MAKING IT WORK:
CORPORATE EXECUTIVE OPINIONS ON WORK-LIFE SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the opinions of senior executives of corporations regarding work-life supports on the job. These work-life supports take the form of benefits as well as formal policies and informal practices. Work and the workforce are changing with more women and more dual earning couples in the workforce. Work-life is also shifting based on the increasing role of technology and the spillover that occurs between work and family. As a result, workers have changing needs related to integrating work and family. Quantitative studies have examined *how* companies are addressing the changing needs of workers. These studies have investigated *what kind* of work-life supports companies are offering. This study has built on existing quantitative work and investigates *why.*

Specifically, this study explores senior executives' attitudes, opinions, and points of view regarding work-life supports offered by corporations. The central questions that this research answers are: 1) what are the factors or barriers that executives believe affect the adoption of work-life supports by companies? and 2) in what ways and to what extent do executives view work-life supports as linked to the organizational outcomes they are seeking to accomplish? The research findings in this study demonstrate that executives have authority and influence over work-life supports. In addition, there is a great variety in the extent and types of work-life

support provided by organizations. These typically take the form of benefits, policies, practices, diversity programs, work environments, and work tools. Factors which enhance or detract from the provision of work-life supports are leader discretion, culture, the nature and demands of the work, globalization, technology, younger generations in the workforce, and performance management approaches. Gender is also a salient feature of women executives' experience with work-life support. Executives believe there is a connection between the provision of work-life supports and organizational outcomes such as employee engagement, attraction, and retention as well as productivity. In addition, executives in this study believe the provision of work-life supports will increase in the future.

My research makes a unique contribution because it builds on the quantitative studies that already exist. Senior executive perspectives are crucial to expanding upon the quantitative data because the executives make decisions about work-life supports for their own companies. They also influence other senior executives through their personal and professional networks. In addition, they set examples for others in their organizations based on their visibility and status. The outcomes of this study are important because they contribute to an understanding of the pressure that men and women are under and the ways that corporations are seeking to offer work-life supports. Lacking comprehensive federal support for this work-life integration, the support offered by corporations is imperative. These findings inform the field and inform those who seek to increase the provision of work-life supports across organizations.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Introduction and Research Question

In this dissertation, I examine the opinions of senior executives of corporations regarding work-life supports on the job. These work-life supports take the form of benefits as well as formal policies and informal practices. Work and the workforce are changing, with more women and more dual earning couples in the workforce. Work-life is also shifting based on the increasing role of technology and the spillover that occurs between work and family (Bond, Thompson et al. 2002). As a result, workers have changing needs related to integrating work and family. Quantitative studies set a foundation for this study. They have examined *how* companies are addressing the changing needs of workers and they have investigated *what kind* of work-life supports companies are offering. This study sets a context for the investigation by providing some information on what kind of work-life supports are available but primarily, this research investigates *why.*

Specifically, this study explores senior executives' attitudes, opinions, and points of view regarding work-life supports offered by corporations. The central questions that provide direction for my research are: 1) what are the factors or barriers that executives believe affect the adoption of work-life supports by companies? and 2) in what ways and to what extent do executives view work-life supports as linked to the organizational outcomes they are seeking to accomplish? While this is a qualitative study in which I investigate these questions without a formal hypothesis, I also explore whether there would be differences among executive respondents based on their gender and whether there are differences based on the industry segment into which their company falls. In addition, I explore whether there are differences based on the area

of the country in which the executive and his/her company are located. In fact, there is a difference in the way men and women view the topic of gender but the conclusions I can make based on differences in companies' industries and regions are negligible.

The questions I investigate are important because men and women are under increasing pressure to integrate the demands of work and family. Lacking comprehensive federal support for this work-life integration, the support offered by corporations is imperative. Further, when work-life supports exist, there are benefits to both employees and to corporations (Galinsky et al. 2008). In addition, my research makes a unique contribution because it builds on the quantitative studies that already exist. Senior executive perspectives are crucial to expanding upon the quantitative data because the executives make decisions about work-life supports for their own companies. They also influence other senior executives through their personal and professional networks. In addition, they set examples for others in their organizations based on their visibility and status.

More specifically, there are five ways in which this research is important. First, work-life supports are instrumental in helping workers to integrate work and family demands. Integrating work and family is a shared experience for most of the population regardless of differences in gender, class, race-ethnicity, income level, or family situation. Most individuals share aspirations to commit fully to both family and work and to navigate them both successfully. The majority of men and women work for pay in the marketplace and, for many, work delivers not only a paycheck but also meaning and fulfillment. At the same time, many workers report that they feel overloaded with their work and that the intensity of their work had increased steadily (Jacobs and Gerson 2004). In addition to their work, the majority of workers also have children. Bianchi et al. (2006) find that most adults feel that raising their children is one of the most meaningful and

rewarding investments of time they can make. Beyond the importance of work and family at an individual level, societies need to ensure that citizens work productively, rear children successfully, and respond to change with agility (Heymann 2005).

Second, this study is important from a policy perspective. U.S. federal policy has not kept pace with the needs of working families. The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) passed in 1993, is the most comprehensive U.S. policy aimed at addressing work and family issues. However, the FMLA only covers employers who have 50 or more workers and only offers unpaid leave. It excludes employees who work in companies which have less than 50 workers. In lieu of federal or state work-life supports, the benefits, policies, and practices offered by employers are important to families' successful integration of work and family demands. This study will serve policy by uncovering barriers to the adoption of work-life supports for employees of corporations.

Third, this study is important for both companies and families. In 2002, the National Study for the Changing Workforce found that

> employees in more effective and flexible workplaces are more likely than other workers to have: greater engagement in their jobs; higher levels of job satisfaction; stronger intentions to remain with their employers; less negative and stressful spillover from job to home; less negative spillover from home to job; and better mental health (Galinsky et al. 2002).

For employers, having employees who are more engaged and healthier may result in higher retention, higher productivity, and reduced costs for medical expenses (Galinsky et al. 2002).

Fourth, this study is important in that it examines the attitudes and opinions of senior executives using a qualitative approach. While other research has examined *what* companies are doing in order to address the needs of work and family, this study explores *why*. In addition,

senior executives are a key group because they strategically influence company policy. They occupy roles where they employ agency to influence company practices through their leadership and broad chain of command. They also influence decision makers in other companies through their professional networks of other executives. In addition, because of their visibility, status, and spans of control, others may look to them for clues about organizational norms. This has broad implications for work and family because through their actions, these men and women influence others regarding behavior within organizations. The senior executives are not representative of the average worker and they have a high degree of privilege based on their positions, pay, benefits, and levels within their organizations. Despite their privilege, this group is important to interview because their agency, influence, leadership, visibility, and decision making affect work-life supports in organizations. They are uniquely suited to this research, not because they are representative of an average worker, but because they possess privilege of position and decision making power within their organizations.

Finally, this study makes a contribution to society as a whole. The way individuals and society understand the issues of work and family shapes governmental policies and spending as well as corporate policies and spending. Given this, it is valuable to examine senior executive decision makers' perceptions about work-life supports. Contribution to the dialogue raises awareness and understanding which contributes to a "framework that makes it possible for the society to be better than it was before" (Duneier and Back 2006: 563).

Assumptions

As a backdrop for this body of research, I am making certain assumptions. One assumption underlying my research is that work and family are interconnected and inseparable

and should be treated this way for the purposes of study. This approach and the emphasis on relationships between the milieus of work and family are rather new. Historically, society has regarded work and family as separate spheres, and this has influenced the ways each field has been studied and the laws and professions that have grown up around each (Kanter 2006). But profound social change has occurred over the last decades. The boundaries between work and family have become permeable, and spillover has become the norm. According to Kanter (2006), in the face of such social changes, studying, discussing, and analyzing the phenomena are worthy and important missions. Much scholarship has focused on the permeability of the boundaries between work and family: work and family are each part of a systemic whole. Ultimately, work and family are intertwined at individual, collective, and societal levels. The interconnectedness of the milieus makes this study salient.

A second assumption underlying my research is that work provides a critical context for family members. Indeed, work affects what men and women earn and in turn, their access to resources. Work also has implications for social networks including whom people know and the friends people have. It affects the support networks they can access and the leisure activities in which they engage. Work also has important effects on physical, emotional, and mental health. It affects the ways the people define themselves, the way they are defined by others, and the level of prestige they are afforded. In addition, work is part of the public sphere. Stephanie Coontz (2000) reinforces the importance of the public context for the family: private family relations take place against a backdrop of rules set by public authorities; public inequities of gender, race, or class get transferred into private relations; and family norms affect the ability of individuals to exercise public rights (Coontz 2000). The work-life supports that companies offer have an influence over the work experience of employees, and they carry over into the non-work and

family situations they face. In addition, I hold a personal belief that work-life supports are important and valuable to both families and companies. I believe they help families more effectively navigate and integrate the numerous demands they face both from work and from family obligations. I also believe they result in increased engagement and productivity by employees, which is a benefit for companies. This second assumption provides a lens through which I analyze and report these findings. In short, I believe that *more* work-life supports, and the right work-life supports, are better for individuals, families, and organizations.

A third assumption behind this study is my belief in the necessity for a sociological lens. Using a sociological lens (Vallas 2009) leads to a conclusion that work is fundamentally social and reciprocal. Individuals shape their work and in turn, work shapes individuals, groups, and society. Organizations are social systems, and they are in a complex, symbiotic relationship with the environments in which they function. In addition, the sociological lens of work addresses the distribution of opportunities through jobs and occupations. Not all work is the same, and different kinds of work and workplaces can have a range of effects on individuals and families. Here, I focus on corporate, white collar work. In addition, race, class, and gender matter in the way that work opportunities are distributed (Collins 1997). Because work is social and reciprocal, this research into executive opinions about work-life supports is important to pursue.

Theoretical Frameworks

My research explores the attitudes and opinions held by senior executive leaders regarding work-life supports for employees. This inquiry is framed by three theoretical perspectives. These include social constructionist perspectives, social humanistic models, and

gender and feminist perspectives. My research regarding executive opinions about work-life supports arise from these theoretical frameworks.

Social Constructionist Perspectives

Through this research, I explore how senior executives interpret the concept of work-life supports and how they make sense of organizational responses to the needs of the changing workforce. Social constructionist or interpretive theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for this study. Specifically, they suggest that men and women create reality through their relationships with one another. They also create reality through behaviors that operate to form a reinforcing cycle of social cues, expectations, and responses. The symbolic interaction framework is one such interpretive perspective. Attributed to Mead (1934/1962), it emphasizes the way humans create meaning and the implications of these perceptions on their choices and behavior. In this framework, the construct of culture – both in the larger society, within the family, or within the workplace – is as important as a context within which actors share symbols, language, and meaning. In addition, the process of interacting with others creates meaning. Berger (1967) developed Mead's theory further, placing emphasis on the meaning that is created and sustained through social processes. He also posited that people take their understanding about reality for granted, and these implicit assumptions are infrequently made explicit. There is a reinforcing loop connecting the individual's understanding and the social world. Individuals' assumptions about reality drive their behaviors in the social world which, in turn, drive interactions and thus the accumulation of knowledge and more assumptions by individuals. Berger conceives of the internalization of meaning as a basic social process.

This framework also places importance on roles. Theoretically, when individuals are clear about role expectations and are able to fulfill their roles in their own and other family members' evaluations, the more satisfaction and less stress they will experience (Calhoun et al. 2007; White and Klein 2008). Concrete processes and situations drive individuals to create meaning but, having agency, these meanings can shift just as situations can shift. Therefore, this framework contains a balanced view of both the reinforcing nature of behaviors and the transformative potential for change (Lengermann and Wallace 1985).

Recently, social constructionist and interpretive frameworks have been further developed by Peter Senge. Specifically, in the late 1990's Senge gained popularity in corporations. He advocated that employees should be aware of the meaning they were creating and assumptions they were making in working relationships. In turn, he recommended they redirect their interactions for more positive outcomes (Senge 1990). While his focus was not on work and family in particular, it was applicable to these milieus and had influence on a large number of organizations at the time.

I apply this social constructionist perspective throughout my research. It is one lens through which I view the data and through which I interpret the findings. The social constructionist framework provides a lens for how executives are creating meaning about the barriers to work-life supports. It provides a foundation for understanding how executives interpret and reflect the ways that work-life supports impact their businesses.

Social Humanistic Perspectives

Since this research explores organizations and the context of work, I also apply the adaptive and social humanistic theoretical frameworks of the sociology of work and

organizations. In this approach, work and organizations are seen as adaptive systems that evolve in ways that are spontaneous and organic. Theorists in this framework focus on the social aspects of work and organizations. They emphasize the importance of processes for motivating people. In addition, they advocate for rewarding and reinforcing the value that people bring to the work itself. Each of these aspects of the social humanist perspectives has informed my research about executive opinions.

Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim influenced this social humanistic model. In particular, Marx (1844) focused on workers who were alienated and disconnected from their work because they lost connection to the value of their outputs. They were separated from the products of their labor because they did not own them. They were separated from their labor processes since the de-skilling of production meant that their work was only a means to their subsistence. In addition, they were estranged from other workers since they were in competition with others for pay, jobs, and ultimately survival. Marx compared workers to animals who were being used simply for their physical abilities and not for their minds or their passions. The social humanistic model responded to Marx's analysis with a more person-centered framework. It valued workers for their contributions and recommended that employees participate in more decision making.

Durkheim (1933) theorized that work would become increasingly differentiated based on the unique ways in which individuals express themselves. In addition, he advocated that social relationships were the critical linkage points to any economic ties. It is possible to see the influence of this thinking in the social humanistic model that focuses on the value employees bring to the workplace. The social humanistic model is a person-centered framework, valuing workers for their contributions and recommending that employees participate in more decision making. Further, the social humanistic model focuses on the value employees bring to the

workplace. Beyond Marx and Durkheim, Homans (1941) used Hawthorne's studies at the Western Electric Company to demonstrate the importance of employees feeling valued and the productivity that could result. Abraham Maslow (1943) and Chris Argyris (1964) argued for the importance of self actualization and treatment of employees with respect for their maturity and competence. Douglas McGregor (1957) opposed a 'theory x' system in which management and workers were at odds and in which leaders were hegemonic. He argued for 'theory y' in which people were viewed and treated as inherently motivated, responsible, and hard working. Accordingly, it was the task of management to create the conditions in which workers could flourish and bring their creative potential to bear in their work (McGregor 1957). Likewise, I have used this research to explore the extent to which work-life supports (benefits, policies, practices) influence the conditions for workers. The social humanistic theory is in alignment with this spillover from work to home and home to work. To this end, it argues for a 'whole person' mentality in which workers are viewed as being multifaceted. This view acknowledges the talents, personalities, and lives beyond simply the work that employees are expected to perform on the job.

Another relevant aspect of the social humanistic theory is the emphasis on the social nature of work and the relationships and networks that guide workplace norms, unwritten rules, and practices (Ibarra 1993; Ibarra 1994). In the social humanistic approach, managers are most successful when they create conditions within which employees can flourish. This interplay of unwritten rules, organizational culture (Shein 1996) and manager behaviors contribute to a culture that affects behaviors and choices in the workplace. Through this social humanistic lens, my findings on work-life supports are illuminated. I find that the executive opinions I researched

are embedded in the context of their organizations. I also find that the work-life supports are demonstrative of a broader organizational culture, creating conditions for employees.

Gender and Feminist Perspectives

While I did not ask senior executives specifically about gender issues, gender issues did emerge in the interviews. I am applying a gender lens to my analysis and interpretation of the data. The reason is that gender matters to the macro structural conditions of social life and through organizations which are gendered. Gendered organizations and institutions are those in which gender is the organizing force for the 'rules of the game' and the way behavior within the institution is normative (Acker 1991). Ultimately, gender is a critical factor shaping how roles are conceived and fulfilled, how rewards are disbursed, how power is distributed and enacted, and how resources are allocated to individuals and groups.

Feminist theories of gender have demonstrated the nature of gendered institutions. A few key attributes of feminism are important to note. The first is pluralism. There is a great deal of diversity within feminist theories, and most feminist scholars prefer a reference to feminism that speaks to this variety (Osmond and Thorne 1993; Laslett and Thorne 1997). Even so, there are unifying principles within and among virtually all feminist views. Second, in addition to pluralism, feminist theories also share a principle that women and their experiences are unique, and theorists should not assume that women have the same experiences as men (Smith 1990). Women bring unique truth and perspectives to the world (Smith 1990; Thorne 1997). In the research I conducted, women did indeed share their unique situations. Third, feminist theories emphasize that women are oppressed and that power structures devalue women both implicitly

and explicitly. Fourth, feminist theories also advocate that gender analysis must occur in concrete and varied contexts and cannot focus simply on individuals or interpersonal relationships. Again, through the study of senior executive attitudes and opinions, I have discovered ways in which organizations are gendered and the ways in which organizations create a context for women's experiences.

It is the feminist theorists who are most commonly credited with raising the issue of gender equality and specifically, gender equality in the workplace (Acker 1991). Within the workplace, gender shapes the way work is organized and the value that is placed on certain jobs and work activities (Reskin 1991; Wharton 2005). Organizational practices and processes also create and perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination (Kanter 1977; Kanter 1984; Acker 1991; Martin 1999). Kanter (1977) argued that women were disadvantaged in the corporation because they were perceived to bring less value and contribution as compared to men. Another factor affecting gender equality is culture (Swidler 1986), including the culture of the U.S. and the culture of organizations. Within organizations there are multiple variables that affect culture. While policy is one, others include the organization's strategy and leadership. In addition, variables such as training approaches, communication, and measurement processes can affect culture. Culture in an organization can also be affected by reward processes and performance management processes (Schein 1991; Kotter and Heskett 1992).

Beyond the gendered nature of organizations, feminism also has informed an understanding of the ways in which the broader context of society is gendered. This broader context is relevant to the research as well. Motherhood is a primary example of where the paradigms about women's roles persist. Sharon Hays (1996) has articulated how the United States culture idealizes 'intensive mothering', which requires tremendous time, energy, money,

expertise, and emotional investment. Additionally, mothers themselves perceive the need to be present and build relationships with their children. They also believe it is necessary to invest in family time and to link their children to the public world through appropriate activities (Garey 1999). Mothers are held accountable for their children's behavior and success to a much greater extent than fathers (Bianchi et al. 2006), and mother blame holds mothers accountable for the failings of their children (Garey and Arendell 2001). Indeed, the United States culture sets up work and family as mutually exclusive for women, portraying women as either work-oriented or family-oriented (Galinsky et al 2008, Garey 1999; Milke and Peltola 1999). Still, some studies have shown that women's independent work translates into having more power in the home. Women who work in careers outside the home "tend to spend less time doing housework and their husbands tend to spend more time doing it" (Cherlin 2009: 93). All of this insight about the broader culture is informative to this research because of the demands women face in the home. These demands in turn affect the way they integrate work and family in their lives.

In contrast to women, men presently possess more power and privilege as a group but may not necessarily feel more powerful or privileged as individuals (Gerson 1993). In addition, men who became parents also become more committed to their work and see their investment in their careers as resulting in positive outcomes for their families. Additionally, many men are taking a more active role in their households, acting against cultural ideas. Today's discourse about fatherhood emphasizes the importance of spending time with children (Townsend 2002, Daly 1996). In fact, many men view their lives as a 'package deal'. Emotional closeness, provision, protection, and endowment are four elements that become a composite for men's lives and cannot be viewed in isolation (Townsend 2002). Again, the cultural messages about men's roles create pressure to perform at work and at home. This pressure creates a challenge to

integrate and navigate the demands. In turn, this integration may be enabled or constrained by the work-life supports that are, or are not, available in the workplace.

The gendered nature of both organizations and the broader culture are illuminated through the findings of my research. My guiding research questions focus on the perceived barriers to work-life supports and the perceived effects of work-life supports on organizations. In addition, executives' opinions about these two guiding questions are influenced by their gender. Feminist and gender scholarship are important foundations on which my findings build.

Definition of Terms

I am defining work-life supports as benefits, formal policies, and informal practices. The terminology 'work-life supports on the job' is utilized in the National Study of the Changing Workforce 2002 completed by the Families and Work Institute (Galinsky et al 2008). The details of each of these are informed by the literature I review in the following pages. While there is some overlap between benefits, policies, and practices, I provide some examples here. Examples of benefits include insurance coverage for family members, pension plans, financial assistance for education and training, or retirement benefits. Examples of policies include flex time, caregiving leaves, telecommuting, or employee assistance policies and programs. Finally, organizational practices may include examples such as development programs for supervisors to sustain work-life supports or allowance for employees to leave early now and then in order to meet family obligations.

In addition, through the study of work-life supports, this research places a focus on structural conditions which I define as those circumstances outside of an individual or a family that enable and constrain behavior. These are the conditions in the broader system within which

individuals operate. They may include economics, laws, policies, or educational systems. They may also include infrastructure such as neighborhood locations or availability of transportation. I define social location as the position a person occupies in society based on attributes such as financial resources, education level, gender, and racial-ethnic background. Further, I define human agency as the actions or responses that individuals or groups take on in leveraging or resisting social constraints. Within this research, I define integrating as coordinating, blending, and bringing elements of work and family life into a unified whole. The worlds of work and family are deeply connected, and they are also fluid. There is a relationship between work and family and an ongoing effort by individuals within families to navigate work and family demands within the flow of their lives. For this reason, I use navigation to mean charting a course and guiding one's way through the competing demands of work and family.

For the purposes of the study, I define senior-level executives as those within three hierarchical reporting levels of the 'C-level' of the organization. The C-level includes such positions as Chief Executive Officer, Chief Information Officer, or Chief Operating Officer. I am defining organizational outcomes as the overall objectives that the business is seeking to achieve. Examples are profitability, growth, brand saturation, stock price, shareholder value, employee engagement, and employee attraction and retention. I am defining organizational culture as the norms, values, and unwritten rules that shape how an organization operates and how its employees behave.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

In addition to being framed by theoretical perspectives, my research about work-life supports for employees also emerges naturally out of the existing literature related to work and family. Below, I explicate literature related to the changing world of work and the 2011 context, parenting, use of time for work and family, and work-life supports.

The Changing World of Work and the 2011 Context

The context set by the economic and labor market realities of 2011 is a backdrop to my research and to the perspectives of the interviewees. The World Economic Forum (2011), the US Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis (2011), and the US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) provide data, analysis, and perspectives that reveal ongoing competitive pressure that places downward pressure on salaries and benefits for workers. These pressures also result in downsizing and exporting of some labor. In addition, 2011 unemployment rates to-date are consistently between eight and nine percent. Popular media during 2011 has reflected widespread concern about the U.S. and world economy and the U.S. job market.

Work-life supports have become increasingly important because of this landscape. Competitive and economic realities place increasing demands on workers (Isidore 2011). They shift the nature of workers' requests and requirements for organizations (Isidore 2011). Specifically, employees typically demand less work-life supports from organizations when the job market is poor because they are simply happy to have employment. Globalization (Moghadam 1999; Foulkes et al. 2006; O'Toole and Lawler 2006; Isidore 2011) and capital

flight have increased the pressure on companies to compete at lower prices (Gross 2001). Corporations are downsizing, exporting routine work, and shifting to more temporary and part time labor (Brush 1999; Ryan 2008; World Economic Forum 2011, US Department of Commerce 2011, US Department of Labor 2011). Technology has replaced human labor (Brush 1999) and companies have become more technologically intensive (O'Toole and Lawler 2006; Lojeski and Reilly 2008). In addition, there has been a shift from production jobs which are typically occupied by men to service jobs which are more typically occupied by women (Hertz 2001; World Economic Forum 2011). Work is becoming more knowledge and service-based (O'Toole and Lawler 2006; World Economic Forum 2011).

These complex economic and labor market realities have resulted in the fact that in the majority of two-parent families, both parents work outside the home (Presser 1998). The National Study of the Changing Workforce conducted in 2002 found that the proportion of women and dual earner couples in the workforce was increasing (Bond, Thompson, et al. 2002). Of those who are employed, 20% are working nonstandard hours (Gornick and Meyers 2003). In 2008, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that for 2007, 81.4% of women with children under the age of 18 were working outside the home. In addition, families are increasingly experiencing stagnating wages for men (Hochschild 1989; World Economic Forum 2011) as well as overall job instability for both men and women (Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000; World Economic Forum 2011). Another factor affecting the world of work is the presence of multiple cohorts in the workforce. Workers who are more senior have not yet retired (O'Toole and Lawler 2006), and the number of younger workers is increasing as they come of age and enter the workforce (Tapscott 2009; US Department of Labor 2011; World Economic Forum 2011). Further, these younger workers have a facility with technology that is shaping the larger society and also the

workplace (Palfrey and Gasser 2008; Tapscott 2009). The presence of these younger generations is placing new demands on organizations who seek to meet a variety of worker types and worker needs.

Yet another dynamic affecting family members' work is the bifurcation of the job market. During 2011, unemployment has hovered between eight and nine percent. Specifically, there are too few jobs available for those with fewer skills and less schooling while there are more, though not always enough, jobs available for those who are prepared for the higher skilled jobs (O'Toole and Lawler 2006; World Economic Forum 2011). In addition, those with more skills report that they wish to work fewer hours while those at the lower end of the skills spectrum typically wish for more hours of work (Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000; Hewlett 2005). In response to issues of skill deficits, companies are offering comprehensive training and development programs (Finegold 2006; O'Toole and Lawler 2006). In addition, there is an overall increase in organizations' desire to hold employees accountable for performance and outcomes. Further, there is an increase in the extent to which organizations are setting wages based on employee performance (O'Toole and Lawler 2006). All in all, there is pressure for increasing levels of skills and performance for all workers, and those who possess fewer skills are most affected by this reality.

Over time, then, men's and women's labor market participation has affected changes in families. Women and men have typically worked; however, the location of their work and the amount of their work has shifted. These shifts have influenced families in terms of who is home and available to raise children. Work also affects families considering the levels of income, social location, and resources that families have available. In addition, work affects the ways that families divide their tasks and day-to-day responsibilities within the home (Glass 2000). Some argue that tension has increased between work and family life (Kossek 2006; O'Toole and

Lawler 2006). Further, they reinforce the changing nature of work: “Today’s world of work is about variety, choice, and change,” (O’Toole and Lawler 2006 p. 78). Given this reality of the changing nature of work and families, work-life supports from organizations are important to employees. These realities of the changing labor market and the demands placed on workers are a backdrop to my study. They also underscore the importance of the research to understand senior executive attitudes about the work-life supports that are and could be available to help employees integrate work and family.

Parenting

Another reason that research about executive attitudes regarding work-life supports is important is because men’s and women’s lives serve as context for their children. The extent to which work-life supports are available influences adult working lives, and these in turn influence family life and children. Families and children experience this influence through living conditions and through the social, economic, and human capital resources available to them (Cooksey et al. 1997). Parents’ working conditions, wages, and work hours affect children, and children are influenced by whether parents feel overworked (Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000; Parcel 1998). In addition, work affects parents’ emotional and mental functioning and well-being. These in turn have a strong influence on how they parent, the social capital they build for their children, and the children’s self esteem (Cooksey et al. 1997). In short, parental well-being is correlated with children’s well-being (Strazdins 2006). Parents also provide role modeling based on the kind of work they do and based on their relationship to their work (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Thus, the type of work that parents perform affects their wages and benefits which in turn

affect their social location and class. Class then affects parenting. “There is a cultural logic of childrearing that differs across families [and social location]” (Laureau 2003:8).

This perspective is instructive in terms of the way that the specific nature of parents’ jobs also affects children. When parents have jobs that are complex and challenging and that require teamwork, problem solving, and decision making, they tend to reinforce these characteristics in their children. This in turn positively impacts children’s futures (Galinsky 1999). The extent to which a parent is satisfied with his or her work-life integration also matters to the well-being of children. This parental satisfaction level has a greater influence on individuals within the family than whether or not the parent works outside the home (Galinsky 1999; Jacobs and Gerson 2004).

The overall work-life supports that are available in an adult’s work-life influence the conditions within which they work. They also affect spillover to their families and children. Studying executive opinions has illuminated some of the reasons that organizations either feature or lack, work-life supports. This organizational level of work-life supports has important implications for workers and their families.

Use of Time for Work and Family

Another area of the literature that provides the impetus for this study is that of job demands and time pressures. The National Study of the Changing Workforce conducted in 2002 found that the role of technology in the workforce had increased, contributing to increasing spillover between work and home (Bond, Thompson, et al. 2002). In addition, the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce (Galinsky et al. 2008) uncovered increasing spillover between work and family demands. Work-life supports are increasingly necessary because of the pressures that workers face. In planning and budgeting their time, one constraint that men and

women face pertains to schedules between their work and their children's school (Galinsky 2001, Presser 1998). The challenge for many men and women is that schools are based on an agrarian calendar and do not conform to the typical work hours of parents (Kurz 2002). Parents encounter problems when schools close for weather or teacher in-service days or when they are forced to adjust their schedules to accommodate changes in the school's schedule (Dodson and Bravo 2005). Additionally, the ability both to perform well at work and to participate in children's schooling is important. In one study, mothers perceived that their ability to participate in their children's schools and school meetings was important to their concepts of self (Garey 1999). Parental involvement in schools is associated with children who drop out less, have fewer behavior problems, and achieve better results in language and math as compared to children whose parents are less involved in school (Heymann 2005).

Work-life supports also have the potential to influence the way that parents integrate the demand for childcare. Spending time at the workplace introduces a trade off with time devoted to children. Child care is a perennial issue for working parents, and parents have deep concerns regarding child care and its effects on their children (Dodson and Bravo 2005). Workers with school age children may need to turn to child care before school, after school, during the summer, or in cases of episodic need such as on snow days. In addition, family members provide a great deal of care (Dodson and Bravo 2005). Fully 14% of children in two-parent homes are cared for by grandmothers (Hochschild 1989). Similarly, kin care is typically high among Black and Latino families (Nelson 2002). Further, much care is provided through private services, and class position plays a role in the kind of care that families can afford (Dodson and Bravo 2005).

Similar to the issue of childcare, the issue of housework also is important to an understanding of the demands that workers are facing and the reason that work-life supports are

important to study. While employees are spending time at work in order to accomplish results and earn a paycheck, they also are faced with demands at home. Housework is strongly gendered and while women have increased the time they devote to paid employment, they have largely maintained their time in unpaid work of the home (Gerson 1993). Further, there is a curvilinear relationship between women's wages and men's contribution to households. In situations in which men's wives received approximately equal pay compared to their own, they were most likely to contribute equally to the housework and child care within the family (Hertz 2001). In cases where men's wives earned significantly less or significantly more than they did, men contributed less to the household and child care responsibilities (Hertz 2001). Additionally, when men were more highly educated they were more likely to share more of the housework than were men who were not as highly educated (Gerson 1993). Regarding housework generally, women still spend more time on housework than men (Mattingly and Bianchi 2003). Also, women typically feel overburdened and strained by their work at home (Hochschild 1989; Wharton 1994; World Economic Forum 2011).

A final aspect of the way time usage is connected to the need for work-life supports is with respect to the time workers spend with their families. Specifically, parents prioritize how they invest their time in other tasks. As compared with previous decades, parents appear to be spending less time engaged in community activities, less time on themselves (Gerson and Jacobs 2001; Jacobs and Gerson 2004), less time in leisure activities, and less time sleeping (Bianchi et al. 2006). They are spending less time in these venues in order to devote time to their children (Bianchi et al. 2006). Thus, the ability to flex one's time is important. Some men and women work evenings and weekends in order to accommodate the needs of individuals within the family (Wharton 1994). In addition, women may change the number of hours they work or the

beginning and ending times for their work (Wharton 1994). Women may cut back on their marriage, themselves, or their children as they reprioritize the demands they face (Hochschild 1989). The extent to which either men or women have control over their schedules or have the opportunity to flex their working hours is heavily influenced by the work-life supports available at their workplaces.

Overall, consideration for school schedules, child care, housework, and time with families is relevant to this research on work-life supports. Job flexibility, autonomy, and greater job satisfaction can alleviate the stress workers feel and the conflicts they face (Galinsky 1999; Jacobs and Gerson 2004). These are all potential elements of a work-life support package. Because work-life supports are so important, researching executive opinions about these supports is critical as well. Executive opinions shape organizational policy since they are decision makers in their organizations. Executive opinions also shape organizational practices since the executives' own behaviors frequently become examples for the broader organizational population given their visibility and status.

Work-Life Supports

Through my research, I investigate the attitudes of senior executives toward work-life supports. The need for these supports reflects the lack of federal policies, and the ways in which the United States governmental policies have not kept pace with the realities that families face today. Many of today's policies were developed during agrarian and colonial days. The United States has seen broad scale change with a shift from agrarian to a post-industrial society and the influx of women into the workplace. However, state policy and employer policy have not kept pace. They are therefore mismatched as compared with the nature of work and the nature of

families today (Gerson 1998; Raabe 1998; Vannoy 1998; Hernandez 2005; Hertz 2001; Heymann 2005; Gerson 2010). This mismatch has been coined the 'stalled revolution' (Hochschild 1989).

Workplaces have begun to fill the gap between the needs of families and the inadequacy of governmental supports. Studies have found that there have been small increases in the extent to which workplaces provide benefits, policies, and informal practices to support the changing workforce (Bond, Thompson, et al. 2002). In addition, the National Study of Employers (Galinsky et al. 2008) identified the organizational characteristics that predict the presence of work-life supports. These predictive factors included the size of the organization and whether the organization was union or non-union. Additional predictive factors included the length of time an organization had been in business as well as the number of hourly employees it employed. While I do not seek to study these organizational-level characteristics in my primary research questions, they do create important context for work-life supports. These related streams of research and recommendations provide for a holistic definition of work-life supports.

Work Flexibility

In consideration of work-life supports that help men and women integrate work and family, one area of focus has been the importance of providing more flexible working options. Examples of these kinds of policies include increased job autonomy and more control over the content of one's work. As an example, an employee may have latitude in how he or she solves a problem, or an engineer may have choices about which projects he or she works on during the year. In addition to autonomy and control over one's work, flexible work schedules also may be helpful because they allow parents to meet work demands at the same time they meet the

demands of family. These demands can include driving car pool, picking up children at school, or taking a break mid-work-day to attend a school program. Flexible work schedules go hand-in-hand with control over one's work because employers must have a degree of trust that employees are working and accomplishing results even when they are not in view of supervisors. A paradigm of trusting employees to do their best work without direct supervision and providing employees with more control over their work is also in alignment with McGregor's social humanistic 'theory y' discussed in an earlier section of this document.

An additional suggestion from the literature to increase flexibility includes compressed work weeks. With a compressed work week, employees could work the same number of hours in a compressed fashion; for example, one may work four ten-hour days, allowing the fifth day to meet family demands. Another option is seasonal long term arrangements. These types of solutions could take many forms, including work schedules that would shift between summer months and school months. Workplace policy recommendations in the literature also have included possibilities for extended breaks, working at home, telecommuting, job sharing, and the improvement in the overall work environment. Such policies have been suggested for several decades by Hunt and Hunt (1977), Hochschild (1989), Wharton (1994), Galinsky (1999), Garey (1999), Gornick and Meyers (2003), Jacobs and Gerson (2004), and Hewlett (2005). Having the support of a supervisor is one of the primary factors in parents' ability to navigate successfully their work and family obligations (Galinsky 1999).

In all of these cases, the increased ownership of one's work and control over one's work are intended to help men and women balance the demands of work and home. They are typically also aimed at reducing the negative spillover from work to home or vice versa (Galinsky 2001; Gross 2001; Pitt-Catsouphes and Googins 2005). In addition, the presence of greater proportions

of women occupying top-ranking positions at their companies is connected with a greater number of family-friendly options as compared with companies having fewer women in top leadership positions and less family-friendly policies (Pitt-Catsouphes and Googins 2005).

While corporations may have formal work-life support policies and practices, the reality is that many workers do not take advantage of them. O'Toole and Lawler (2006) attribute this to personal preferences as well as the American cultural ethic valuing work. They also attribute this pattern to economic pressures on companies which have resulted in companies downsizing and reducing headcount. As headcount is reduced, there is increased pressure placed on remaining employees to work harder and longer. (O'Toole and Lawler 2006, p. 97). Also, the extent to which individuals feel they can take advantage of the work-life supports varies based on unwritten rules. In some cases, men and women do not take advantage of the family-friendly policies such as telecommuting, job sharing, or staggered hours (Hochschild 1989; Jacobs and Gerson 2004). One researcher (Hochschild 1989) argues that workers may actually be choosing work over family and seeing it as a refuge from the demands of family life. Others (Galinsky 1999; Jacobs and Gerson 2004) dispute this claim. They suggest that workers do not take full advantage of family-friendly policies because of concerns about negative career ramifications or organizational culture.

This scholarship helps define the work-life supports that are or could be available to employees. It also provides an important context for my study of executive opinions about work-life supports. There have been many advocates for work-life supports, evidenced by all this scholarship. However, there is still a mismatch between families' needs and benefits, policies, and practices to fill the needs. Herein lies the relevant research on executive opinions. This research is designed to understand executive opinions regarding work-life supports.

Working Hours

Research regarding working hours provides yet another body of policy-level recommendations to support workers with integration of work and family. For many, work is not only a matter of financial necessity, but also an important source of identity, self worth, and meaning (Dodson and Bravo 2005). This is true for both men (Hughes 1977; Gerson 1993) and women (Garey 1999; Bianchi et al. 2006). At the same time, many workers feel overburdened and overloaded as the intensity of work has increased steadily (Jacobs and Gerson 2004). Workers in the United States are working more hours and taking less vacation than workers in ten other developed countries (Jacobs and Gerson 2004). In the U.S., time is controlled by employers and schools (Daly and Dienhart 1998). Further, money, position, and status typically result in more control over time (Daly and Dienhart 1998). From a time-budgeting standpoint, more overall time is spent by the family in paid work because of the time both spouses spend working (Jacobs and Gerson 2004).

In the face of this time pressure and time poverty, some scholars have advocated federal solutions. While my research focuses on corporate solutions, these federally-oriented recommendations could inform ideas for corporations. These recommendations have included limiting working time, shortening work days, shortening work weeks, limiting mandatory overtime, or aligning working hours with children's school hours (Garey 1999; Jacobs and Gerson 2004). Again, the backdrop of scholarship related to working hours is important to my research into executive opinions.

Parental Leave and Caregiving

Another body of literature concerns allowances for parental leave. The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 is the most comprehensive federal policy that supports employees and family members. It allows up to 12 weeks of unpaid time off within a 12 month period allowing for birth and care of a newborn or newly adopted child. It also includes provision for the care of an immediate family member with a serious health issue. Further, it includes a provision for medical leave for one's own health condition. However, the FMLA only covers employers who have 50 or more workers and only offers unpaid leave. Taking time away from work without pay is difficult or impossible for many families, especially women. Women who work at companies of less than 50 employees are left without this FMLA benefit. In addition, women who do not have a partner who can support her and her child are unlikely to be able to leave work and be unpaid in order to stay home for family reasons. As a result, employer policies that buttress the FMLA practices and facilitate both men's and women's ability to take leaves upon the birth of their children are relevant. Recommendations from such scholars as Wharton (1994), Garey (1999), Gornick and Meyers (2003), Hewlett (2005), and Heymann (2005) have included: paid parental leave, family leave, longer maternity leave, short term paid leave, and job-back guarantees. These recommendations relate to potential work-life supports that I am examining. They provide a backdrop for the data I collected from senior executives.

As children mature, men and women face the challenge of caring for them while also working. Many men and women also face the need to care for elders. Over their life course, family members' requirements and demands shift. Advocates for child and elder care have recommended employer policies supporting onsite child care, support for elder care, employee

assistance programs, and emergency back up care options. Scholars recommending these approaches have included Garey (1999), Gross (2001), Kurz (2002), Jacobs and Gerson (2004), and Hewlett (2005).

This scholarship provides examples of the kinds of benefits, policies, or organizational practices that companies can provide in order to provide work-life support to employees. My research on executive opinions illuminates the barriers they perceive to offering these work-life supports. It also demonstrates the extent to which they believe these work-life supports have an influence on their business outcomes. In the following section, I explicate the methodology through which I researched the senior executive opinions.

Chapter 3 – Methods

In this study, I explore senior executives' points of view regarding work-life supports offered by corporations. Specifically, my research examines the following questions: 1) what are the factors or barriers that executives believe affect the adoption of work-life supports by companies? and 2) in what ways and to what extent do executives view work-life supports as linked to the organizational outcomes they are seeking to accomplish? While this is a qualitative study in which I investigate the answers to these questions without a formal hypothesis, I explore differences among executive respondents based on their gender. I also explore differences based on the industry segment into which their company falls.

Quantitative research has examined *how* companies are addressing the changing needs of workers. These studies have investigated *what kind* of work-life supports companies are offering. I build on this quantitative work by seeking qualitative data through interviews with executives to understand more about what kind of work-life supports are offered, to understand *why*, and to explore their opinions in depth. Senior executive opinions are crucial to expanding on these data because the executives make decisions about work-life supports for their own companies. In addition, they influence other senior executives through their networks. They also send cues, intentionally or unintentionally, regarding norms and practices based on their visibility and status.

Considerations for Methods

I select my research methods based on my research questions and based on scholarship in the field. Specifically, I consider six key factors in selecting and designing my research methods. The first consideration for the research method begins with my selection of research topic. I

make ‘imaginative use of my own personal experience’ (Becker 1970:22) as a woman at a senior level in my own organization, interacting daily with men and women at senior executive levels in corporations across the United States. This first-hand experience contributes to my technical skill in holding dialogues with my interviewees as well as my access to them and my comfort in inviting them to be part of this study. In addition, the topic I chose arises from my own curiosity and interest (Rubin and Rubin 2005) regarding the challenges men and women face in integrating work and family.

Another consideration for my research approach relates to the way the method itself creates a certain perspective on the topic. Redfield (1955) argues that when one selects a method for studying a question, there is knowledge to be gained by each choice and conversely, we lose certain knowledge by not selecting other methods. Every choice has gains and losses of data that will inform our results. “Methods impose certain perspectives on reality” (Berg 2007:5) so selecting methods true to the research question is critically important. Becker (1970) agrees that it is important to select methods linked with what one is studying. Through this inquiry, I seek to both validate existing theory and to make new discoveries. This is clarity of purpose that Burawoy (1991) recommends. My utilization of interviews has proven to be ‘messy’ (Brydon-Miller 2003:21) featuring plenty of uncertainty and layers of meaning. The depth is the source of rich data but also is “complex, muti-dimensional, intractable, [and] dynamic” (Brydon-Miller 2003:21). I am attracted to this kind study because of the powerful and abundant discoveries that can arise from the chaos of the information.

In addition to designing research methods well-connected with the inquiry on which I am focusing, I also assume that knowledge is socially constructed (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003). Thus, it is created through a process of interpretation and collaborative meaning-making by the

researcher and his or her subject. This study allows for the social construction of knowledge between me and those I interview.

A fourth consideration for my research method concerns my own status as both an insider and an outsider. Simmel (1908/2005) argues that it is necessary to have an appropriate balance between a proximity to one's subjects and a distance. My status as an insider derives from my experience with corporations, my level in my own organization, and my experience interacting with my executive peers. For over 20 years, I have worked within corporations across the U.S. and have become intimate with the way they operate. I occupy a senior level position and have close relationships with colleagues in many organizations. This insider status and experience provide me with opportunities to access, collect, and interpret data with an insider's level of depth and credibility. This insider status could also be a detriment if I were to become so enmeshed in the context that I would be unable to make fresh observations or draw unbiased conclusions. I seek to mitigate this downside risk of being an insider by remaining reflective and seeking to challenge my own thinking throughout my research process.

On the other hand, I also occupy an outsider's status because I do not work for the same organizations nor do I occupy the same organizational positions as the men or women I am interviewing. I also am explicit about the purpose for my research, which is derived from my role as a graduate student. Like Ruth Horwitz (1996:43), I find that I am able to use aspects of my outsider status to ask a lot of "stupid" questions. I also find that the status of being an insider or an outsider shifts regularly and requires constant navigation (Kusow 2003). Far from being fixed or universal, it is "multi-dimensional" (Kusow 2003) and requires reflexivity. Reflexivity is a process that challenges the researcher to explicitly examine how his or her research agenda and assumptions, subject location(s), personal beliefs, and emotions enter into his/her research. It is

imperative for qualitative inquiry because it conceptualizes the researcher as an active participant in knowledge reproduction rather than as a neutral bystander (Hsiung 2008). Because this process of reflection is so critical to the quality and credibility of my research, I give considerable thought to my own role as researcher and interpreter. I continually seek to challenge my own thinking. In addition, I confide in trusted colleagues regarding my observations and conclusions, while never sharing confidential interviewee data. Through this dialogue they assist me in exposing potential biases or limitations.

A fifth consideration concerns an assumption that my interviewees and I are engaged in a process of creating meaning collaboratively (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). As a researcher, I am always in a relationship with my interviewees (Burawoy et al. 1991) and "ambiguity and complexity are omnipresent in all situations and types of discourse" (Mishlar 1986:45). Interpretation is important to the qualitative process and given this, it is all the more important to have a great deal of respect for interviewees' situations, points of view, and individual truths. My interpretations reveal their views through my own perspectives. Further, my ability to demonstrate their interpretations rests partially on the extent to which I am able to authentically value their unique situations. One of my goals throughout my research is to "give to my subjects the opportunity…to be recognized as complex human beings" (Dunier and Back 2009: 553). Taken together, these considerations for my methodology contribute to my research study.

A final consideration relates to study intent and design that would meet with approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This IRB approval is important to help protect the rights and welfare of interviewees. I applied for, and received IRB approval for this study including the overall study design, the sample, the invitation verbiage, and the interview questions. I received IRB approval before contacting any members of my sample population.

The Sample

I interviewed senior executives regarding their opinions about work-life supports that address the needs of a changing workforce. Through the consulting and executive coaching I do, I interact with men and women working in a large number of organizations across the U.S. These men and women perform various organizational functions and are located at all levels of hierarchy within their organizations. Through this network of relationships, I gained access to a non-random sample of senior executives. I used a purposive sampling technique in which I selected subjects and then conducted interviews with those who were willing and available to participate.

I studied executives at a range of companies across the United States. Despite having interviewed the senior executives for their own opinions and not to represent their companies' positions, I still sought interviews with executives from companies that represent a variety of industries and a variety of locations across the country. My sample (see Appendix A) includes executives from 16 companies. The companies are all for-profit, U.S. companies that are Fortune 1000 or larger. The number of employees at each company ranges from 6,000 to 426,000. The total number of employees represented among all the companies is 1,243,703. Two of the companies are in the banking and financial sector. Six of the companies are in the manufacturing sector, three are media companies, and three are technology companies. In addition, I interviewed executives from two oil and gas companies. Of the 16 companies, six were in the eastern United States, two were in the western United States, and eight were in the central/southern portion of the United States. Each of the companies included in the study is very large and therefore has locations in multiple areas inside and outside the United States. My

definition of their regions is based on the locations of their corporate headquarters. In each case, the executive I interviewed lived and worked in the region I have identified for the company.

The sample of companies excludes healthcare or academic institutions, because in my personal experience, those organizational cultures and practices are different from those within traditional corporate, for-profit settings. I did not complete detailed research to compare and contrast the cultures in order to make this determination. However, I did exclude them in order to limit the variables arising from potential organizational differences.

For the purposes of the study, I defined senior-level executives as those within three hierarchical reporting levels of the 'C-level' of the organization. I termed 'level-one executives' as those who report to a 'C-level' executive such as a Chief Executive Officer, Chief Information Officer, or Chief Operating Officer. 'Level-two executives' are those who report to a level-one executive. Finally, 'level-three executives' are those who report to a level-two executive. In total, I interviewed eight level one executives, five level two executives, and three level three executives. I interviewed only those executives who have been in an executive role at least one year.

The senior executives are not representative of the average worker and they have a high degree of privilege based on their positions, pay, benefits, and levels within their organizations. Despite their privilege, I sought this sample population because I wanted to explore the ways their agency, influence, leadership, visibility, and decision making affect work-life supports in their organizations. My interviews also sought information about their perceptions of barriers to work-life supports as well as the extent to which they believe work-life supports affect broader organizational outcomes. This sample is uniquely suited to respond to these questions, not

because they are representative of an average worker, but because they have the privilege of position and decision making power within their organizations.

I interviewed one senior executive per company. I requested that each executive represent his or her opinion as an individual and not seek to represent his or her official company position. In other words, I asked him or her to speak for him or herself and his or her own opinions versus seeking to provide the company's official position on key questions. This framing proved especially helpful because executives were able to speak freely without gaining approval from their organizations' legal departments. Despite asking executives to comment generally, and not necessarily related to their specific companies, executives used their own companies as lenses for their responses. They all explicitly described their own companies in their opinions and their examples. It is for this reason that I am able to extrapolate from the data regarding the companies for which they work and the industries their companies represent. I limited the number of senior executives I interviewed at each company to one executive so that no single company is over-represented in the sample nor has saturated my research model.

As I noted above, all of the executives with whom I spoke had been in a senior executive role at least one year. One executive had been in her current position six months and in other executive positions prior to her current role. Another executive had been in her role for 18 years. The average number of years in their roles was five and a half years. The executives had been at their current companies between five and 35 years with average company tenure of 17 years. I intended to interview a mix of men and women, and I expected that the majority of those I would interview would be men since senior executives are predominantly male (Wilson 2009). In reality, I was able to interview eight men and eight women for this research.

The executives I researched have responsibility for an array of areas within their companies. All of them have breadth of responsibility and none occupy exactly the same position as any other. Two are general managers of key units of their businesses. Four are leaders of functions such as human resources, corporate communications, and employee health/wellness areas. Eight are leaders in the areas of administration, real estate and facility management, environmental, project management, risk management, and support services such as mail, graphics, travel, and the like. Two have leadership responsibilities for engineering and quality.

Nine of the executives have children who are no longer living at home. However, six of the executives still have children living at home. One executive has no children. Among those executives with children still living at home, four have two children still at home. Two executives have one child still at home and one executive has three still at home. The youngest child at home is nine years old and the oldest child living at home is 18. Overall, while all but one executive has children, the majority are parents to older children who are no longer living at home. All but one of the executives is married. I did not use education level, race/ethnicity, age, or family status as criteria for my selection of participants. I conducted all of the interviews by phone, so I was not able to see the interviewees or guess about their personal characteristics based on meeting them in person; however, based on the executives' reports of their number of years in their careers and the ages of their children, for the majority who had children, I am estimating they are all between the ages of 45-65. In addition, one of the executives shared with me that she is a citizen of the United Kingdom who has lived and worked on three continents and has been living and working in the United States for a number of years.

I am maintaining the confidentiality of both the senior executives and their companies and all the names that I reference below are pseudonyms. The confidentiality of the executives is

important and has increased their willingness to participate in the interviews. Several executives mentioned this in discussions. The confidentiality of the companies is important so that the executives agreed to be interviewed without involvement from their company legal counsel or fear of reprisal from organizations who are closely managing their public relations.

Securing Interviews

I used my professional networks to identify potential executives. Specifically, I contacted executives whom I had met in order to inquire about their willingness to participate. In order to gain access to executives I had never met, I contacted people I know who work for my company in sales roles across the nation and inquired about whether they knew executives who might be candidates for this study. I asked the sales people to recommend executives from companies in the sectors of banking and finance, manufacturing, media, technology, and oil and gas. After they provided me with names of executives, I contacted the executives to inquire about their willingness to participate in the study. Of the sixteen executives I interviewed, I had worked briefly with four and previously had met two others. Ten of the executives were unknown to me until the interviews. I recruited each senior executive by sending him/her an email invitation to participate (see Appendix B). Of the 20 executives I contacted, 16 agreed to participate in the interviews. Four executives did not respond to my invitation. I sent two follow up emails to each one. However, these four executives never responded to my original or my follow up email invitations.

I provided incentives to the executives to participate in the study by verbally offering them the results of the data in an executive summary format. I found the promise of the executive

summary, which will include information, data, and trends from this research, to be attractive to the executives I wished to interview. Most mentioned this explicitly during our conversations.

Conducting Interviews

I conducted the semi-structured interviews using a consistent set of questions which allowed me to ask probing and follow-up questions based on the uniqueness of each discussion. Each interview was scheduled for an hour and ran for between 45 and 60 minutes. I conducted each interview over the telephone and recorded it for transcription. The executives typically spoke to me from their offices or sometimes from their cell phones while they were driving. All of the calls occurred within the range of a typical work day: 8am-5pm within the executives' local time zone. Each interviewee signed a consent form (see Appendix C) which was emailed to them and emailed back to me in advance of the interview. The interviews took place between March 2011 and June 2011.

One typical concern with interviews is a potential for social desirability bias affecting participants' responses. In an attempt to mitigate this concern, I carefully designed the interview questions in order to provide the opportunity for executives to feel comfortable responding in what might typically be considered less socially desirable answers. Specifically, I framed the questions by pointing out how work-life practices have not been uniformly adopted by companies. In addition, I asked specifically about the barriers that companies face with regard to work-life supports. Further, I asked about barriers to work-life supports prior to asking participants about the effect on organizational outcomes.

Interview Questions

For each interview, I asked a consistent set of questions (see Appendix D). I pre-tested the questions with three preparatory interviews that are not included in my data. Through this pre-testing, I was able to make changes and adjustments to the questions. Each interview was semi-structured. This allowed me to ask appropriate follow up questions based on each interviewee's individual comments.

Each interview began with basic questions about the participant's role, length of time in his or her role, and length of time with his or her company. In addition, I asked each interviewee to describe the ways and the extent to which he or she participates in decision making at his or her company. I also asked participants about personal factors such as whether he or she was married, whether he or she has children still living at home, and, if children were still living at home, their ages. For each participant, I defined work-life supports as the benefits, policies, or practices that companies offer employees to help them integrate and navigate work and life demands. Then, I asked the interviewees whether and what kinds of work-life supports were available at their companies. I also asked each interviewee what he or she perceived to be the barriers to work-life supports. In addition, I asked participants to discuss the extent to which they believed work-life supports were linked to organizational outcomes.

Analysis of the Data

I transcribed each interview within two days of conducting the interview. I used Gear Player software and foot pedal (Transcription Gear, 2000-2011) for this transcription process. To analyze the data, I used a grounded theoretical approach (Berg, 2007) and a combination of both inductive and deductive reasoning. I began with analytic categories of decision making, current

work-life supports, barriers to work-life supports, enhancing factors for work-life supports, organizational outcomes, and future of work-life supports. Then, I added emergent categories that developed based on the data. I utilized an open coding approach which allowed me to discern emergent themes and patterns that are grounded in the data.

Limitations

This study is limited because participants were interviewed at only one point in time. In addition, the study is potentially limited by the social desirability bias of interviewees seeking to portray a positive image to the interviewer and potentially seeking to provide answers that are reflective of what they believe the 'right' answers are versus their true feelings or beliefs. This bias may be particularly important in discussing work-life supports because family has become a 'cultural symbol' and is 'mystified', producing a gap between the ideal notion of family and the reality of behaviors in families (Baca Zinn et al. 2008:2-3). Also, as the topic of work-life supports and balance has become more commonplace in popular literature and the media, participants may be more influenced to comment in a way that would suggest openness to work-life supports. C. Wright Mills (1940) asserts that the difference between talk and action is a primary issue creating challenges in the social sciences. I have addressed the risk of social desirability bias through my design of the questions.

There are additional limitations that exist with this study. One is the potential that my data are biased by my insider status, however, I have sought to mitigate this limitation as I described above. Another is that my sample is non-random and therefore, I cannot generalize from the data I collected. Despite these limitations, the findings I discover are relevant to the study of work-life supports and their sociological influence on families.

Chapter 4 – Results

Decision Making and Span of Control

In this study, I explore senior executives' points of view regarding work-life supports offered by corporations. Specifically, my research examines: 1) what are the factors or barriers that executives believe affect the adoption of work-life supports by companies? and 2) in what ways and to what extent do executives view work-life supports as linked to the organizational outcomes they are seeking to accomplish? One of the reasons I chose to interview senior executives is that they influence their organizations through their formal decision making. In order to validate whether this group of interviewees does indeed have influence in their organizations, I asked each of them explicitly, "To what extent do you participate in decision making regarding policies for your organization? To what extent do you influence policies and practices within your organization?"

Through their answers to this question, this group of leaders validates that they do indeed have decision making authority and influence, exercising agency. In some cases, the executive makes recommendations to senior executive teams, and the teams make the final determination about policies or practices. In other cases, senior leadership teams set agendas, goals, and boundaries, and the executive makes decisions within these boundaries. In other cases, the executive acts as a member of a leadership team that makes final decisions. Frank, an executive from a manufacturing company, describes his decision making latitude like this:

> If it falls within my area of responsibility…typically they'll [senior team] give me some general expectations, maybe some fence-posts that I can make the decisions relative to how we want to execute that in the company. If it's outside my area of influence…I may be a member of a team that would be commissioned, that would

> make proposals to a[n even more senior] senior leadership group that would make the final decision.

Diane, from a media company, reports "…there are certain decisions…I just make and I'm trusted to make them." Lorraine, also from a media company, says "…if there's anything to do with my responsibility in the region, I can make the decision and I can choose."

In addition to their own decision making and spans of control, some of the executives also refer to the importance of grass roots efforts at their organizations. Isaiah, an executive from a technology company, points out that in addition to his role in a "tops down" decision making approach, he also seeks to influence by "fostering the conversation" that will create demand within the organization for the kinds of policies and procedures that he believes are important. Allen, from a banking and financial institution, reports that he is "trying to shape a vision and get people to understand why they [work-life supports] are so valued."

> …there's this huge opportunity to create something that has never been in this environment before…so part of the effort…is…convincing our own senior team that this is a worthwhile adventure."

These points reinforce the executives' influence over their organizations not only through their own decision making directly, but also through the avenues by which they seek to influence others in a less formal way.

While the nature of a particular decision is always a factor to the executives' process of decision making and span of control, these executives are the decision makers for their organizations. This is important because the organizations they represent employ approximately 1,243,703 people across the United States. Although they are not each directly responsible for

every decision affecting employees, they influence policies and practices that have the potential to touch many employees.

In addition to their formal roles in decision making, these leaders also have informal influence within and outside of their organizations. Because of their visibility, status, and spans of control, others may look to them for clues about organizational norms. Because the organizations these leaders represent employ approximately 1.2 million people, their spans of influence are broad.

Current Work-Life Supports

Benefits, Policies and Practices

The work-life supports that companies do (or do not) offer are important structural constraints for employees. From a sociological perspective, these constraints create conditions in the broader context that both enable and constrain behaviors of individuals. They also have implications for individual and family member well-being. In order to determine the general context for the discussions I had with executives, I asked each, "What work-life supports are currently available within your organization?" I asked this question in order to determine context, and to ground the executives' thinking in work-life supports prior to asking about the primary areas of inquiry for my study.

Through the interviews, I find that companies vary widely in the types of policies and practices they have in place (see Appendix E). In addition, all of the executives who work at companies with global operations noted that policies are different outside of the United States. Here, I have only focused on policies within the United States. For the purposes of the interviews,

I define ‘work-life supports’ as policies, practices, and benefits that help employees navigate and integrate work-life demands.

Some companies offer very little in the way of work-life support. Lorraine, an executive at a media company, reports that her organization really does not have any work-life supports at all. Likewise, Brian, from a manufacturing company, says there “really isn’t a whole lot.” Later in the interview he reports that this absence hinders the support leaders can offer because the culture requires a great deal of adherence to policy. Therefore in the absence of a policy, leaders do not offer flexibility. He says his company is currently working to determine what additional work-life supports it should be offering.

Other companies offer some degree of work-life supports. Two oil and gas companies provide examples. Rick’s oil and gas organization offers alternative working hours during the summer, however his company does not allow employees to work from home except in emergency or unusual situations such as when an employee is working on a short term project that requires concentration. Similarly, Kyle’s oil and gas company offers alternative summer hours and allows employees to work from home in certain situations. Kyle explains that his company is reluctant to “policy the heck out of everything” because it would be difficult to write a policy to cover everything. “Less is better as far as policies go,” he says.

Other companies feature mechanisms that make possible a variety of work-life supports. Rita’s manufacturing company offers a formal flexible work arrangement policy. Frank reports that his manufacturing company’s flexible work arrangements policy allows any employee to develop and propose a flexible work arrangement that he or she chooses. Most requests are honored, provided the employee has a good performance record and continues demonstrating positive performance after the alternative working arrangements are implemented. Frank’s

company also is asking employees to track their time so leaders can see trends in working time and ensure that employees have balance in work hours. The time tracking assists with planning work loads as well as ensuring "something more reasonable in terms of hours per week worked." Frank's company is the only one that has implemented this time tracking system that is designed to enhance visibility to the working hours employees are facing.

Michelle, from another manufacturing company, describes the wide range of policies and practices that provide work-life supports for her organization's employees. They include: flex-time, which includes provisions for telecommuting, job sharing, and more; flex-place, which provides for employees to work at locations other than the corporate offices; and benefits for everything from paternity leave to adoption support to gender re-assignment. She reports that her organization has onsite daycare, emergency backup care, a summer program for children, a community program for children, a kindergarten onsite, and healthy food for take-out dinners. Michelle has personally helped create virtually all of these programs. Curt's manufacturing company offers flex work, job sharing, compressed work weeks, and adjusted summer hours. Louise's manufacturing organization offers flexible working schedules and provides technology support for working at home. In addition, parents are provided with generous options for parental leaves with the birth or adoption of a child.

Technology companies provide examples of a variety of work-life supports that are available. Lee, who works at one of these technology companies, says his organization has options for employees to work compressed work weeks, to work at home, to bring children to work occasionally when daycare or school is not available, or to set their own schedules. In addition, Lee's company sets a threshold for those who are officially 'remote workers'. They are workers who work from home more than three days a week on average. They receive assistance

for equipment, home office furniture, work tools, and high speed internet connections. The process for any of these requires simply enrolling. It does not require formal approvals through a Human Resources (HR) process.

Linda, an executive with another technology company, reports that her organization offers summer child care, elder care, adoption, employee assistance, job sharing, the option for employees to work at home, generous maternity leave policies, online referral services, medical/health phone help lines, and flexible working hours programs. Isaiah's technology company features a web-based portal where employees can sign up to work from home regularly, to work virtually, or to set their own working hours. The sign up is not an HR approval process but rather, it is designed to provide employees with the necessary equipment and furniture for their home office as well as ergonomic supports at home. At Isaiah's company, employees are also able to adjust their working hours regularly without being part of any formal program.

The banking and finance companies represented in the study also provide various work-life supports. Allen reports that his banking and finance organization has policies for time off as well as vacation. Barbara, from a banking and finance organization, reports that her organization offers generous maternity and paternity leaves. She believes that the coverage offered by FMLA is too limited, and she says that her company offers a complement to this limited federally-mandated coverage. Her organization also offers adoption support, daycare support, elder care support, lactation rooms, flexible hours for return from leaves, and flexible working policies. She also reports generous paid time off policies, sick time policies, and corporate counseling services.

Two of the media companies offer work-life supports. Diane says the policies and practices her media organization offers are "tremendous…we even have a small department devoted to work-life supports." Her company is working to connect people with programs that

support work-life in the community. The company offers fairs in the cafeteria and supports employees who wish to take time off in order to work on Habitat for Humanity housing. The company also offers online wellness-related services such as education and health tracking. At the same time, Diane's company does not offer many options for employees to work at home or to utilize job sharing or compressed work weeks. Lisa's media company offers flexible working hours, job sharing, telecommuting, and emergency child care.

In general, most of these executives report their organizations are seeking to create an environment that values employees and treats them as inherently motivated, responsible, and hard working. Lee says,

> It's not uncommon for employees to bring their children to work for a half day because of childcare or illness or school. So when that occurs…fellow employees learn about the entire person. They understand they're a parent and this is their kid and it helps to create cohesiveness within the organization.

Further, many of the executives give examples of providing flexibility for employees to attend soccer games, care for elderly parents, or go back to school for continuing education, thus helping alleviate the spillover problems between work and home.

Comparing these companies across industries, the three technology companies, two based in the western United States and one based in the eastern United States, tend to offer more than other companies in terms of work flexibility and control afforded to workers. This is likely due to the relative youth of their workforces and the prevalence of technology in their work environments (see sections on 'younger generations' and 'technology' below). Two of the three media companies also offer a variety of work-life supports. Manufacturing companies, based in the central/south and eastern United States vary greatly with the extent to which work-life supports were available. Banking and finance organizations also vary. Oil and gas companies,

both based in the southern United States tend to have traditional environments offering less flexibility or employee control of their working hours and locations as compared to the other organizations in this study.

Formal Diversity Programs

One pattern that arises in the research is the link between work-life supports and formal diversity and inclusiveness programs. Seven organizations[1] (see endnotes for details about respondents' gender, industry, and region) in this study have extensive diversity programs and also offer more work-life supports for employees as compared with the other organizations in the study. One manufacturing organization has a limited diversity program. It includes affinity groups but diversity is not a focus of the organization, nor do the organization's goals include anything related to diversity. It does not have extensive work-life supports available to employees. For the seven organizations that have extensive diversity programs, each is positioned as a priority in the organization's culture and important to the organization's business.

In most cases, the diversity programs focus on all kinds of diversity: ethnic, racial, gender, sexuality, cohort, and more. At one banking organization, there is an emphasis on diversity especially from the point of view of gender. Two companies began their diversity programs with a primary focus on gender but have since expanded their programs to include many types of differences. Michelle, who is from a manufacturing organization, is specifically seeking to "de-gender" the issues of work-life support in order to reduce the stigma that can accompany them. She wants to do so in order to provide more opportunities for women. She also recognizes that men face similar issues, desiring to 'see their kids grow up', attend their children's events, or care for elderly parents.

Linda, an executive at a technology company, describes the goals of their diversity efforts:

> By definition it gets a more diverse community making decisions…and when you have a collective team effort you tend to have a better outcome…When you have diversity of thought within that collaboration, it yields even better outcomes.

The connection between the diversity programs and work-life supports also is articulated by Linda:

> If you want a diverse workforce, you have to be able to accommodate diverse lifestyles. Each [diversity] council focuses on the 'vital few': the top issues that are having the most negative impact on the advancement of this community.

In a similar vein, Barbara, whose employer is a banking organization, reports that part of the reason for her company's diversity councils is "to really understand what's going on in the context with a particular focus on gender and gender advancement." Frank, an executive at a manufacturing company, emphasizes the reason for his organization's diversity effort is to ensure attraction, retention, and development of diverse talent. Rita, who is with a manufacturing company, says that her company has a great deal of homogeneity, which is not reflective of their consumer base. Their diversity program "…is built around causing more dissonance, interrupting the status quo constantly, being more market-facing, and being more of a representation."

The diversity efforts provide education, training, and events on key issues related to particular groups' interests. They also host networking events and panel discussions with the intention of connecting people, building community, and providing support based on common areas of interest and challenge. Companies with formal diversity programs also are measuring the extent to which different populations are represented at all levels in the organization.

With the exception of region, there is little pattern to the organizations who have formal diversity programs. They vary in size from 18,000 to 426,000 employees. They include three manufacturing companies, two media companies, one banking organization, and one technology company. The one factor where there was more similarity was region. All of the companies are in the eastern United States except two in the central/south region of the United States. Two of the companies have been focusing on diversity and inclusion for a decade or more.

One additional organization, a seventh organization, stands out regarding its diversity programs. Lorraine's organization, a media company, has a diversity program, but the company has no work-life supports. She laments the overall culture which does not allow for them:

> I was hoping by this time – I've been working for almost 40 years – that the generation of men with provincial attitudes would have been long retired and things would be different [in terms of work-life support options]…I think too many people in the workforce today learned bad behavior from the people they worked for and that just kind of flows down. [Work-life support] issues are just not on the radar.

She reports that despite the diversity program, few women are represented in management and above. She attributes this to the fact that the diversity program has not been linked with talent planning and acquisition processes. She describes the program as having good intentions but lacking in leaders who "take responsibility to make sure we operate that way."

Work Environment and Work Tools

This research uncovers the ways in which some executives are also defining work-life supports as elements of the physical work environment and work tools. Their belief is that by providing employees with amenities in their physical environment, options for supporting work in the office and work tools, the employees will be aided in navigating work and life demands.

Isaiah's technology company offers spaces that are not assigned to certain employees but are simply available to come in and utilize when an employee is going to be in the building working for a shorter period of time or between meetings. The phone system allows employees to be assigned to a temporary space for a day or period of hours. In addition, employees have tools such as laptops and sufficient access to the system to work from anywhere. Lee's technology company offers a cafeteria, a fitness center, onsite oil changes, onsite dry cleaning, and mobile dentistry. Lee reports that the company offers these amenities in order to keep employees onsite, foster productivity, and attract and retain employees. It also helps employees avoid having to spend personal time "going out and running a variety of chores". The company also provides plenty of tools such as smart phones, laptops, and tablet devices.

Similar to the technology companies, Brian's manufacturing company offers spaces for mobile workers who are not based in an office for their whole day, or who are working in multiple locations. They find a desk at which to sit for a period of time. Rita's manufacturing company similarly offers 'hoteling/hot desking' which is a similar model for employees who do not have space dedicated for themselves but drop into spaces and use them temporarily while they are in the office. Brian's manufacturing company also selects locations for their new facilities based on proximity to convenient services and residential areas where their employees live. They provide tools such as laptops and easy access to all internal drives and information systems. Frank's manufacturing company offers onsite daycare and has a bustling Starbuck's-like coffee area for employees to work and connect with others when they are not working at their desks. His company also offers laptops, cell phones, wireless, internet connections, online meeting capabilities, Skype, and video conferencing capabilities. The banking and finance

company that employs Allen offers plenty of tools such as wireless, Blackberries and teleconferencing as does Lisa's media company.

Relevance of Work-Life Supports

Each of the executives in this study refers to times when their employees, and they personally, have needed to rely on work-life supports. They provide examples of parenting commitments such as attendance at soccer games, graduations, and school functions. They also provide examples of situations requiring child care for young children or for children who are home sick from school. They reference elder care as a situation in which employees may need work-life supports. In addition, they provide examples of extreme situations requiring work-life supports such as catastrophic illness, accidents, or the death of a close family member. Executives also provide examples of employees who are continuing their educations and need work flexibility for that purpose. Through these examples it is clear that parents seek to integrate work and family and are affected in doing so by their working conditions and the extent to which their work offers flexibility.

Themes in Work-Life Supports

One of my primary research questions pertains to the barriers to work-life supports in organizations. Specifically, I asked participants, "What might stand in the way of a company adopting work-life supports?" and "What are the barriers to the development or adoption of benefits, policies, or informal work-life practices that offer work-life supports to workers?" Through my interviews, I discover key factors that not only hinder organizations from adopting

work-life supports, but also factors that enable work-life supports. In many cases, the same factor can be both an enabler and an obstacle, depending on situational variables. These factors naturally cluster into three key themes: management practices and culture; organizational realities; and gender. The theme of management practices and culture reflects leader discretion, management practices, and the culture within the organizations. The theme of organizational realities reflects the nature of the work, global work, technology, and the presence of younger cohorts in the work environment. Gender is a third theme that I will explicate below.

Management Practices and Culture

The theme of management practices and culture includes three factors. One is leader discretion, another is management to performance outcomes, and a third is organizational culture. I explicate each of these in turn.

~ Leader Discretion ~

Leader discretion is a primary theme that emerges in my findings. Throughout this discussion, I use the terms leader, manager, department head, supervisor, and work team leader synonymously. I describe them below with consideration for the prevalence of leader discretion, the enhancing/ constraining nature of leader discretion, leadership attitudes, leader influence and training. I close this sub-section with an analysis of why leader discretion is an important factor.

One of the primary factors in work-life support is the extent to which work team leaders in all the organizations I study have discretion in making decisions about the supports available to employees on their teams. All but one of the organizations I study, Lorraine's media company, rely on work team leaders, department supervisors, or managers to make decisions about work-

life supports for employees. This is true for companies that have a variety of policies and practices available as well as for those companies that have few formal policies or practices.

As an example, Frank's manufacturing company offers a variety of work-life supports, however, the approval for these programs and practices rests with work team leaders. In comparison, Kyle, an executive at an oil and gas company, reports that there are no set policies for work-life support at his company, but rather employees work with their supervisors to gain support and approval to work at home occasionally. Prior to working from home, an employee explains what he or she will accomplish while at home. Then, when he or she is back, the employee shows evidence of what he or she has accomplished during that period. Kyle argues that leaders are in the best position to understand an employee's particular situation and be able to assess the employee's needs in light of the needs of the business or the employee's role:

> The other part of that quality of life is recognizing, understanding, and getting to know your people when they are in stress – when they are at a point when you need to tell them to leave because they have some personal situation.

Allen, an executive at a banking and finance organization, says that his company's large size contributes to the local interpretation of overall policies. While there are formal policies for time off and vacation, individual leaders are responsible "to interpret how they want to address things…the decision making process has been so distributed that I don't think there's a consistent approach," he says.

According to Linda, an executive from a technology company, leaders have a lot of flexibility within the boundaries of the policies:

> A manager, not just a senior executive, but a manager, has an awful lot of latitude as long as they are meeting the needs of the business and complying with the values of the company and any legal requirements…Within those bounds, a first

> line manager has an awful lot of flexibility in coming up with a unique situation that meets the needs of a given employee.

This leader discretion may either enable or constrain the provision of work-life supports. Rick, also from an oil and gas company, shares examples of how leaders tend to accommodate employees informally when they have life or health challenges, but these situations are exceptions and are negotiated with the managers on a case-by-case basis. They are not the norm for day-to-day working or operating. Rick also shares that the leader's personality affects what he or she allows:

> Depending on the personality of the leader, if you're a slave driver versus a really sensitive attuned person, given that it's informal, it's practiced differently between different team leaders.

Barbara, from a banking and finance company, says that HR sets policies and guidelines and then counts on leaders to have discretion in how work is accomplished within the policy. But according to her, leaving decision making about work-life support to work team leaders is challenging:

> I can have the greatest policies in the world but if I haven't changed the mindset of the line manager [who is making the decision], then there is potential that this individual isn't going to be approved for this flexible working arrangement. And some of these managers have antiquated mindsets that we're still, even in this day and age, trying to work around.

Lee, an executive at a technology company, echoes Barbara:

> Many managers still traditionally evaluate a person's effectiveness by the number of hours they are at their desk. And that's not always [the best method of evaluation].

Brian, from a manufacturing company, reflects this sentiment by describing some leaders who need to see their team members in order to believe they are working. At his organization, a leader's style dictates the extent to which he or she allows his or her staff to work away from the office. Diane's media company is similar. While officially employees can apply for working in alternative ways such as job sharing, compressed work weeks, etc., most of the time, these arrangements require "working out a deal" with one's direct manager, and few employees really take advantage of the practices that are officially available. In contrast to situations where leaders stand as a barrier to employees having work-life supports, some executives report that work team leaders frequently grant employees work-life support and flexibility. In particular, all three of the executives at technology companies and one executive at a manufacturing company report that managers at their companies typically do accommodate employees' flexible working arrangements.

Senior executives[2] in this study also identify the importance of attitudes in work-life support provisions. Isaiah, from a technology company, reports that "old school" attitudes can get in the way of work-life supports. Allen, from a banking and finance company, Diane, from a media company, Brian from a manufacturing organization, and Louise from a manufacturing organization, all agree that attitudes on the part of senior managers are key to work-life supports and their availability. Rita, an executive at a manufacturing organization, reports that the biggest barrier to work-life supports is traditional thinking. "…it's more traditional mindset that is the biggest barrier, above all else." Michelle, an executive at a manufacturing company, also believes that a leader's own work-life balance is important. According to her, the extent to which leaders themselves are practicing flexible working arrangements sends important cues to others in the organization.

In addition, if leaders believe that they must be able to see employees in order to ensure work is being accomplished, that will get in the way of flexibility and the provision of work-life supports. Linda describes these attitudinal barriers as a lack of understanding on the part of leaders:

> There are a lot of misconceptions about work-life integration – that it is an accommodation or that I'm allowing a weakness in the organization – as opposed to being perceived as a way to get maximum productivity from my employees and making sure I'm getting the most diverse set of skills possible in the organization.

Rick, a senior leader from an oil and gas company, says that leaders have varied opinions about what is fair or not. In addition, while a leader may want to provide his or her employee with time off, he or she may not, for fear of being perceived by his or her boss as "weak" or as a "softie" or as a poor business leader.

In addition to describing the attitudes of leaders within their organizations and articulating the potential barriers that exist with regard to their attitudes, the interviewees' own attitudes were evident through their comments. One senior leader says:

> You have to be sure they [employees] don't take advantage of you and you have to hold them to clear accountabilities…making sure they're not goofing off, and then there is the other perception that if they're home, they're probably not doing work. So there are some old perceptions that create a stigma for working from home.

Lisa, an executive from a media organization, agrees with this leader's sentiment. In contrast to these more 'theory x' philosophies, Allen's description of the way he leads is more aligned with a 'theory y' philosophy in which he trusts employees and expects them to be motivated:

> I don't need to be the person who's controlling or micro managing things. I just want to hire really good people who will just go out and bust the world open and

> so I've always been really, really open minded about how people work, when they work, and where they work…[but] I don't know that everyone has that attitude.

At the same time that attitudes are a factor, there are senior leaders in this study who also take personal responsibility for influencing leaders in favor of work-life supports. Five of the senior executives[3] reported taking active roles – both personally and through providing direction to others in their departments – to help leaders become more comfortable and increasingly to accommodate flexible working arrangements for employees.

Another way that companies seek to shape leader behaviors is through training and development. One company, Michelle's manufacturing organization, offers formal training for leaders on work-life supports and how to address needs for flexibility in the work environment. Frank's manufacturing company offers online training for leaders about how to administer their worker flexibility policy. Rita's manufacturing organization offers training to leaders regarding their flexible work arrangement policy. Other organizations offer general leadership training, such as Barbara's banking and finance organization which offers a comprehensive program which trains leaders on the bank's philosophies and policies. Diane's and Lorraine's media organizations are examples offering general leadership training. Also offering general leadership training are Curt's, Louise's, and Rita's manufacturing organizations and Kyle's and Rick's oil and gas companies. Isaiah's and Lee's technology companies do as well. Despite these examples of general training, most companies do not offer training specifically addressing work-life supports. Curt, from a manufacturing company, reports that some leaders may struggle with providing for worker flexibility because "it's not something that is in the normal course of business and many managers don't know how to deal with it."

~ Management to Performance Outcomes ~

The measurement of work-life supports emerges as another factor in the data[4]. This factor is a second aspect of the theme relating to management practices and culture. Measurement to performance outcomes tends to be a barrier to organizations providing greater work-life supports. About 10 years ago, Lorraine's media organization experimented with having call center employees answer calls at home, but ultimately did not adopt the practice because they were not able to measure and therefore adequately quantify and prove positive results for the organization. Lorraine says that employees also struggled with the model since they "felt out of it because things changed so rapidly at the office that it was difficult for them to stay connected when they were working at home". Brian's manufacturing organization offers little in the way of work-life support, and he attributes this to the difficulty in measuring its outcomes.

Bob, from a banking firm, and Lee and Linda, both from technology companies, are all quite sure there are positive benefits tied to work-life supports and the provision of work flexibility for employees[5], however none of them, nor their companies, have determined how to quantify them. Linda says, "Unlike other programs where it's easier to do an ROI [analysis of Return on Investment] or even a risk/reward profile, it is far harder to say what benefit I gained because I let someone work from home." This emphasis on measurement can sometimes impede the widespread adoption of work-life supports.

Performance management is another related factor. Many executives[6] refer to the importance of using individual performance to judge outcomes and effectiveness instead of using the number of hours an employee spends in the office as the indicator of success. Linda, from a technology company, agrees this is important:

> I think the bar needs to be on productivity and innovation, not time. It's really results that matter. I think we are moving away from a culture that manages eyeballs. But in a very distributed, service-based organization, those are harder to measure as well. It's not just work that becomes hard to measure, it's overall productivity and overall innovation. And that's what you really want, it's overall productivity and overall innovation. You don't want to work more hours, you want to work better, smarter. But that requires some breakout thinking and necessity is the mother of invention.

Rita, an executive from a manufacturing company, says, "I don't care if people are working upside down in the bathtub at home as long as they're exceeding their objectives." Lee, from a technology company, says that it is important for managers to define deliverables for their employees and set expectations and then manage to those instead of managing based on the number of hours people spend in the office.

Performance also is linked to whether employees have the opportunity to flex their working hours. Barbara, an executive at a bank, says that "it's all predicated on strong performance…and if a person isn't pulling their weight, the bank will not have the appetite to provide the employee with the privilege of working from home or working alternative hours." For Barbara's bank, working from home is a privilege. Diane, from a media company, expresses the point in this way, "It's a two-way street. You have to be doing your share and more and then we're really supportive [of flexible working arrangements]." Lisa, from a media company, sees that the use of performance feedback and 360 degree evaluations helps managers provide the opportunity for employees to work from home:

> It has allowed managers to say, yeah, you can work from home because I don't have a problem evaluating your performance because your performance is now based on your ability to produce and perform, not on punching a time clock.

Curt's manufacturing company allows flexible working arrangements. He says, "as long as we're producing results, the rest [our working hours and location] is secondary." Frank's manufacturing company also allows employees to work in a flexible manner with flexible hours and locations as long as they are performing well. Rita's manufacturing company is similar. Frank says that the "key" to providing more flexible working options has been his company's focus on performance management, and he believes that better overall organizational results and individual productivity result when there is a focus on these performance outcomes. Brian, from a manufacturing company, and Diane from a media company, also link performance to trust. Diane says, "You really shouldn't have to ask someone too much about their personal life if you trust them, and if you don't trust them, they shouldn't be working for you."

~ Culture ~

In addition to the importance of leader discretion and management to performance outcomes, many executives[7] also cite culture as an important factor in work-life supports. This factor becomes the third aspect of the overall theme of management practices and culture. Culture is key theme in these research findings, because it can either enhance work-life supports or detract from them. Culture may be defined as the norms, values, and unwritten rules that shape how an organization operates and how its employees behave. There are many factors that influence organizational culture. Examples include a company's industry, competitive market, leadership, policies, measurement systems, and reward systems. These factors both shape culture and are shaped by culture in a reciprocal relationship. Organizational culture can be an enabler of work-life supports. Isaiah, an executive at a technology company, reports that within his company's culture, people are free to work in remote locations, work at hours that are flexible to

accommodate their demands, and have flexibility to pursue their own interests within the context of their work. He says this kind of work is "ingrained and naturally accepted in their culture." Linda, also from a technology company, credits her culture's maturity with its acceptance of work-life supports and flexibility for workers.

Rick refers to his organizational culture's commitment to integrity and respect for employees. Specifically, his organization makes accommodations for unanticipated, episodic situations where employees need to be allowed to take time off for a sick child or parent. Frank, from a manufacturing company, credits his culture's emphasis on trust and integrity as one of the reasons for the acceptance of employees working alternative hours and working from alternative locations. Allen provides a personal example of a time when he had knee replacement surgery and was able to work from his bed with ease. His bank's culture was accustomed to having meetings where many employees called in on the phone, so his time recuperating was facilitated by his ability to do some work from his bed at home. He attributes this pattern to the culture that embraces a variety of flexible working options.

On the other hand, despite the fact that Frank's manufacturing company has a flexible work arrangement policy, he says that when an employee is out of sight, he or she may well be out of mind. This is not unusual among the respondents. Some cultures require face time in order for employees to be successful and to be perceived as contributing and performing. This was the case with Diane at a media company who says, "We're very much about face time…there is still a culture here about face time and about being seen." Brian, from a manufacturing company, says that working away from the office and working with more flexibility is not very accepted in his company because of "cultural hurdles." Rita says face time is important at her manufacturing

company. She has "…found people leaving jackets on the backs of their chairs just to make people think they were still in the office."

In addition to organizational culture, three executives[8] also identify the broader societal culture which influences their organizations and work-life support provisions. The broader culture also influences behavior and creates context for men and women. This culture inherently influences companies as well. Linda, from a technology company, and Barbara, an executive from a bank, point to this factor. In addition, Michelle, an executive from a manufacturing company, refers to the overall culture within which her organization operates:

> I think about the underlying cultural mores that go well beyond a company. I can do my damndest to have what I would call progressive, family friendly policies but [my company] still operates in a culture…and I can't change that.

Organizational Realities

A second theme that emerges from the data is related to the realities that each of these organizations face. This theme is made up of the following factors: the nature of the work, global work, technology, and the presence of younger cohorts in the workforce.

~ Nature of the Work ~

The nature of an employee's job is another element executives in this study cite as important to work-life support. Points about the nature of work, the demands of work, and work load arise frequently and combine to create important theme in the findings. Providing flexibility in work hours and working locations can be challenging for certain roles or situations. This body of findings – related overall to the nature of work – is illustration of the importance of social

location and structural constraints. Many of the jobs that are difficult to accommodate with work hour flexibility or work location flexibility are those at lower socio-economic levels. In addition, the presence or absence of work flexibility creates structural constraints within which employees must navigate work and life demands.

Many of the executives[9] give examples of roles that are not conducive to working at home. Kyle, from an oil and gas company, says, “Not everyone can work from home because our work is in the building.” The type of work Kyle is referring to may be that which requires employees to work with machines or equipment which is in the building. Another example is work that requires regular face-to-face interaction with other employees such as his travel services group. Linda, with a technology company, and Michelle, with a manufacturing company, both point out how difficult it is to provide flexibility in a manufacturing setting. Isaiah, from a technology company, says that it is difficult to work away from the office for engineers who handle hardware and equipment. He also mentions that it is more difficult in the early stages of a project but easier in the latter stages of a project.

Beyond options to work at home, some executives[10] also give examples of types of situations where it is difficult to provide work flexibility in terms of scheduling. Three executives[11] provide examples of working with customers as situations that are not conducive to remote or alternative working hours. Barbara, an executive with a bank, provides examples of traders who are required to be at their trading desks. In Lorraine’s media company, technicians have to keep face-to-face appointments with customers, and call center employees are tied to the phones at their desks.

It can also be difficult to provide work flexibility when a job requires travel such as in a sales role.[12] In addition, Michelle, from a manufacturing company, Allen, from a bank, and Rick, from an oil and gas company, each say that they believe managerial work is less flexible because leaders need to be available to their team members.

Regulations and security are additional reasons that companies sometimes do not provide flexibility in working and work hours. For example, Barbara's bank does not allow work from home for some employees because of the necessity to protect the security of their customers' financial accounts. In addition, although Lee's technology company allows for many different kinds of alternative working hours and locations, his company does not allow the use of Skype on company laptop computers for security reasons. Kyle, an oil and gas executive, reports that some work is constrained because of the need to ensure the protection of the infrastructure and gas flow that feeds one third of the United States.

In addition to constraints of the job itself, Barbara talks about the importance of considering whether people have the right skill sets to work at home. "Not every person is wired to work at home. Not every person is mature enough." It is possible that some employees may not wish to work at home and may prefer the social connections that are available through face-to-face interactions at the workplace. Overall, this set of factors relate to the nature and demands of the work itself and the content of jobs. They relate to the nature of the employees. Individual characteristics also can affect the extent to which work-life supports are possible to make available.

According to some executives[13], teamwork and social interaction drive the need for face-to-face interaction. Michelle, from a manufacturing company, says, "some work requires people to be physically present for long periods of time because that's how the work gets done. They

collaborate face-to-face." She also identifies an example where an employee tried working at home but ultimately discovered she was missing the social connection the work offered. Michelle advocates that no one work from home 100 percent of the time so employees can ensure they maintain their connection with co-workers.

Michelle also points out that when one employee works in a flexible style, it has an effect on the whole team. Therefore, the whole team needs to be part of this decision making. Kyle, an oil and gas executive, summarizes it this way:

> [As a leader], you have so many extra things to keep the team motivated, feeling connected, and accountable…it's difficult when you have supervisors who are not good at bringing their people together in the office so how the hell are they going to do it when nobody shows up.

Allen, from a banking and finance institution, also reinforces the importance of teams working together face-to-face:

> What I learned long, long, long ago is that one person can't do it…you have to have a team. And you have to empower that team…people don't have to sit in a particular place in an org chart to be a leader, but they do have to get up out of their chairs and go and talk to people and help explain what we're trying to do and to add value…The very concept of team to me is that you have a diverse group of individuals and create an environment…where they get to grow and learn and become so valuable they can work anywhere but then you try to create a culture and an experience that they never want to leave. It's about enabling people to be themselves and yet be part of a team.

Lee, an executive at a technology company, also points out the value of work with others:

> I think we're social creatures…and our most creative work occurs face-to-face…and there's nothing better than a hallway conversation to increase productivity.

Yet another element these executives[14] say is important to work-life support is the extent of the demands of the work. Michelle, from a manufacturing company, believes that all

companies are facing increasing pressures to do more work using fewer resources, making it difficult for people, and creating a situation where people feel burdened. Curt, also from a manufacturing company, reports that the pressures with individual jobs are increasing and "everybody is working 120 percent, coming in early and staying late in order to meet the demands". Louise, from a manufacturing company, repeatedly raised the issue of rising pressures and fewer people to accomplish results due to downsizing over the last 20 years. Rick, from an oil and gas company, believes that a "natural barrier [to the provision of work-life supports] is the demands of the job":

> Everyone's compensation, performance ratings, and bonus are all based on business delivery so if the supervisor is sitting with stretch goals, it is a constant battle about whether to let his guys off or to keep noses to the grindstone…everyone [here] is in burnout mode and overworked but the business moves on.

Lorraine's media company is particularly constrained by the nature of the work. They have centralized their business over the past couple of years and are seeking to standardize the employee experience as well as the customer experience. Her company has determined that all employees should have equal access to all benefits, policies, and practices, and because most of the company's employees are technicians and call center employees, the company has gone to the "lowest common denominator". This means they have decided not to offer work-life supports to any employees. The company considered offering work-life supports and flexibility to those with positive performance records, but subsequently decided against this approach since it would make the supports unavailable to those without a positive performance record. The company's desire was to put employee equality above other factors in their decision making.

~ Global Work ~

Another factor within the theme of organizational realities is related to global work. This factor emerges through the interviews[15]. It is a key factor that is fostering greater work-life support and work hour flexibility. Many executives[16] report that their companies are interacting more on a global basis. Based on time zone differences, this global work makes it necessary to work in early mornings, late evenings, and even in the middle of the night. This requirement for work at unusual hours has the effect of driving more acceptance of taking time off during typical working hours in order to compensate for hours worked at non-traditional times.

The other way that global reach is affecting work-life support is through increasing leaders' knowledge of policies and practices outside of the United States. Michelle, an executive with a global manufacturing company, comments on the extent to which countries outside the United States have family friendly policies and practices. She is using some of these as inspiration for policies and practices in the United States. Brian, with a manufacturing company, reports that his company is

> …experiencing a shift where we have almost as many workers in Asia as we do in the United States and the workforce in Asia is a stronger proponent of work-life support [than we are in the United States] and they're going to help the rest of the company acclimate to that environment.

~ Technology ~

Technology is another factor contributing to a theme of organizational realities. Like many of the other factors, technology can be either an obstacle or an enabler for work-life support, depending on the context and the situation. When technology is seen as a cost, it can be a constraint, as in the case of Kyle's oil and gas company. His organization faces high charges to

provide all employees with access to their network from remote locations. To save money, the company provides this remote access only to select workers. Isaiah, from a technology company, also articulates this constraint related to technology. He says:

> If a company doesn't have the kinds of technical systems that allow employees to work remotely – phone systems, order processing systems, financial systems, collaborative systems, or others, they will have a hard time.

Lisa, Diane, and Lorraine, all from media companies, believe that costs are an obstacle in the provision of work-life supports because of the costs for technology. In addition, Lorraine believes there are cost implications to backfill a person's position when he or she is working in a flexible manner, expecting that more employees will be required to fill holes left by the worker who is flexing his or her hours.

On the other hand, Isaiah, an executive at a technology company, believes that working alternative hours or working from alternative locations is no longer a trend but a norm because of technology. Allen, an executive with a bank, and Curt and Frank, both from manufacturing companies, agree that technology is an enabler for work-life support and flexibility. Brian, whose manufacturing company does not offer work-life supports broadly, is testing remote working with one group. Technology is an important ingredient in that pilot since each employee receives a laptop and other tools to support working away from the office. Linda, who works for a technology company, articulates her perspectives about technology's effects:

> Technology is accelerating the breakdown of the barriers of a traditional work schedule and a traditional office environment. [Companies] have two choices. They can either resist it or embrace it and actually use it to an advantage.

Barbara, an executive with a bank, argues that while technology has allowed for flexibility with working hours and locations, it has detracted from work-life balance because employees cannot

disconnect, and they are “on 24/7”. She argues that companies need to better manage this in order to fully implement work-life supports. Linda, an executive with a technology company, agrees as does Lisa, an executive with a media company:

> It’s great to have a flexible work schedule…but you’re given a Blackberry and the objective is that you’re going to respond…pretty quickly…[but] it is unhealthy. It does creep into your life being on the handheld night and day. It is important to take time off and be away from the Blackberry.

Rick, from an oil and gas company, offers a contrasting view that technology has contributed to greater work-life balance because it is no longer necessary to be at the office in order to accomplish work effectively.

Younger Cohorts in the Workforce

The presence of a younger cohort in the workplace is another factor related to organizational realities. Some executives suggest[17] that work-life supports have been enhanced by the presence of more employees who are younger, specifically, members of the millennial generation, which is typically defined as those born between the late 1970s and the 1990s. Frank, from a manufacturing company, suggests that the younger workers are placing increased demands on the organization for more technology such as tablet devices, smart phones, and the like. This demand has the effect of making more of these devices available to workers in all age ranges. A few of the executives[18] believe that the presence of the younger cohort in today’s workforce is increasing the demand for flexible working arrangements and that everyone is benefitting from the responses companies are providing. Isaiah, a technology company executive, agrees and describes how the millennial generation views the work environment:

> They don't view their workplace as a place anymore, they view it as the technology they have at their disposal…they'll figure out where they need to work but they need to know what allows them to get their work done.

Linda, an executive with a technology company, argues that the millennial cohort is better equipped than others to deal with the changing conditions in work environments such as mobile work and working from a location other than a traditional office, primarily because of their comfort and facility with technology.

Gender

A third theme that emerges in the research is related to gender. While I did not ask senior executives specifically about gender issues, they did emerge in the interviews with women. None of the men brought up gender issues. Gender arose so frequently that it is an important theme in the findings. Of the eight women, four of the women have two children, one woman has four children, one woman has three children, one woman has one child, and one woman has no children. All the women are married, except one. Most of the women said they personally benefitted from work-life support when their children were younger. In addition, all of the women with children became executives when they had children living at home. In this sub-section, I discuss the following factors that emerge related to gender: its personal nature, the extent to which women face demands at work and at home, the question of 'de-gendering' work-life supports, and women's advancement. I close this sub-section with a discussion of gender's importance to these findings.

~The Personal Nature of Gender~

For many of the women, work-life support is a personal issue. Michelle, an executive with a manufacturing organization, prefaces her remarks by saying, "As a professional woman who's had kids and is now older, I can reflect back." Michelle shares that she only took an average of seven weeks maternity leave for each of her two children and was a full time working mom with a lot of travel required for her job. She was already an executive when her children were eight and four years old. Barbara, with a bank, comments on her successful advancement:

> I've always had leaders who didn't differentiate me because of my gender. It was based on my work and that's a huge part of it. He found a part time project for me [after my second child was born]. There was this institutional corporate commitment to me…it made me work harder, try harder. When I came to the office…I [gave] 150%, I couldn't be distracted at home but equally, I had the resources to take care of my home.

Diane, an executive at a media company, says that when she had young children she did not want to complain or put the spotlight on herself:

> I was stretched and I was bananas. I was crazed trying to do it all but I didn't want to put the spotlight on me because no one else was dealing with this. I was on a trajectory and I didn't want it to take away the opportunities.

~Demands at Work and Home~

A few of the executive women talk about their perspective that women are responsible for both work and home to a greater extent than men. Michelle, an executive at a manufacturing company, says that she worries when she frequently hears about younger women who are struggling with juggling many responsibilities and being held accountable to all the outcomes of their children. In addition to the broader cultural mores that Michelle references, she also points to the woman's responsibilities at home:

> I find it deeply disappointing and concerning. It makes me check [whether we have the right supports in place]. It also makes me step back. I can't control the

> dialogue between a 30-something and her spouse that she's feeling overwhelmed and because her husband doesn't do the dishes, go grocery shopping, change the baby, do the laundry, none of that, so she's doing that and working. You can't change that.

Michelle also shares an example of a senior colleague who was struggling with all her family responsibilities. Despite having a nanny, she was still feeling an overwhelming burden of having to orchestrate all the family's needs in addition to her full time executive career. While this example demonstrates social class and the benefits of having financial resources, it also demonstrates the extent to which women are responsible for multiple demands, regardless of their social location.

Linda, from a technology company, says that her company's employee survey data demonstrate that women managers have the greatest challenge in managing work-life integration because they continue to have a greater share of responsibilities at home. Louise, from a manufacturing organization, shares a story about a new Vice President (VP) of Human Resources (HR) who is 37 years old with two children. This VP received negative feedback from her employees because they perceived she did not have enough work-life balance. While the VP had indeed been working many hours and traveling extensively, Louise and this VP believe she would not have received this feedback if she were a man.

In another example of navigating the demands of both work and home, Barbara, an executive from a banking and finance firm with two children at home and a stay-at-home husband, says that it is also challenging to compete for jobs in comparison to men who have stay-at-home wives. In her view, women are working and also attending to "child bearing, cleaning, dinner parties," and other home-oriented tasks. She says that women in our society are typically the primary caretakers. Men are able to devote more of their time and attention to work.

She also points out that many prominent women who have achieved high levels of success in organizations did not have children. Specifically, she provides the example of Maria Bariromo, who does not have children, from Cable News Network (CNN) whom she heard speak about women's issues at a conference. Women are burdened with home responsibilities in addition to their work responsibilities, and this puts pressure on them to integrate all these demands.

~Seeking to De-Gender or Focus on Gender~

Some of the executives are seeking to 'de-gender' work-life supports. By 'de-gendering', they are attempting to remove the stigma from work-life support issues, thereby helping women and all groups achieve better access to opportunities within organizations. Michelle, an executive at a manufacturing company, advocates for de-gendering the topic of work-life supports:

> You look at how does work get done here and you broaden the dialogue [beyond just the leader and the employee], then you can have something in it for other people [the work team, for example] and it gets you out of 'this is a working mother problem'. We're getting many more requests for short term flexibility around…all sorts of issues [that are not just related to women]…I've worked very hard with my team here [Michelle is responsible for internal and external communication for her company], I don't let them gravitate to 'it's only a mom issue'. I don't let them use just those examples. We've got to use different things. We do panels on flexibility…and I made damn sure I had dads on the panel and people talking about different issues.

The desire to de-gender work-life support is partially because they have been stigmatized. Barbara, an executive at a bank points this out, "[they are] stigmatized as a female benefit." Lisa agrees that they have been stigmatized. While her four children are all teenagers today, she says that when she had young children, she never took a day off or worked from home "because there was a stigma" and because she believed her boss would lose faith in her ability to perform if she was not onsite at all times.

Instead of seeking to de-gender work-life supports, Barbara focuses actively on women and women's issues. Her organization's formal diversity program is focused on women and women's advancement. Extended maternity leaves, two weeks of paternity leave, and the opportunity for part time work after maternity leaves are factors in her companies' benefits package. In addition, she has helped foster benefits such as adoption support, help for employees finding daycare and elder care, and mandatory lactation rooms. Lorraine, an executive with a media company, believes that work-life support already has been somewhat de-gendered. She sees more men in her organization seeking flexibility so they can attend their children's soccer games or care for their aging parents.

~Women's Advancement~

The women in this study also share data regarding women's advancement in their organizations. Barbara, a bank executive, reports on statistics regarding advancement in her banking institution saying that high potential women are well represented at lower pay grades and in more junior roles. Indeed, forty nine percent of them are women. Then, there is a reduction in high potential females in higher pay grades. Their representation is reduced to 23%. Barbara argues that this dip is not related to competence but to the nature of the jobs at those levels. These jobs typically require long hours, and some also require travel, for multiple weeks at a time, to international destinations. In her view, this can be difficult for women when they also are raising a family. She says, "It comes down to [child care] resources" if you need to leave your children for that long, many women do not have the resources to accomplish that kind of travel for their jobs. She also says that the pools of candidates for senior executives rarely

include a 50/50 split of men and women. “Quite frankly, we haven’t done enough, there just aren’t enough women in these pools,” she says. Rita, from a manufacturing company, says that of their 20 billion in sales, 17 billion is purchased by women. However, 78% of the people who make decisions in the company are men. Her organization is seeking to shift that proportion.

This lack of opportunity for women is in spite of women’s valuable contributions to organizations. Lorraine, an executive at a media company, provides data that when women are represented on corporate boards, the companies perform better. This is true as it relates to return on equity, return on sales, and return on invested capital. Lorraine is currently part of organized efforts to place more women on corporate boards within her community.

Diane, an executive with a media company, says that she recently spoke with a friend who is a senior executive at another company which does real estate and property management and large scale consulting. According to Diane, he said that while he “is a big proponent of women he thinks twice before he hires them because in the past he has put time and effort into training women and then they leave the company because when they have children they no longer want to travel.” Lorraine, an executive at a media company, says that despite the media stories about women who are opting out of the work environment because they want to, she believes they are actually opting out because there are inadequate work-life supports for women. Essentially, she believes, women opt out because they do not really feel they have a choice other than to leave an organization if they also desire a family and a fulfilling personal life.

Brief Summary of Themes for Work-Life Supports

Overall, important themes emerge related to the provision of work-life supports in organizations. I discuss these in more detail below but briefly, the key themes include the

following. First, management practices and culture affect the extent to which work-life supports are provided. These include leader discretion, management to performance outcomes, and organizational culture. Each of these may both enable and constrain work-life supports. Organizational realities, including: the nature of the work, global work, technology, and the presence of younger generations in the workforce also affect the provision of work-life supports. Finally, gender also affects work-life supports and gender limitations are still facing women in the workforce. With this backdrop of the themes that affect work-life supports, I will now turn to my findings regarding the extent to which the executives believe work-life supports relate to organizational outcomes.

Outcomes of Work-Life Supports

In addition to exploring the factors that affect whether organizations offer work-life supports to their employees, this research also sought to discover the extent to which executives believe there is a link between work-life supports and organizational outcomes. For the purposes of this research, I am defining organizational outcomes as the overall objectives that the business is seeking to achieve. Examples are profitability, growth, brand saturation, stock price, shareholder value, employee engagement, and employee attraction and retention. During the interviews, I asked executives, “To what extent do you believe that family friendly policies (work-life supports) have an effect, either positive or negative, on the organizational outcomes you are trying to accomplish?”

Employee Engagement, Productivity, Cost Savings

Executives[19] frequently refer to employee engagement and loyalty as outcomes of work-life supports. According to Michelle, an executive at a manufacturing firm, providing work-life supports sends a message to employees that the company cares about them as individuals. It affects their engagement because they feel better about a company that provides work-life supports even if they do not personally take advantage of every program or policy. Diane, from a media company, believes that work-life support programs build enthusiasm and bonding and the feeling that the company cares about the individual. She believes that people will always go the extra mile when they believe the company cares about them. Like Michelle, she believes this is true regardless of whether an employee personally takes advantage of all the work-life supports that are available.

Kyle, an executive at an oil and gas company, describes a situation in which one of his employees was going through a very difficult time when her husband was dying. She needed to take a great deal of time away from work, and the company was willing to accommodate this time away. In his view, she is now a better employee because she appreciates the support the company provided. “She would walk through fire for us now,” he says. For Allen, an executive at a bank, providing work-life supports better enables people to be themselves, and this has positive results for employees and for their commitment:

> A mother of two who has kids in kindergarten is every bit as valuable to me even though she has to leave at 4:45pm every day to pick up her kids as the computer nerd who loves working in the office until 10pm. How they work doesn’t matter to me but being in an environment where they both feel valued is the only way you can create a great team.

Executives[20] in this study also believe that work-life supports help organizations accomplish goals and reach better organizational performance. Further, they link employee engagement to productivity. Michelle, from a manufacturing company, says:

> If you increase engagement and retention, you keep costs down because you have employees that are productive. And if you give them flexibility you're meeting them more than halfway to facilitate that productivity.

Barbara, from a banking organization, says that because people work so much, the organization is obligated to allow some flexibility. For her, flexibility leads to better engagement which in turn leads to better productivity, creating better results for the organization. Lisa, from a media company, believes that people perform better when they are happier at their jobs and have flexibility. Rick, from an oil and gas company, says:

> You win the hearts and minds of your employees which is about ensuring their needs are met as well as the business needs, then the employee is going to work for you because they want to and because of respect and appreciation as opposed to an employee that is just beaten into submission and they're just going to punch a time clock. You'll get much more innovation, much more out of the box thinking, trying to improve the business as opposed to someone who is just doing their job.

Some leaders also believe that providing work-life support saves money. Frank is from a manufacturing company and a portion of his responsibilities include real estate and facilities. He believes that by giving an employee work flexibility and allowing the employee to work from home, he saves $100,000 per employee in facility costs because he avoids the expenses of having an office for that person onsite. Isaiah and Lee also have some responsibilities for real estate and facilities at the technology companies for which they work. While they have not quantified the savings, they both agree. Other leaders[21] see the provision of work-life support as a negligible cost with payoffs for the company overall.

Attraction and Retention

Leaders[22] in this study also believe that work-life supports help organizations attract[23] and retain talent. Isaiah, from a technology company, says that they are in an extremely competitive market for talent, and work-life supports are a critical component of attracting people. Barbara, from a bank, agrees:

> What it comes down to is autonomy and flexibility…I've found time and time again that the flexibility that people are afforded is a real factor.

Rick, an executive from an oil and gas company, agrees:

> I think work-life support, especially now…is critical because you're not going to get the top talent that you need to deliver your business unless you've got an atmosphere and culture in your company that gives good balance between the two.

Lorraine, from a media company, points out that the availability of work-life supports can vary based on how challenging it is for a company to recruit talent. She has seen that as the market for talent becomes more competitive, her company offers more work-life supports. When the market shifts and it is easier to attract talent to the organization, the work-life supports that are offered tend to be reduced. She describes a hierarchy of needs in which, when the economy is poor, employees are just happy to be working and demand less in terms of work-life supports.

Misalignment of Current Supports and Outcomes?

Overall, executives believe there is a connection between work-life supports and positive organizational outcomes. If the executives believe in the positive outcomes, then why are work-life supports not more prevalent today? This research enumerates a number of factors that enable

work-life supports: diversity programs, globalization, technology, and the presence of younger cohorts in the work environment. Despite the presence of these factors and the executives' beliefs that work-life supports are helpful, work-life supports are still not as widespread as they could be. Measurement systems may be a key factor impeding the provision of work-life supports and explaining the misalignment between executive perceptions versus actual availability of work-life supports. Some executives, as discussed previously, point out that it is difficult to measure the effect of work-life supports. For organizations that value tangible metrics as a tool for decision making, this may be a barrier. This research also uncovers the relationship of performance management systems. Specifically, when companies tie work-life supports to performance systems, the work-life support systems are more prevalent. Since performance management systems are one avenue through which to measure employee performance, I draw a connection between these factors. It is possible that by enhancing performance management and measurement systems, more companies could be convinced to leverage and foster work-life support systems. Further research could investigate whether measurement systems, inclusive of performance management, are a fundamental factor in the provision of work-life supports in organizations.

Future of Work-Life Support

While it was not a pre-established question for my interviews, an emergent topic in my study was the future of work-life support. Many of the executives[24] commented that in the future, work-life support and the need for companies that provide flexibility will become more prevalent. Lisa, from a media company, believes demands will increase as global work increases and as

technology and the speed of information increase. Some executives[25] also raise the issue of elder care as a key driver for the future of work-life supports. They explain that it is becoming a critical issue for all employees, both men and women. Lorraine, from a media company, describes how elder care is particularly challenging because many people do not live in close proximity to their parents. Linda, from a technology company, attributes the challenge of elder care partially to her perception that families have become smaller.

Regarding work-life supports and worker flexibility, Isaiah, an executive from a technology company, says:

> This is more than just a trend. At one point it was a trend to work remotely and have flexible environments. It's reality now. It's the way work is done. The barriers and walls that prevent you from doing this continue to go down and I would say those individuals who are not familiar with working this way will become obsolete.

Lisa, from a media company, agrees, "I think it's really an evolution and you just really have to keep listening to your employees." Rita, from a manufacturing company, says, "It [demand for work-life supports] can only grow. People will demand it. They will vote with their feet if we don't give it to them." Frank, from a manufacturing company, believes increasing work-life supports will simply be a requirement. Overall, the executives believe the provision of work-life supports will increase. Despite the attitudinal barriers discussed above, the executives see a general increase in the availability and the use of work-life supports as they look forward.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

Theoretical Connections

This research study explores the attitudes and opinions held by senior executive leaders regarding work-life supports for employees. This inquiry is framed by three theoretical perspectives. These include social constructionist perspectives, social humanistic models, and gender and feminist perspectives. My research regarding executive opinions about work-life supports arises from these theoretical frameworks and is informed by them.

First, through this research, I explore how senior executives interpret the concept of work-life supports and how they make sense of organizational responses to the needs of the changing workforce. Social constructionist or interpretive theoretical perspectives suggest that men and women create reality through their relationships with one another. Interactions with others create meaning through social processes. They also create reality through behaviors that operate to form a reinforcing cycle of social cues, expectations, and responses. This view is especially relevant to the senior executives' role since they have great visibility within their organizations and their own choices and behavior provide cues and expectations for others. In the symbolic interaction framework, the construct of culture – within broader society, within the family, or within the workplace – is an important context within which actors share symbols, language, and meaning.

One of the themes emerging through this research is the concept of organizational culture. The executive women raised the issue of the broader culture within which organizations function. People take their understanding about reality for granted, and these implicit assumptions are

infrequently made explicit. The interviews in this study provide an opportunity for executives to reflect on their attitudes about work-life supports and articulate their interpretations. There is a reinforcing loop connecting the individual's understanding and the social world. Individuals' assumptions about reality drive their behaviors in the social world which, in turn, drive interactions and thus the accumulation of knowledge and more assumptions by individuals. The social constructionist framework provides a lens for how executives are creating meaning about the barriers to work-life supports. It provides a framework for understanding how executives interpret and discuss the ways that work-life supports impact their businesses.

I also apply the adaptive and social humanistic theoretical frameworks of the sociology of work and organizations. In this view, there is a focus on the social aspects of work and organizations, emphasizing the importance of processes for motivating people. This view advocates for rewarding and reinforcing the value that people bring to the work itself. The social humanistic model includes a person-centered framework, valuing employees for their contributions and recommending they participate in more decision making. Further, the social humanistic model focuses on the value employees bring to the workplace as well as the importance of self actualization and treatment of employees with respect for their maturity and competence. I use this research to explore the extent to which work-life supports, including benefits, policies, and practices, influence the conditions for workers. The social humanistic theory is in alignment with this spillover from work to home and home to work. The view acknowledges the talents, personalities, and lives beyond simply the work that employees are expected to perform on the job. Another relevant aspect of the social humanistic theory is the emphasis on the social nature of work and the relationships and networks that guide workplace norms, unwritten rules, and practices. In the social humanistic approach, managers are most

successful when they create conditions within which employees can flourish. This interplay of unwritten rules, organizational culture, and manager behaviors contribute to a culture that affects behaviors and choices in the workplace. Through this social humanistic lens, I find that the executive opinions are embedded in the context of their organizations. I also find that the work-life supports are demonstrative of a broader organizational culture, creating conditions for employees.

Finally, feminist perspectives and the theoretical frame of gender inform this work. While I did not ask senior executives specifically about gender issues, gender issues did emerge in the interviews with women. Gender informs the macro structural conditions of social life through organizations which are gendered. Gendered organizations and institutions are those in which gender is the organizing force and a critical factor shaping how roles are conceived and fulfilled, how rewards are disbursed, how power is distributed and enacted, and how resources are allocated to individuals and groups. In the research, women share their unique perspectives, informed by their own circumstances and experiences of navigating work and home demands. Through the study of senior executive attitudes and opinions, I discover ways in which organizations are gendered and the ways in which organizations create a context for women's experiences. Organizational practices and processes create and perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination. In addition, gender equality is affected by culture, including the culture of the U.S. and the culture of organizations. Within organizations, policy is one variable that affects culture. Others include the organization's strategy and leadership. Since these senior executives are key leaders within their organizations, they are examples of this leadership influence. Additional variables include training approaches, communication, and measurement processes. Each of these emerged as a theme within the research. The gendered nature of both organizations

and the broader culture are illuminated through the findings of my research. Specifically, they demonstrate the barriers to work-life supports and the effects of work-life supports on organizations. Executives' opinions about these two guiding questions are influenced by their gender.

Connections to Literature

In addition to the connections to the theories which underlie this research, there are significant connections to the literature which provides a backdrop to this study. First, related to the leaders' decision making, in addition to their formal roles in decision making, these leaders also have informal influence within and outside of their organizations. Because of their visibility, status, and spans of control, others may look to them for clues about organizational norms. This is consistent with the social humanistic theory which emphasizes the social nature of work and the relationships and networks that guide workplace norms, unwritten rules, and practices (Ibarra 1993; Ibarra 1994). Also, leaders' behaviors shape unwritten rules in organizations and organizational cultures (Schein 1996) within which more than a million people work.

Second, these findings regarding current benefits, policies, and practices that make up the work-life supports are consistent with scholarship in the field of work and family. Specifically, researchers (see Hunt and Hunt 1977; Hochschild 1989; Wharton 1994; Galinsky 1999; Garey 1999; Gross 2001; Kurz 2002; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; and Hewlett 2005) recommend a wide variety of policies, practices, and benefits to improve work-life supports. Likewise, companies are implementing a broad variety of work-life supports and this research describes these. The time tracking that Frank's company does is in alignment with scholarship that suggests employees are increasingly under time pressure (see Gerson and Jacobs

2001; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; O'Toole and Lawler 2006) and are seeking ways to integrate all of their demands successfully.

Programs with emphasis on child care and programs that fill the gaps for parents during summer when their children are out of school, such as those at Michelle's manufacturing company, also are reflective of scholarship in the field (see Garey 1999; Gross 2001; Kurz 2002; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Dodson and Bravo 2005; Hewlett 2005). In addition, Michelle has personally helped create virtually all of these programs. This is in alignment with scholarship (see Pitt-Catsouphes and Googins 2005) regarding the presence of women in senior management linked with the existence of more family friendly policies and practices. The technology companies that provide the opportunity for employees to bring their children to work is particularly reflective of scholars who discuss the importance of workplaces helping parents who face challenges with childcare (see Hochschild 1989; Dodson and Bravo 2005). Further, Barbara's belief about the limited nature of FMLA support is in concert with scholarship suggesting there is inadequate federal support and a mismatch between worker needs and governmental supports (see Hochschild 1989; Wharton 1994; Gerson 1998; Raabe 1998; Vannoy 1998; Garey 1999; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Hernandez 2005; Hertz 2001; Hewlett 2005; Heyman 2005; Gerson 2010).

Approaches offering increasing flexibility in work hours are consistent with the literature advocating increased work flexibility and support for alternative working hours (see Hunt and Hunt 1977; Hochschild 1989; Wharton 1994; Galinsky 1999; Garey 1999; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Hewlett 2005). Finally, recent studies (see Bond, Thompson et al. 2002; Galinsky, Bond et al. 2008) suggest that organizations are making small increases in the

provision of work-life supports for their employees. Overall, the organizations and executives in my research validate this finding.

This focus on diversity programs linked to organizational business drivers is consistent with views from experts on organizational culture who advocate for top-level emphasis in order for programs to become part of an organization's day-to-day practice (see Senge 1990; Kotter and Heskett 1992; Schein 1996). In addition, the link between diversity and work-life support points to the importance of feminist perspectives. These frameworks suggest that gender is a critical factor in the distribution of rewards, power, and resources (see Acker 1991; Reskin 1991; Martin 1999; Wharton 2005). The organizations that have adopted formal diversity programs are explicitly seeking to distribute more evenly these resources among all groups, including women. Additionally, two of the organizations began their diversity efforts specifically for women and have since expanded them to address the needs of all groups. The link between diversity programs and work-life support is logical because diversity programs seek to embrace the whole person (see Maslow 1943; McGregor 1957; Argyris 1963). Work-life supports help a variety of employees with differing needs and obligations, allowing them to more easily navigate and integrate their work and life demands.

Overall, the companies' attention to work environment and provision of work tools is consistent with scholarship that reinforces the importance of the work environment to work-life integration (see Galinsky 1999). It is also in concert with the social humanistic theories (see Homans 1941; McGregor 1957) that suggest these are important to worker satisfaction and productivity. Further, it is consistent with scholars who advocate for flexible working and companies that help employees meet their personal needs at the same time they're meeting the organization's needs (see Hunt and Hunt 1977; Hochschild 1989; Wharton 1994; Galinsky 1999;

Garey 1999; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Hewlett 2005). Additionally, work environments and the provision of tools that support work-life, send important cues to employees regarding the acceptability of working away from the office and working hours that are non-traditional. These cues contribute to the organization's culture (see Schein 1996) and contribute to an environment that is enabling of successful work-life integration for employees.

Through this research it is also clear that questions and inquiries related to work-life supports are relevant and important. Through these examples it is clear that parents seek to integrate work and family and are affected in doing so by their working conditions and the extent to which their work offers flexibility (see Cooksey et al. 1997; Galinsky 1999; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Strazdins 2006). Employees also have high expectations of their own accountability for their families and responsibilities for their children (see Hayes 1996; Townsend 2002). Some researchers suggest (see Kossek 2006; O'Toole and Lawler 2006) that work and family tensions are increasing, and this factor is closely connected to this research regarding executive opinions on work-life benefits, policies, and practices that may provide support.

One of the key themes from this research is management practices and organizational culture. The factors making up this theme include: leadership discretion, management to performance outcomes, and culture. Again, the discoveries are well-founded in the literature that underlies this study. Specifically, the extent to which work team leaders have discretion in determining the amount of flexibility provided to employees is important particularly in light of social constructionist perspectives (see Mead 1934/1962; Berger 1967). Leaders are creating reality through their actions, decisions, and interactions with the teams and with their employees. They also are important links in the networks and relationships that guide workplace norms,

unwritten rules, and practices (see Ibarra 1993; Ibarra 1994). Further, leaders vary in the ways that they choose to accept and implement work-life supports. Despite organizations seeking to create a context for work-life support through policies, practices, and benefits, leaders are variables that companies cannot necessarily control. Overall, organizations may be seeking to create humanistic environments (see McGregor 1957); however, leaders may be acting on assumptions that are not aligned with these philosophies. Leaders also are important because of the extent to which they govern work flexibility. The support of a supervisor is one of the primary factors in employees' ability to navigate successfully their work and family obligations (Galinsky 1999), and this leader support can vary widely.

Scholarship in the field also recommends training leaders and employees (see Finegold 2006; O'Toole and Lawler 2006). However, these companies are not offering training specifically designed to aid leaders in making judgments about how to provide support for employees facing various life and work demands. If companies are largely seeking to create a net to support employees with work-life integration and navigation, as evidenced by the policies, practices, and benefits they are offering, the net has wide holes in the form of leader discretion. While many leaders may make decisions that support work-life navigation, a number of leaders may not. Overall, this research study demonstrates that organizations are potentially leaving work-life support to chance by giving leaders tremendous discretion and not seeking to train them in how to execute the work-life supports.

Companies are facing tremendous pressure to compete and lower costs (see Gross 2001; O'Toole and Lawler 2006). Their emphasis on measuring outcomes and ensuring that investments are appropriate is related to this pressure. Previous research demonstrates the use of performance objectives and accountability (see O'Toole and Lawler 2006) by companies is

increasing. In addition, my research uncovers the variable of performance management as an enabler to the provision of work-life supports. It appears from these findings that companies are becoming more comfortable with the provision of work-life supports when they are tied with performance outcomes. Through this performance mechanism, companies are able to gauge employees' output and productivity even though they may be working flexible hours or in alternative locations. This is important for the field of the sociology of work since this variable of performance management could be a lever for both employees and companies seeking to provide more work-life supports despite a difficulty in measuring the Return on Investment (ROI) for such programs.

Scholarship in the field of organizational culture (see Homans 1941; Maslow 1943; McGregor 1957; Argyris 1964; Ibarra 1993; Ibarra 1994; Kotter and Heskett 1992; Schein 1996) and broader social culture (see Swidler 1986; Smith 1990; Acker 1991; Thorne 1997) bears out the importance of an organizations norms, customs, and unwritten rules in shaping patterns of behavior on the parts of employees. The extent to which work-life supports are provided and perceived as acceptable are based on the culture of the organization and broader society.

A second theme in this study is that of organizational realities. This theme is made up of the following factors: nature of the work, global work, technology, and the presence of younger cohorts in the work environment. The theme relating to the nature of work as a factor for work-life support is consistent with key literature. In particular, scholarship points to increasing pressure on jobs and organizations (see Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000; O'Toole and Lawler 2006) as well as the increasing tension between work and family (see Kossek 2006; O'Toole and Lawler 2006). These findings also reinforce the way in which many jobs have transitioned to an increasingly service-oriented nature (see Hertz 2001; O'Toole and Lawler 2006) and the extent

to which workers feel burdened (see Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Hewlett 2005; Kossek 2006; O'Toole and Lawler 2006).

The nature of a job is a factor in whether work flexibility is available (Ehrenreich 2001). In addition, jobs are one way that social location is defined. They are often closely related to education levels and socio-economic levels. While some of the limitations for work-life supports exist for white collar workers, other limitations reflect the bifurcation of work today. It is often easier for organizations to provide work-life flexibility to those in white collar jobs as compared with blue collar production jobs or pink collar service jobs such as call center operators. This dynamic perpetuates privilege and creates conditions for inequality of the work-life supports that are provided across jobs and labor markets. My research reinforces that there are jobs and situations that are more and less conducive to work flexibility and this creates challenges. Organizations face a choice to ensure equality among employees and offer work flexibility based on the "lowest common denominator" as in the case of the media company cited or to offer work flexibility to some employees, but not to all. Companies are taking disparate approaches, and the evolution of the work flexibility issue has not yet resulted in a universal answer that effectively provides equality.

In addition, work is social (see Senge 1990; Smith 1990; Schein 1996; Thorne 1997) and these executives' opinions validate this dynamic. Work provides context for relationships (see Mead 1934/1962; Berger 1967), context for the creation of meaning, context for community, and context for the distribution of rewards, power, and resources. The social nature of work therefore, potentially limits the extent to which organizations and leaders offer flexibility to employees who wish to work at locations or during hours that would take them away from their teams and co-workers.

Globalization is cited as a key issue facing organizations today (see Brush 1999; Moghadam 1999; Gross 2001; Foulkes et al. 2006; O'Toole and Lawler 2006; Ryan 2008; World Economic Forum 2011). As companies face increasing demands for global work (see Moghadam 1999; Foulkes et al. 2006; O'Toole and Lawler 2006), they also are finding that global work is an impetus for work-life support and work flexibility. Indeed, global work can either detract from work-life support as in the case of increasing demands for off-hours work or enhance work-life support as in the case of allowing for employees to adjust their work schedules to fit not only their work demands but also family demands that may occur during the traditional work day.

Literature in the field of work-life support bears out the connection between technology and job demands (see Bond, Thompson, et al. 2002; Galinsky et al. 2002). The workplace is becoming more technologically intense (see O'Toole and Lawler 2006; Lojeski and Reilly 2008). Just as workers are facing increasing pressure from having technology available 24/7, they are also increasingly able to accommodate family demands by connecting on a remote basis, aided by technology. Organizations face a bind that the policies and practices that dictate technology use also influence the extent to which employees perceive work-life support and have work flexibility.

Like the pressure from globalization and technology, labor markets also are increasingly pressured by the presence of multiple cohorts in the workforce (see Brush 1999; Gross 2001; Palfrey and Glasser 2008; Ryan 2008; Tapscott 2009). This can contribute to a perception of job instability on the part of employees (see Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000). As with the other factors that emerge in this research, the presence of younger generations in the workforce may operate as both an obstacle and an enabler to work-life supports. Some employees may feel increased job insecurity from the number of new millennial workers entering the job market and the relatively

small number of jobs available. In addition, the theme of younger cohorts in the workforce reinforces the importance of a sociological lens that considers social location. There is the potential for ageism in which certain groups are provided with a greater proportion of resources based simply on their age. In contrast, younger workers may create the impetus for increasing work-life supports that will benefit all workers.

A third overall theme relates to gender and again, the literature bears out a strong connection to the outcomes of this research. Women's perspectives are unique (see Smith 1990; Thorne 1997) and their experiences are important to consider, especially within the context of work and family. Gender issues are palpable considering the experiences of these women, even at senior executive levels. In addition, executive perspectives suggest that gender affects how rewards and power are distributed and how resources are allocated to individuals and groups (see Smith 1990). Feminist perspectives argue that women are oppressed and that power structures devalue women both implicitly and explicitly. The opinions of these executives about the stigma associated with work-life issues bear out this point of view and suggest there is continued room for improvement.

In addition to validating feminist perspectives on the unequal distribution of power and opportunities within organizations (see Kanter 1977; Smith 1990; Thorne 1997), these executives' opinions also reinforce the value of assessing gender in concrete and varied contexts. Further, these executives reinforce the reality that organizational practices and processes both create and perpetuate gender inequality (see Acker 1991; Martin 1999) and discrimination (see Kanter 1977). As reported above, a few of the executive women talk about their perspective that women are responsible for both work and home to a greater extent than men. This reality of their experience is a reflection of scholarship in the field as well (see Hochschild 1989; Gerson 1993;

Wharton 1994; Hertz 2001; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003). Some researchers believe that tensions between work and family are increasing (see Kossek 2006; O'Toole and Lawler 2006).

These executive women also are expressing agency. A few of the women speak regularly on panels and mentor younger women in order to support the younger women's advancement. In addition, their social location as senior executives provides them with the opportunity to influence benefits, policies, and practices within their organizations in order to foster women's equality. These executives' realities are instructive as it concerns the need for continued emphasis on gender issues – to ultimately reduce the gender inequality that is still present.

Another of the findings related to this research pertains to the extent to which the executives see a connection between work-life supports and organizational outcomes. Companies are facing pressure to compete, and they are facing labor market compression (see Gross 2001; Brush 1999; Moghadam 1999; O'Toole and Lawler 2006; Ryan 2008; World Economic Forum 2011). If it is true, as these executives believe, that work-life supports have positive benefits for organizations, then a compelling business case may be made for increased provision of work-life supports. These work-life supports would have positive results for employees and for organizations (see Galinsky, Bond et al. 2002; Galinsky, Bond et al. 2008).

Overall, leaders believe that work-life supports have a positive influence on attracting and retaining talent. As companies compete in the global marketplace (see Moghadam 1999; Foulkes et al. 2006; O'Toole and Lawler 2006; World Economic Forum 2011) and as they increasingly value knowledge workers (see O'Toole and Lawler 2006), it is the knowledge workers who are most likely to benefit from work-life supports. Given these realities, it is possible to make a strong business case for the increased use of work-life supports. These work-life supports would contribute to organizations' successful accomplishment of business results.

Considering the future and their predictions for work-life supports, the executives believe the provision of work-life supports will increase. Despite the attitudinal barriers discussed above, the executives see a general increase in the availability and the use of work-life supports as they look forward. To the extent they are correct, scholarship would suggest this will be beneficial to employees who seek to balance work demands in order to be effective parents to their children and children to their parents (see Cooksey et al. 1997; Perry-Jenkins 2000; Parcel 1998; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Strazdins 2006). Increased work-life supports also would reduce the stress that employees face in navigating the competing demands of work and home (see Galinsky 1999; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Kossek 2006).

Summary and Implications

Through this research, I make discoveries about work-life supports in organizations. Specifically, I explore senior executives' attitudes, opinions, and points of view regarding work-life supports offered by corporations. The central questions that provide direction for my research are: 1) what are the factors or barriers that executives believe affect the adoption of work-life supports by companies? and 2) in what ways and to what extent do executives view work-life supports as linked to the organizational outcomes they are seeking to accomplish?

As I summarize the findings of this study, I am making the assumption that work and family are interconnected and inseparable. The boundaries between work and family have become permeable and spillover between work and home has become the norm. Because of this permeability and the spillover, I also make the assumption that work-life supports are important and valuable. A key element of this assumption is that *more* work-life supports are better for individuals, families, and organizations. Using this lens, many of the implications for these

research findings relate to the ways in which advocates for work-life supports can affect change to increase its provision in organizations.

Implications Relating to Decision Making and Influence

Overall, I find that senior executives have a great degree of formal authority for decision making as well as much informal influence on their organization's benefits, policies, and practices. They also express agency through their own actions and attitudes and in some cases, through actively speaking with other leaders to persuade them about work-life issues. They influence their organization's practices, policies, and norms. These executives have broad spans of control, and they also affect organizations that employ 1,243,703 people total. The implication for this finding is that executives are an important lever for enhancing work-life supports. Because of their visibility, status, and spans of control, others may look to them for clues about organizational norms. This has broad implications for work and family because through their actions, these men and women influence others regarding behavior within organizations. The senior executives have a high degree of privilege based on their positions, pay, benefits, and levels within their organizations. It is because of this group's privileged agency, influence, leadership, visibility, and decision making that their perspectives are important.

Implications Relating to Current Work-life Supports

I find that companies vary in the types of work-life support they offer. While these supports generally fall into benefits, policies, and practices, there is little predictability regarding the companies that offer the work-life supports and those that do not. While technology companies offered more work-life supports, it is inappropriate to generalize from this research

since there were only three technology companies represented in the study. According to my findings, companies in the east are also more likely to offer greater work-life supports to employees, but it is again inappropriate to generalize since, there were more companies in the study from the central/southern region of the United States as compared to other regions. This research study was not developed with the intention of evenly representing industries or regions. It was also not designed to draw quantitative conclusions from the data. Rather, it was developed as a qualitative study exploring the opinions and perspectives of senior leaders about work-life supports across a variety of industries and regions of the United States.

Some companies offer very little in the way of work-life supports; other companies offer a broad spectrum of benefits, policies, and practices designed to support work and life integration and navigation across employee groups. The provision of work-life supports sets context for family members. Additionally, the work-life supports that companies offer influence the work experience of employees; and it carries over into the family and non-work situations they face. As a result, work-life supports are important and valuable to both families and companies. Based on this, there is a need for more active advocacy for work-life supports. The reality that companies are taking diverse approaches to work-life supports will most likely make it challenging to accomplish changes that are comprehensive and consistent. Public policy could more effectively recommend and mandate work-life supports. Without mandated consistency, employees will not receive equal work-life supports.

There is also an apparent relationship between formal diversity programs and robust work-life support offerings. With one exception, a media company in the central/southern region of the United States, companies with formal diversity programs tend to have more well-developed and comprehensive offerings to support employees with work-life demands. I attribute

this relationship to the fact that most diversity programs are designed to value the whole person and since lifestyles vary among diverse groups, work-life supports are offered in order to accommodate a variety of needs. Diversity programs could be used as a lever for the provision of enhanced work-life supports, thus supporting workers and having a positive influence on family systems. Specifically, diversity programs could create the opportunity for expanded dialogues with companies about the need for work-life support. Expanding diversity programs could also influence a more inclusive approach, considering multiple factors such as race-ethnicity, class, gender, age, sexuality, and more. Work-life supports that serve diverse groups of people would have positive effects on family members.

The data also demonstrate that many senior executives define work-life supports to include work environment and work tools. Therefore, it may be possible to advocate for greater work-life supports by addressing the topics of work environment and work tools. By expanding the definition of work-life supports to include these factors, there may be more opportunities to include broader groups of executives in the advocacy for work-life supports or to make a business case that includes these components as well as benefits, policies, and practices. Again, expanding the dialogue with companies and intentionally advocating for work-life supports would enhance the experiences of men and women in the workplace and would potentially spillover into the home and family systems.

Finally, this research demonstrates there are far more informal practices in organizations than there are formal policies. The implication for the field is that formal policies will only expand work-life supports to a certain extent. Companies may be resistant to establish too many formal policies because they cannot anticipate every possible situation in which work-life supports should be made available. There is a risk with more formal policies such as the

approach Lorraine's company, a media company, took. In that case, because decision makers did not believe their policies could accommodate a diverse set of needs, they wrote the policies to support the 'lowest common denominator.' People in lowest common denominator were the employees who were not able to take advantage of work-life supports because they were tied to a machine or a phone system making working from home or other kinds of part time work impractical. This 'lowest common denominator' framework illustrates the inequality that exists between socio-economic levels and the ways that privilege is evident in differing types of work.

On the other hand, one could argue that formal policies are even more important if work-life supports will ever be more prevalent. These policies could be at the company level or at the union level or at the federal level. Realistically, it is difficult to imagine that federal policies could pass given the power of corporate lobbies. Given the data from this research, it is also difficult to imagine that large companies would take this route. These executives make it clear that the real opportunity for change will need to come in the context of more informal practices and cultures within organizations. While it would be preferable to accomplish broad-scale public policy regarding the provision of work-life supports, in the absence of this, it may be possible to affect change by concentrating on the factors or themes that contribute company-by-company to work-life supports. These are verified by this study. They include: leadership, culture, nature of the work, global work, technology, younger cohorts in the workplace, management to performance outcomes, and gender.

Implications Relating to Key Factors for Work-Life Supports

In addition to discovering what work-life supports currently are available within organizations, this research also discerns the key factors that affect the provision of work-life

supports. Leader discretion is important in almost all the companies studied. While there were two companies that allowed very limited leader discretion, a media company in the central/south area and a manufacturing company in the east, overall, leader discretion is a theme that emerges. Also, leader discretion either enables or constrains the presence of work-life supports based on the leaders' decisions, attitudes, and personal judgments. A portion of the senior leaders with whom I spoke employ agency to influence the leaders making the decisions. Additionally, companies are generally not training leaders regarding work-life supports. A manufacturing company in the east and a manufacturing company in the central/south are two exceptions. Many organizations are designing work-life supports and then leaving their execution to leaders who employ a great amount of discretion in their decision making. In order to increase work-life supports, within organizations, it is clear that leaders are a key variable that will need to be addressed. Leaders play a pivotal role, so any solution that increases the provision of work-life supports will need to take leaders into account.

The management of performance is also a factor that seems to enhance work-life supports. While it is difficult to measure the outcomes of work-life supports, in general, it seems that when companies focus on individual performance rather than simply hours worked or locations in which work occurs, this is a boon to work-life support. Efforts to increase work-life supports would benefit by advocating for an increased focus on performance management.

Senior executives in this study also identify culture as a key factor for work-life supports, and it is a key factor that emerges from the data. Because it is such an important factor, any mandate that is imposed from outside the organization may have limited effect since organizational cultures are so compelling in guiding behavior. Enhancements to work-life supports could possibly be more successful if change is fostered within organizations' cultures. It

may also be helpful to foster the ties between sociological study and the study of organizational culture in order to buttress the efforts for increasing work-life supports. This type of tie could be accomplished through joint research projects or through increased departmental programs or communication at universities.

Another key factor relates to the nature of work. Work-life supports are influenced by the nature of an employee's work and the increasing demands and pressures in the work environment. Because of these realities, one-size-fits-all solutions will not work. For any solution to be effective and long lasting, it will need to account for differences in the content of jobs and the pressures that employees face with regard to work load.

Globalization, technology, and the presence of a younger workforce are also factors which could be helpful in enhancing work-life supports. While each of these factors has downsides, in general, each seems to provide more impetus for increasing the provisions of work-life supports. It may be possible to leverage these factors in fostering increasing work-life supports.

Finally, gender is another theme affecting work-life supports. The topic of gender was raised only by women. This is significant and may be the result of male privilege and the reality that men in the study may not have faced the same challenges that women have faced. For women in the study, gender and work-life supports are personal, and each of the women who raise the issue of gender has personal experience with navigating and integrating work and family commitments. In addition, they report unequal demands on women as they seek to fulfill both work and home responsibilities. Some executives in the study are seeking to de-gender the issue of work-life supports, believing this approach will make the supports more palatable to organizations and therefore more available to all groups of employees. Finally, women raise the

issue of their limited advancement within organizations. The implication of these findings for the field is that gender limitations are still facing women and society. They are prevalent in organizations, and they affect the distribution of rewards, power, and resources. Advocates for women still have much work to do, and progress is apparently slow as illustrated by these findings. It is also significant that no men brought up the topic of gender through the interviews.

Implications Relating to Organizational Outcomes and Future

Many executives in the study believe that organizations benefit from increased work-life supports. Most of them believe there are either positive effects on cost or they believe that the costs of such solutions were negligible compared to the benefits. Executives perceive that the most important benefits of work-life supports are in the areas of employee engagement, attraction and retention of talent, and productivity on the part of individuals and the organization. Despite the executives' belief in their value, work-life supports are not ubiquitous today. This may be due to attitudinal barriers or due to the perceived inability to adequately measure their effects. Future research related to attitudinal barriers is needed. In addition, better measurement of the effects of work-life supports is necessary. Despite this misalignment, most of the executives believe that work-life supports will be increasing in the future. These findings are encouraging because they suggest the opportunity for proponents of enhanced work-life supports to develop compelling business cases. This finding is potentially useful in convincing organizations there is value in providing work-life support options to employees. This finding also may point to the opportunity for those in the field of Sociology to partner with those in the field of organizational studies in order to connect work-life supports to quantifiable corporate outcomes, and by doing so, advocate for work-life supports.

General Implications

In addition to the factors and themes that did emerge in this research, it is also important to point out factors that did not emerge. One of these is the presence of unions. Unions typically advocate for employees and to place limits on executive decision making and spans of control. These executives did not say they experienced limits from unions, nor did they refer to unions in their comments. It is possible that this is based on executive privilege. Perhaps their privilege makes it challenging for them to see the importance of unions. In addition, because the economic climate has been difficult for workers and because unemployment has been high during 2011, it is possible that organizations and executives wield more power. The average worker may be satisfied with having a job and may not demand work-life supports. Thus the economic climate may place more power in the hands of corporations and executives. Unions are a structural component that could control the power and spans of control by senior executives. Another structural component that did not emerge in this research pertains to mergers and acquisitions. There have been mergers and acquisitions that have occurred during the timeframe of this research, and despite this, the topic did not emerge in the interviews. The may be due to the relative short time for each interview but it is an important structural condition that should not be ignored, and could inform future research.

Work-life supports are important to the health and well-being of men, women, and family members. They are critical to helping workers to integrate work and family demands. The majority of men and women work outside the home. Beyond their wages, most also seek meaning and fulfillment from their work. At the same time, many workers report that they feel overloaded with their work and that the intensity of their work had increased steadily. Most

workers also have children. Workplaces that are more flexible are likely to result in workers who are more engaged, more satisfied, more likely to stay with their company, and less stressed at work and at home. In turn, these engaged, healthier workers may result in higher productivity and reduced medical costs for companies. The opportunity to advocate for more work-life supports using the lenses from this study, may contribute toward more effective, flexible workplaces that contribute to individual and family member health and well being.

U.S. federal policy has not kept pace with the needs of working families. The FMLA only covers employers who have 50 or more workers and only offers unpaid leave. This creates inequity for employees, particularly women. In lieu of federal or state work-life supports, the benefits, policies, and practices offered by employers are important to individuals' and families' well being. Because of the variability of corporate approaches to work-life balance, it will be important to advocate for public policy and standards which provide consistency. The goal of this consistency would be to more equally distribute work-life supports across all populations. In the absence of consistent public policy or perhaps in conjunction with it, it will also be beneficial to educate company executives about the benefits of work-life supports and the factors which enhance the provision of work-life supports.

Opportunities for Further Study

This research also suggests avenues for further study. One involves the extension of research with this particular group by interviewing them again after twelve to eighteen months. Interviewing the same group again could demonstrate the extent to which there is consistency with their points of view and also uncover possible shifts based on changes within their companies. Another avenue for further study involves the use of a questionnaire or survey to

broaden and deepen the data collected from the executives. The depth and breadth of this research was limited by the time constraints of interviews and therefore a questionnaire could result in more data. The qualitative outputs of this study provide a framework for the quantitative studies which could further investigate the themes that emerged here. An anonymous questionnaire could also remove some social desirability bias that is inherent in a study involving interviews. This additional data collection would be useful to further develop the themes that emerged and validate the findings that were highlighted. It would also provide perspective on how some of the factors shift over time.

Another opportunity to broaden the study would be to collect qualitative and quantitative data from employees of the organizations represented by these executives. Obtaining the viewpoints of a broader set of employees at each organization would enhance the breadth of information and it would also introduce perspectives from different social locations. This additional data would be important to test for congruence with the opinions offered by this privileged group. In addition, it would potentially reduce the limitation of social desirability bias since employees may have lower propensity to exhibit this bias in their responses.

Yet another avenue of study would be to compare these companies' work-life supports with their quantitative outcomes such as stock price and financial performance. Beyond the executives' perceptions of the connections between work-life supports and organizational outcomes, this type of study would overlay quantitative analysis and further demonstrate the extent to which a link exists.

An additional avenue for future research would be to compare U.S. companies with companies in other countries. Because other countries have different federal mandates that affect work and families, research comparing the effects of these differences could be helpful in

learning more about the work-life supports and the dynamics that affect these supports in the United States. This study found a commonality between the oil and gas companies in that they both have a relative lack of work-life flexibility, although both provide for alternative summer hours. Further research could seek to explain this commonality and whether it is based on their industry, their region of the southern United States, or other factors. Further research could also investigate organizational structural characteristics such as unionization and mergers/acquisitions and the ways in which these attributes affect the provision of work-life supports. Still another avenue for further exploration would involve expanding the team of researchers for the study. Because I am an insider it would be useful to involve other researchers who do not have an insider's perspective.

Despite the executives' beliefs that work-life supports are helpful, work-life supports are still not as widespread as they could be. While I cannot draw a firm conclusion, I believe that there are still a great amount of attitudinal constraints to work-life supports. Further research would be productive to ascertain the reasons for the attitudinal barriers and draw conclusions and recommendations about how to change the attitudes and reduce the constraints that arise from them. Additionally, further study could focus on the methodologies for more adequately measuring and quantifying the value of work-life supports in order to make a stronger case for their adoption. This research also demonstrates a connection between performance management systems and the presence of work-life supports. Related research could investigate whether measurement systems, inclusive of performance management, are a fundamental factor in the provision of work-life supports in organizations. Finally, research could also go into more depth regarding the benefits that organizations offer that are specific to domestic partners.

Conclusion and Contribution of the Dissertation

I have examined the opinions of senior executives of corporations regarding work-life supports on the job. These work-life supports – in the form of benefits, formal policies, and informal practices – are important to address the needs of a changing workforce. There are more women in the workforce and more dual earning couples. These realities create challenges with the spillover that occurs between work and family. These realities result in increasing demands for the integration of work and family.

The study I have completed examined 1) the factors or barriers that executives believe affect the adoption of work-life supports by companies and 2) the ways and extent to which executives view work-life supports as linked to the organizational outcomes they are seeking to accomplish. The research findings in this study demonstrate that executives have a great deal of authority and influence over work-life supports. In addition, there is a great variety in the extent and types of work-life support provided by organizations. These typically take the form of benefits, policies, practices, diversity programs, work environments, and work tools. Some of the themes I discover in the research may either enhance or detract from work-life supports. These include: leader discretion, culture, and the nature and demands of the work. Other factors also affect the provision of work-life support and primarily enhance it. These include: globalization, technology, younger cohorts in the workforce, and performance management approaches. Gender also is a salient feature of women executives' experience with work-life support, and it is clear from this research that women are still constrained by gender and that systems within organizations still present barriers to women's advancement. Executives believe there is a connection between the provision of work-life supports and organizational outcomes such as

employee engagement, attraction, and retention as well as productivity. Despite the executives' near unanimous belief that work-life supports are beneficial for both employees and organizations, the fact remains that work-life supports are not ubiquitously adopted or utilized. Herein lies an opportunity for additional research to ascertain which barriers are constraining this adoption. I believe that attitudinal barriers and limitations in quantifying the effects of work-life supports are the primary constraints. However, more research is necessary to understand why and how the attitudinal barriers and limitations are operating within organizations. Finally, executives in this study believe the provision of work-life supports will increase in the future.

This study builds on quantitative work which has examined *how* companies are addressing the changing needs of workers and *what kind* of work-life supports companies are offering. Senior executives' attitudes, opinions, and points of view regarding work-life supports help explain *why.* My research makes a unique contribution because it builds on existing quantitative studies and it points to factors which may inform important quantitative studies in the future. Senior executive perspectives are crucial to expanding upon the quantitative data because the executives make decisions about work-life supports for their own companies. They influence other senior executives through their personal and professional networks. They set examples for others in their organizations based on their visibility and status. The outcomes of this study are important because they contribute to an understanding of the pressure that men and women are under and the ways that corporations are seeking to offer work-life supports. These findings inform the field and inform those who seek to increase the provision of work-life supports across organizations. Lacking comprehensive federal support for this work-life integration, the support offered by corporations is imperative.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Profiles of Interviewees

Banking and Finance Companies

Allen, male, level two, 10 years in position, 12 years with company, 280,000 employees, central/southern region, married, no children living at home (4 children total).

Barbara, female, level one, 6 years in position, 15 years with company, 85,251 employees, eastern region, married, 2 children at home (ages 9, 11).

Manufacturing Companies

Louise, female, level one, 3 years in position, 35 years with company, 120,000 employees, central/southern region, married, no children living at home (1 child total).

Rita, female, level one, 6 months in position, 9 years with company, 56,000, central/southern region, married, 1 child living at home (3 children total).

Michelle, female, level one, 7 years in position, 7 years with company, 18,400 employees eastern region, married, no children at home (2 children total).

Curt, male, level two, 4 years in position 24 years with company, 71,000 employees central/south region, married, no children at home (1 child total).

Brian, level one, 1.5 years in position, 18 years with company, 26,200 employees eastern region, married, no children at home (3 children total).

Frank, level three, 2.5 years in position, 33 years with company, 55,700 employees central/southern region, married, no children at home (2 children total).

Media Companies

Diane, female, level one, 18 years in position, 18 years with company, 6,000 employees eastern region, married, one child living at home (age 16 at home; 2 children total).

Lisa, female, level two, 6 years in position, 20 years with company, 19,000 employees eastern region, married, 3 children living at home (ages 12, 17, 17 at home; 4 children total).

Lorraine, female, level one, 4 years in position, 18 years with company, 44,000 employees central/southern region, not married, no children.

Technology Companies

Linda, female, level one, 9 months in position and in an executive position for approximately 11 years, 27 years with company, 426,751 employees eastern region, married, 2 children living at home (ages 13, 15).

Lee, male, level three, 5 years in position, 5 years with company, 9,117 employees western region, married, no children living at home (1 child total).

Isaiah, male, level two, 7 years in position, 7 years with company, 8,900 employees western region, married, two children living at home (ages 12, 15).

Oil and Gas Companies

Kyle, male, level two, 10 years in position, 24 years with company, 5800 employees central/southern region, married, 2 children living at home (ages 14, 17; 3 children total).

Rick, male, level one, 3 years in position, 22 years with company, 11,610 employees central/southern region, married, no children living at home (4 children).

Appendix B: Invitation Script

Good morning. My name is Tracy Brower and I am a graduate student conducting a research study on the corporate executive opinions of work-life support. In this study involving research, my purpose is to study the factors or barriers that executives believe affect the adoption of work-life supports by companies and 2) the ways and to what extent the executives view work-life supports as linked to the organizational outcomes they are seeking to accomplish. I was given your name by [insert name of person who referred me to the person or delete this section if I already know the person] as someone who may be a fit for this research study based on your position in the organization. I would like to invite you to participate in the research study.

Specifically, the people I am seeking to interview are those who have been in senior executive position at least one year and who work for U.S. companies that are Fortune 1000 or larger. If you agree to take part in this research study, I will spend approximately an hour with you individually asking about your opinions and perspectives regarding work-life supports in organizations. The interview will likely last about an hour, though may take a bit longer if our conversation about certain issues becomes in-depth.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary, you can withdraw at any time, and your refusal to participate will have absolutely no impact on your professional or personal life. If you decide to take part, you can later change your mind and withdraw from the research study. You may refuse to answer any question that you do not want to answer. In addition, a*ll responses are completely confidential.* I will not name or refer to [company name] in any way nor will I refer to you by name. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of [insert company name] will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. If you agree to participate, I will ask that you sign an informed consent form.

Would you be willing to participate? If so, we can speak directly in order to discuss the research study and set up a time for our interview.

Thank you for considering participating in this research study!

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researchers, Tracy Brower, Department of Sociology graduate student, tracy_brower@hermanmiller.com, 616-399-4604, 14746 Powderhorn Trail, Holland, MI 49424 or Dr. Maryhelen MacInnes at the Department of Sociology, Michigan State University at (517) 353-3898.

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Interview Informed Consent: Corporate Executive Perspectives on Work-life Support
The purpose of this form is to obtain your voluntary consent to be interviewed as part of a research study. The purpose of the study is to examine the opinions of senior executives of corporations regarding work-life supports offered by corporations. These supports take the form of benefits, formal policies, and informal practices. The study will include approximately 20 total participants. If you agree to take part in this research study, we will speak with you individually asking about your opinions as a chief or senior executive leader. The interview will likely last about 45-60 minutes although it may take a bit longer if our conversation about certain issues becomes in-depth.

I am not offering any compensation for your participation in the research study, however the possible benefits to you for taking part in this study are the chance to talk about your opinions as a chief or senior executive and to potentially provide suggestions and lessons learned relating to work-life support benefits, policies, and practices. There is only a slight risk that you may become upset or frustrated in relating your experiences on this topic.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can later change your mind and withdraw from the study. You may refuse to answer any question that you do not want to answer.

All responses are completely confidential. In all written documentation, we will refer to you by a pseudonym. We will also refer to your company by a pseudonym. The interview will be recorded and this is a requirement for participation in the research study. The recording will be transcribed by myself or a professional transcriptionist, and these pseudonyms will be used to identify your responses to our questions. After transcription, the recording will be destroyed. All materials will be kept secure in a locking filing cabinet. Please be assured that all of your responses are completely confidential. Confidentiality is protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Your name will never be linked to the responses you provide on the questionnaire or in the interview. Note that information from this study may be published, but your identity will be kept confidential in any publications. Data will be stored in hard copy and electronic copy in a password-protected file. It will be kept for a minimum of 3 years according to Michigan State University policy. It will be stored in the office of Dr. Maryhelen MacInnes at Michigan State University. Only Dr. MacInnes, me, and the Michigan State Institutional Review Board (IRB) will have access to the data.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researchers, Tracy Brower, Department of Sociology graduate student, tracy_brower@hermanmiller.com, 616-399-4604, 14746 Powderhorn Trail, Holland, MI 49424 or Dr. Maryhelen MacInnes at the Department of Sociology, Michigan State University at (517) 353-3898. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____ _____

Signature Date

This consent form was approved by the Social Science/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board (SIRB) at Michigan State University. Approved 020/2/11 – valid through 02/01/12. This version supersedes all previous versions. IRB#10-1260

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. (Note gender). While I did not ask interviewees their gender, I did note gender for each.
2. What is your marital status?
3. Do you have children under 18 living at home? If so, what are their ages?
4. What do your responsibilities include?
5. How long have you been in that position? And how long have you been at your organization?
6. To what extent do you participate in *decision making* regarding policies for your organization? To what extent do you *influence* policies or practices within your organization?
7. What work-life supports are currently available within your organization?
8. Benefits, policies, and informal work-life practices that offer work-life supports vary widely across companies and they have not been uniformly adopted across companies. Thinking generally, and not specifically about your company, what might stand in the way of a company adopting work-life supports?
9. Now thinking of your company specifically, what are the barriers to the development or adoption of benefits, policies, or informal work-life practices that offer work-life supports to workers?
10. To what extent do you believe that family friendly policies have an effect (either positive or negative) on the organizational outcomes you are trying to accomplish?
11. Is there anything I have not asked that you believe would be helpful for me to know?

Appendix E: Current Work-life Supports

While the primary research questions of this study did not seek details about the work-life supports that companies currently provide, this question was a part of the interviews in order to set context and provide background. Below are the summarized findings by industry.

Banking and Finance Companies

The banking and finance companies in this study offer: policies for time off as well as vacation; maternity and paternity leaves; adoption support, daycare support, elder care support, lactation rooms, flexible hours for return from leaves, flexible working policies; paid time off policies, sick time policies, and corporate counseling services.

Manufacturing Companies

One manufacturing company in this study offers virtually nothing. Another offers an especially wide range of work-life supports so it contributes to a long list of offerings from manufacturing companies here. In total, these companies offer the following. Formal flexible work arrangement policies; time tracking; flex-time (which includes provisions for telecommuting, job sharing, and more); flex-place (which provides for employees to work at locations other than the corporate offices), paternity leave; parental leave; adoption leave and support; gender re-assignment; onsite daycare; emergency backup care; summer program for children; community program for children; onsite kindergarten; healthy food for take-out dinners; flex work; job sharing; compressed work weeks; adjusted summer hours; flexible working schedules; and technology support for working at home.

Media Companies

One company offers virtually nothing. The others offer support (counseling and fairs in the cafeteria) to connect people with programs that support work-life in the community; time off for volunteering (such as Habitat for Humanity); online wellness-related services such as education and health tracking; flexible working hours; job sharing; telecommuting; and emergency child care.

Technology Companies

The technology companies in this study offer: compressed work weeks; work at home; options to bring children to work when child care is not available; flexible scheduling and flexible working hours; work at home; assistance for home office furniture and work tools; summer child care; elder care; adoption; employee assistance; job sharing; maternity leave; online referral services; and medical/health phone help lines.

Oil and Gas Companies

The two oil and gas companies offer: alternative working hours; options to work from home in emergency situations or special work-related situations; and summer hours.

ENDNOTES

[1] A banking and finance company in the east, a manufacturing company in the east, two manufacturing companies in the central/south, two media companies in the east, and one technology company in the east.
[2] There was a mix of men and women expressing these views.
[3] A mix of men and women: Barbara and Allen, both from banking and finance organizations, Michelle at a manufacturing company, Linda and Isaiah, both from technology companies.
[4] Both men and women raise this issue.
[5] A mix of men and women raised this issue.
[6] A mix of men and women: Bob and Barbara both from banking and finance companies, Diane and Lisa both from media companies, Frank, Curt, and Rita, all from manufacturing companies, Linda and Lee, both from technology companies. Louise raises the issue of accountability but does not connect it with the provision of more work-life supports.
[7] Isaiah, Linda, and Lee from technology companies, Michelle and Rita from manufacturing companies, Diane from a media company, Brian from a manufacturing company, Rick from an oil and gas company, Frank from a manufacturing company, Lorraine from a media company.
[8] The broader cultural context was raised only by women, not by men. The reasons for this may point to their experience of the gendered nature of organizations and families. Please see the section on 'gender' below.
[9] A mix of men and women: Kyle and Rick from an oil and gas companies, Isaiah, Marie, and Lee from technology companies, Michelle and Louise from manufacturing companies, Barbara from a banking and finance company.
[10] A mix of men and women.
[11] Kyle from an oil and gas company, Isaiah, from a technology company, and Brian from a manufacturing company.
[12] This example was provided by Barbara, an executive at a bank as well as Rita, from a manufacturing company.
[13] A mix of men and women: Michelle from a manufacturing company, Isaiah from a technology company, Rick from an oil and gas company.
[14] A mix of both men and women.
[15] Global work was a topic raised by both men and women.
[16] Isaiah and Lee from technology companies, Lisa from a media company, Curt, Michelle, Louise, and Rita from manufacturing companies.
[17] Both men and women raise this topic.
[18] Kyle from an oil and gas company, Michelle, Brian, Curt, Louise, and Rita from manufacturing companies, and Diane from a media company.
[19] A mix of men and women: Barbara from a banking and finance organization, Curt , Frank, Rita, and Michelle from manufacturing companies, Lisa and Diane from a media companies, and Rick and Kyle from oil and gas companies.
[20] Isaiah, from a technology company, Barbara from a banking and finance company, Michelle and Rita from manufacturing companies, Lisa from a media company, and Rick from an oil and gas company.
[21] Barbara, from a banking and finance company, and Curt, from a manufacturing company, Rick from an oil and gas company, are examples.

[22] Both men and women: Michelle, Rita, Louise, and Curt from manufacturing companies, Linda from a technology company, and Lisa from a media company.
[23] Barbara, an executive from a banking and finance company, is an exception to those cited here. She believes work-life support helps retain talent but she does not believe it's a factor in attracting talent.
[24] A mix of both men and women: Kyle and Rick at oil and gas companies, Michelle, Curt, Brian, Louise, Rita, and Frank at manufacturing companies, Lee at a technology company, Barbara at a banking and finance organization.
[25] Men and women: Diane and Lorraine from media companies, Michelle, Curt, and Frank from manufacturing companies, Marie from a technology company.

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