ronen, 1981). Work–family conflict is also associated with higher levels of burnout (e.g., Bacharach, Bamberger, & Conley, 1991; Barnett, Gareis, & Brennan, 1999; Burke, & Mikkelsen, 2006; Chaoping, Kan, & Zhengxue, 2003; Harvey, Kelloway, & Duncan-Leiper, 2003; Mikkelsen & Burke, 2004; Montgomery, Panagopolou, & Benos, 2006; Thompson, Brough, & Schmidt, 2006). We also see more reported work stress among employees with more work–family conflict (e.g., Beena & Poduval, 1992; Chan, Lai, Ko, & Boey, 2000; Galinsky et al., 1996; Hammer, Saksvik, Nytro, Torvant, & Bayazit, 2004; Netemeyer, Brashear-Alejandro, & Boles, 2004). Finally, work–family conflict and work stress are related to lower levels of self-reported job performance (e.g., Butler & Skattebo, 2004; Hill, Ferris, & Martinson, 2003; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Lambert, 2000; Netemeyer, Maxham, & Pullig, 2005). Research on the link between work–family conflict and performance would be improved by including supervisors' reports of performance and/or more objective data on the quantity or quality of work performed.

In addition to the plethora of research on work–family conflict and individual-level work outcomes, there is some research that addresses whether the *use* of work–family initiatives impacts work–family conflict and work outcomes such as job satisfaction, absenteeism, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g., Lambert, 2000; Milkovich & Gomez, 1976; see also reviews listed previously). Some of this research, however, has found the utilization of on-site child care, for example, to be unrelated to work–family conflict, absenteeism (e.g., Goff et al., 1990), and employee performance (e.g., Kossek & Nichols, 1992; Milkovich & Gomez, 1976).

Overall, the findings from this body of research suggest that work–family conflict is related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, tardiness, and absenteeism. The large number of studies that find these relationships lends credence to these claims; however, most of this research utilizes cross-sectional data and employee self-reports, raising questions of causal order and common method variance. Additional longitudinal, multi-level research would advance both theory and management practice.

### Directions for Future Research on Business and Work Outcomes

Our review leads us to call for (1) more research that addresses the mechanisms through which work–family initiatives affect business outcomes; and (2) more studies that quantify the impact of these initiatives using methods and measures that are relevant to employers, such as ROI analysis. The second part of our multi-level, mediational model (Figure 7.2) proposes that organizational work–family initiatives impact business outcomes through the mediating factors of employees' perception of the work environment, employees' perception of work–family conflict or enrichment, and the work attitudes and work behaviors that are affected by work–family conflict. Some work attitudes and behaviors are closely associated with organizational attachment, whereas others more directly affect organizational performance. Business outcomes such as productivity, labor costs associated with turnover and financial performance are, of course, also determined by a myriad of other organizational, industry, and market conditions.

Our primary hypothesized mechanism is that work–family initiatives change employees' perception of the work environment and this reduces work–family conflict. Reduced work–

family conflict and increased work–family engagement lead to improved employee attitudes and behaviors. Employees' work attitudes and behaviors then further change in ways that, when aggregated, benefit the organization. But here we take a step back to consider more generally the processes by which organizations may benefit from work–family initiatives or reduced work–family conflict. We identify two processes: increasing revenue, typically by increasing the productivity of the workforce, or reducing costs, typically by reducing turnover or absenteeism. Both of those changes may have major impacts on a firm's overall financial performance, but each suggests a different theoretical link to the behavior of the firm and each has potentially different impacts on ROI estimates. Furthermore, different policies may be designed to have a greater impact on one versus the other and employees and their families may be affected differently by these two strategies. Therefore, it is important for both scholars and practitioners to separate these two strategies analytically for improving business outcomes.

Work–family initiatives may impact firm revenues through recruitment of higher-quality candidates and through marginal productivity gains in existing labor, as suggested by such scholars as Konrad and Mangel (2000) and Drago and Golden (2006). When studying the ability of work–family policies or initiatives to attract or retain desired employees, it is important to remember that these policies are attractive to potential employees only to the extent that potential employees seek out and value those policies. In this sense, firms view work–family policies in much the same way they view health insurance: as a component of total compensation that can be used to attract a specific type of worker for whom family-friendly policies are valuable. Formal policies, which can be easily touted in the press and to potential recruits, may be more useful as a recruiting tool than the less familiar culture change initiatives or work redesign strategies discussed previously—even if the culture change or work redesign strategies do more reduce employees' work–family conflict. Innovative initiatives that receive a large amount of press (such as “Mass Career Customization” at Deloitte and “Results Only Work Environment” at Best Buy) may be particularly effective in recruitment. Another implication is that firms may want to target specific types of workers when implementing these policies, most likely highly-skilled workers in highly-competitive labor markets. Organizations may adopt these policies when provided with information on the extent to which the targeted employee group values work–family initiatives, rather than waiting for ROI measures. Under this scenario, the work–family initiatives may influence business outcomes directly because they change the mix of employees in the firm, without necessarily changing the work attitudes or behaviors of any individual employee.

An efficiency wage or exchange theory perspective suggests that work–family initiatives affect productivity because employees increase their effort in exchange for working in a more supportive environment. In this scenario, the work outcome of increased productivity by an individual employee is influencing business outcomes by increasing revenues. For example, Osterman (1995) and Berg et al. (2003) conceptualize work–family policies as part of a broader high-performance strategy, although they were not able to measure changes in performance when these policies were adopted. Konrad and Mangel (2000) found that work-life programs are positively correlated to productivity gains, as measured by sales per employee. Interestingly, these effects were strongest with higher percentages of women and higher percentages of professional employees. However, this study did not discuss the underlying theoretical mechanisms responsible for these productivity gains. Yasbeck (2004) makes note of this problem as a common one in the literature, stating that there is no coherent theory of *how* work-life policies influence employee-level productivity. Linking work–family conflict to productivity is further obscured by the fact that most of the literature focuses on the effect of work–family initiatives on business outcomes (pathway C, Figure 7.1) *or* the effect of work–family conflict on work outcomes (pathway D, Figure 7.1), rather than considering crucial mediators (Figure 7.2). Note that a few studies do examine multiple pathways from work–family initiatives to work–family conflict and work outcomes (Dunham, Pierce, & Castenada,



1987; Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Wagner & Hunt, 1994). We agree with Konrad and Mangel (2000, p. 1236) that “future research can contribute to the literature by directly examining... work-life conflict to observe whether [it] mediates the relationship between work-life programs and productivity”. Compelling ROI evidence might persuade more employers that work–family initiatives result in productivity gains that at least offset the cost of these initiatives. Importantly, this type of ROI evidence could be used to justify organization-wide changes as opposed to targeting these initiatives to highly-skilled (and relatively privileged) employees, as suggested by the earlier talent recruitment scenario.

The second process by which work–family initiatives may affect business outcomes is through their impact on the cost of production for a firm. Work–family initiatives are believed to reduce costs primarily by reducing turnover and reducing absenteeism. Reducing turnover and the recruitment and training costs associated with losing trained employees will save organizations time and money. The cost savings from reduced turnover are, obviously, highly correlated with the productivity benefits associated with recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce. Whether work–family initiatives are viewed as reducing turnover costs or increasing revenues, however, has a major impact on the design and conduct of studies examining these initiatives. Turnover costs are higher when employees have high levels of firm-specific skills, since it will take longer for the organization to train a new employee and have that person become productive. Turnover costs are also generally higher when employees are highly skilled and credentialed, because the labor pool of properly trained candidates is smaller. Variation in turnover costs partly explains the finding that organizations that have professionals or managers in the “core job” (normally operationalized as the most common job title) are more likely to adopt work–family policies (Deitch & Huffman, 2001; Kelly, 2003). Unfortunately, very few studies document actual turnover rates (an organizational-level business outcome) but rely instead on employee self-reports of turnover intentions (an individual-level work outcome). Studies that evaluate the effects of work–family initiatives on turnover should be sensitive to the implementation issues discussed previously, since having policies “on the books” may do nothing to reduce turnover if employees do not perceive that those policies are usable (Eaton, 2003) or if the work environment remains unsupportive, inflexible, and overly demanding.

Work–family initiatives are also believed to reduce organizational costs through decreased absenteeism. Absenteeism can be a form of organizational withdrawal that results from disengagement and low levels of attachment to the organization. Absenteeism can also be due to one’s own illness or the illness of a family member. When provided workplace supports that include control over work time, employees are less likely to be absent due to illness of a family member. Absenteeism is most often thought of as a cost because it represents lost productivity and because paid sick leave is a large component of total compensation for many businesses. As with employee turnover, however, it is possible to conceptualize avoided absenteeism as increasing revenues. Work–family initiatives may reduce absenteeism by altering individual behaviors, as noted previously, or by simply redefining absenteeism. For example, a firm may eliminate the distinction between sick leave and vacation time and thereby eliminate the financial liability of accrued, unused sick leave without actually reducing the amount of work missed by a given employee. The implication is that work–family scholars need to understand how management defines the problems that it hopes a new work–family initiative will address and to consider how associated changes in organizational policies and practices will affect employees, families, and the organization’s bottom line.

Our second recommendation regarding business outcomes is a call for more objective, non-self report data such as supervisor ratings, sales volume (e.g., Allen et al., 2000), profit-sales growth (e.g., Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000), shareholder value (e.g., Arthur, 2003; Arthur & Cook, 2004), profit and loss, and measures of market performance over time. Clear and compelling

research data on the business case may buffer investments in work–family initiatives as companies consider other needs—including investments in expensive technologies, development of a global workforce, or health and retirement benefits for employees and retirees. From an economic perspective, the shortage of compelling data on the positive financial impact of work–family initiatives on a company’s bottom line jeopardizes the survival or expansion of these policies into the future. As noted previously, some studies begin to identify the financial benefits of work–family initiatives but they do not address the central question of ROI analysis: does the reduction in work–family conflict yield cost savings that are equivalent to or greater than the investment in the work–family initiatives themselves?

## Discussion and Conclusion

Our review of the literature on the consequences of work–family initiatives for employees and organizations has led us to formulate a research agenda based on four primary conclusions. First, the field would be strengthened by more multi-level research evaluating inputs and outcomes at both the individual and organizational levels. Second, an interdisciplinary approach to these questions is beneficial and, perhaps, essential for designing strong studies and reaching the varied audiences who are interested in these topics. Third, a move toward longitudinal studies that employ quasi-experimental or experimental designs would dramatically improve the evidence base related to these questions, as well as address most of the methodological concerns we raised previously. Fourth, as with most areas of research, scholars should be attuned during all phases of a study to the challenges of translating research into practice in effective ways. We elaborate on these four points in turn.

### Multi-Level Research on Work–family Initiatives

We have argued throughout this review that there is a need for more multi-level research on how work–family initiatives affect employees and organizations. The call for multi-level research is a familiar call within organizational studies, but it is often unclear what this would look like. To flesh this out, we have proposed, in Figure 7.2, a multi-level model describing how organizational work–family interventions affect employees’ perceptions of specific aspects of the work environment and their perceptions of work–family conflict. When employees experience changes in the level of work–family conflict, our model suggests that this will affect their work attitudes and work behaviors related to both organizational attachment and performance. Meaningful changes in employees’ job satisfaction, organizational commitment, absenteeism, and related work outcomes will accumulate in ways that ultimately affect business outcomes for the unit or organization as a whole. Existing research has generally examined only one, or perhaps two, parts of this model, but we believe the model is useful for integrating and evaluating the field—as illustrated in our review—and for guiding future research.

In addition to proposing this model, we have operationalized work–family initiatives as multi-level organizational interventions in Table 7.2. Generally, researchers and practitioners have focused on work–family policies and benefits that provide top–down provision of new programs or top–management approval of new work arrangements. Individuals then seek to use these programs or arrangements in a largely unchanged work environment. Our claim is that work–family conflict will be reduced more dramatically if and when the broader work environment changes, as measured by perceived support, control over work time, and overload. When the focus is changing the work environment, it becomes clear that we should consider innovation at all levels, including those that target work group processes (e.g., Van Dyne et al., 2007).

## Interdisciplinary Research and Multiple Stakeholders

Our multi-level conceptual model explicitly recognizes that work–family initiatives are of interest to both employees and organizations, but there are additional stakeholders who may benefit from changing the work environment to reduce work–family conflicts. Employees’ families benefit when work–family conflict is ameliorated (e.g., Crouter & McHale, 2005; Hammer, Cullen, et al., 2005; Schneider & Waite, 2006). Communities benefit if employed individuals have more time and energy to be involved in local volunteer work and civic engagement (e.g., Bookman, 2004; Swisher, Sweet, & Moen, 2004; Voydanoff, 2001). There are more general benefits to the public as well, in so far as these initiatives improve the health of employees and their families (e.g., Allen & Armstrong, 2006; Bianchi, Casper, & King, 2005). We believe that research is more likely to speak to multiple stakeholders when studies are conducted by interdisciplinary teams or, at least, informed by the methods, measures, and rhetorics used by different disciplines and the groups they traditionally study (Kossek, Sweet, et al., 2006).

## Research Designs to Enable Evaluations of the Effects of Work–family Initiatives

Our review demonstrates that there is already a lively and informative literature on these topics, but we believe it is time for scholars to pursue more rigorous studies of work–family initiatives and their consequences. Specifically, we call for longitudinal studies that employ experimental or quasi-experimental methods to evaluate the impact of these initiatives on both employees and organizations. Our collaboration provides an example of the value of an interdisciplinary team—where different people have different knowledge and expectations of research—for moving us towards this goal. We all know that experimental designs are the “gold standard” for causal claims, but the randomized field experiments of worksite interventions that public health scholars (in particular) brought forward helped us to reconsider what might be done in future studies of work–family initiatives. We certainly recognize the challenges of conducting studies of this type—including the challenge of finding cooperative research partners willing to (or already planning to) implement new and unproven policies or programs and open to the possibility that their new initiatives are not beneficial to employees, the organization, or both parties—but worksite studies in other fields have raised new possibilities for us to consider as we plan, conduct, and assess our own work.

## The Goal of Translating Research to Practice

We believe this research has the potential to benefit employees, their families, their organizations, and their communities in so far as the insights from existing studies and the lesson from future research are translated into management practice and put to use in public policy debates. Yet this is no simple matter. Scholars in many fields have recently discussed the challenges of translating research into practice (e.g., Glasgow & Emmons, 2007; Tunis, Stryer, & Clancy, 2003), and these issues have received attention from prominent management scholars (e.g., Rousseau, 2006; Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001; Van de Ven, 2007). These scholars have emphasized the value of treating knowledge transfer as a mutual process in which both scholars and practitioners learn from each other, designing studies that address real-world problems, and working with practitioners so they are attuned to and comfortable with the evidence that scientists produce.

Additionally, in order to conduct work–family research in the ways that we have proposed here, scholars and practitioners will need to form on-going relationships that function as research partnerships. Scholars conducting longitudinal, quasi-experimental research on the effects of work–family initiatives need to either catch organizations at the right time to study newly implemented policies or programs or partner with organizations in developing and implementing these initiatives. Both strategies require a significant amount of scholars’ time and labor in tending relationships that may or may not lead to full-blown studies, but these

relationships also bring value to the research because scholars come to know organizations, their workforces' needs, and their cultures well.

Because the relationships between scholars and practitioners are “two-way streets”, scholars may need to adjust their research plans to meet organizational goals as well as their own. It may be important to use measures and adapt sources that employers find compelling, even if these are not the most common measures or sources in the academic literature. Researchers may also need to conduct some analyses that are important to the organization but not central to researchers' main questions. This may include ROI analysis that is comparable to the information used to make other business decisions, and so particularly appreciated by decision-makers in organizations. For some scholars, these adjustments require an identity shift and a new focus on engaged scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007). Although we recognize the challenges of conducting research with multiple audiences in mind, we feel that this agenda is necessary both to build further the academic evidence base and to create support for meaningful work–family initiatives in the business community.

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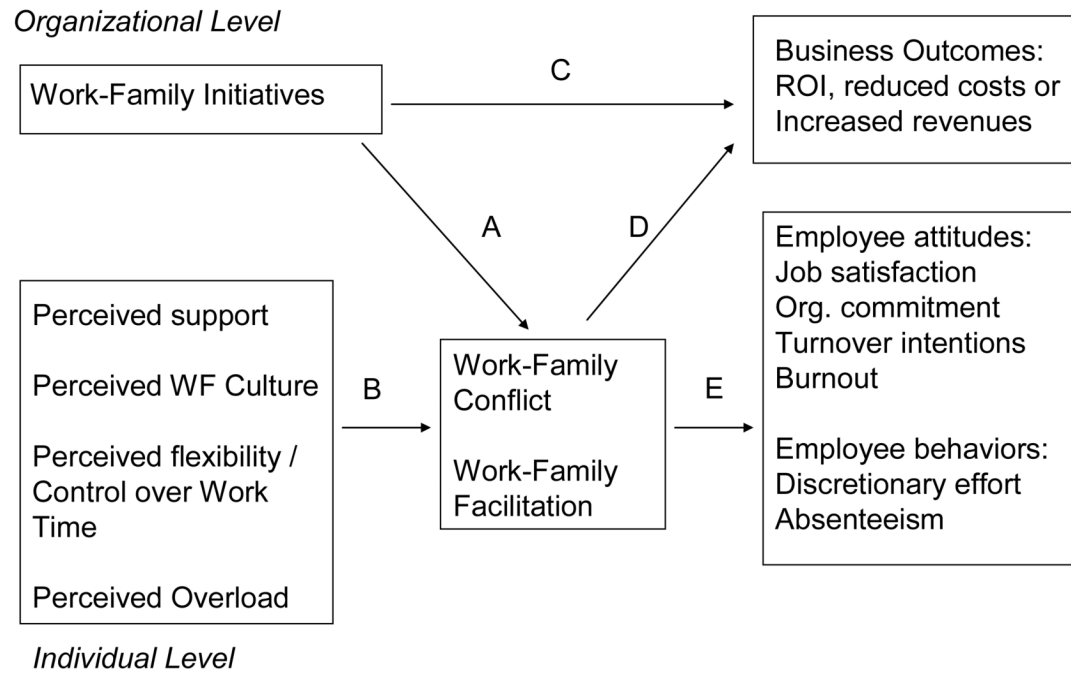
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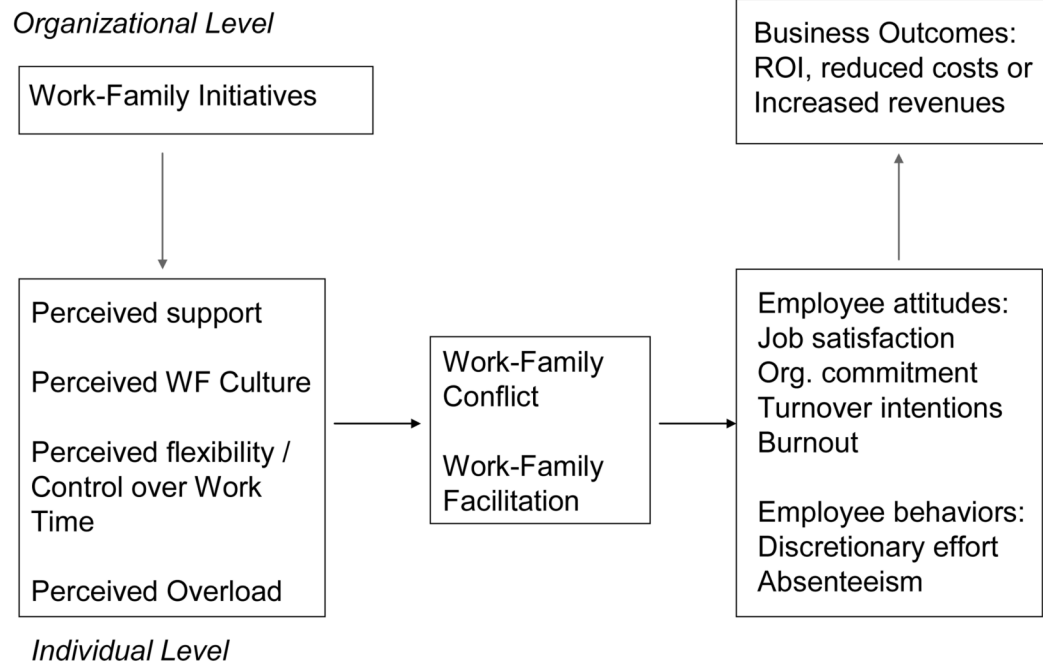
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**Figure 7.1.**  
Summary of Previous Research.



**Figure 7.2.**  
Conceptual Model.



**Table 7.1**

## Selected Studies of Work–Family Policies, Programs, and Benefits

	Availability	Use
<b>Significant</b>	Allen (2001) [count]	Allen (2001) [count]
	Berg et al. (2003) [childcare]	Brough et al. (2005) [count]
	de Luis Carnicer et al. (2004) [count]	Duxbury, Higgins & Thomas (1996) [count]
	Frye & Breaugh (2004) [count]	Ezra & Deckman (1996) [flextime]
	Lyness & Kropf (2005) [count]	
	Mennino et al. (2005) [count]	Hill et al. (1996) [telework]
	Thompson et al. (1999) [count]	Hill et al. (2003) [telework]
	Thompson et al. (1999) [count]	Lapierre & Allen (2006) [telework]
		Madsen (2003) [telework]
		O'Driscoll et al. (2003) [count]
	9	9
<b>Not significant</b>	Anderson et al. (2002) [count]	Dikkers (2004) [count]
	Barrah et al. (2004) [count]	Hammer, Neal, et al. (2005) [count]
	Batt & Valcour (2003) [count]	
	Behson (2005) [count]	Kossek, Lautsch et al. (2006) [telework]
	Galinsky et al. (1996) [count]	
	Luk & Shaffer (2005) [count]	Lapierre & Allen (2006) [flextime]
	Moen & Yu (1999) [flextime]	
	O'Driscoll et al. (2003) [count]	Scharlach (2001) [count]
	Tausig & Fenwick (2001) [flextime]	
	Thompson & Prottas (2006) [count]	
	10	5

Table 7.2

Conceptualization of Work–Family Initiatives

Level	Organizational change	Work-group change	Individual or job change
<b>Goals Foster Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dependent Care Benefits</li><li>• Statement from top management</li><li>• Work-life staff</li><li>• Work-life committee</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training on emotional support and instrumental support, for supervisors and/or for groups</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educational Programs and/or Employee Groups for users or those with specific family demands</li></ul>
<b>Increase control over work time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flexible hours and remote work policies</li><li>• Longer leaves and career breaks</li><li>• Provide technology</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training on options</li><li>• Cross-training</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage use</li><li>• Back-up users</li></ul>
<b>Manage workload</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Part-time and reduced load arrangements</li><li>• No mandatory overtime</li><li>• Paid vacation, sick days, leaves</li><li>• Staffing changes to cover absences, reduce overload (e.g., on-call floater)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training on options available</li><li>• Work redesign to reduce low-value tasks</li><li>• Cross-training</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work redesign for a specific job</li><li>• Encourage use</li><li>• Back-up users</li></ul>

Note: Italicized initiatives are those that are more familiar to scholars and practitioners.