Work–Life Integration:

Present Dynamics and Future Directions for Organizations

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Our marching orders to the field around work-life [are] certainly to walk the talk. We can’t just talk about making a change in our environment and making a change in our culture and making a change in how we deal with one another in our workplace. We actually have to put it into action. We have to be willing to make the commitment to focus on different work and life opportunities for our workforce. We have to be willing to make the commitment [not only to the] programmatic changes that need to be made but also [to] the cultural and environmental changes that need to be made. – Sharon Allen, Board Chairman, Deloitte, LLP

For decades scholars and practitioners have worked to develop and integrate work–life. The topic of work–life has evolved into one of the most significant business issues of the 21st century. Rooted in the history of women’s rights and equal opportunity in education and the workplace, the notion of work–life has shifted in focus from solely a woman’s concern to a workforce management issue. The current challenge for organizational leaders is finding new ways to make a cultural shift in how their organizations think about work–life integration. This shift requires moving from a program and policy approach that is currently seen as an accommodation for working mothers to a more comprehensive approach to workforce management that addresses the growing work–life needs of all employees.

In this paper, we draw from findings of a study of the evolution of work–life initiatives across many organizations to show how large companies’ workforce management strategies have evolved in response to the need for work and family integration. We also explore current and anticipated trends that “thought leaders” in the work–life field view as most important to not only sustain but to more fundamentally address how such trends impact workforce management practices and work–life initiatives going forward. Finally, we conclude with a set of recommendations for initiating and affecting cultural change from a work–life perspective.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This study was initiated in 2005 by a team of researchers at the Boston College Center for Work and Family. The goal was to identify key trends that impact the work–life field, and to determine future directions for organizations in responding to these challenges. We conducted a series of interviews with leading researchers and practitioners in the work–life arena and analyzed transcripts from interviews with recipients of The Work–Life Legacy Award made available to us by the Families and Work Institute. We then facilitated a “Future Search” conference in 2006, which brought together 25 thought leaders on work–life issues. The results were findings and recommendations regarding how the work–life movement has affected more broad-based changes in workforce management and projections for how the movement might continue to grow and evolve in the future.

CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON WORK–LIFE

While early work–life initiatives were primarily focused on dependent care and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), the movement has evolved over time to touch on nearly every aspect of a person’s working life. The myriad of HR functions that are intimately connected to corporate work–life programs include: employee recruitment, total rewards programs, job design, diversity and inclusion, approaches to career advancement and leadership development, employee relocation and travel policies, leave taking and corporate social responsibility.

As a result of this tremendous breadth, work–life initiatives can be housed in many different areas

1 As quoted in an interview with Ellen Galinsky from the Families and Work Institute in response to receiving the 2007 Work-Life Legacy Award.
within human resources (HR) departments, depending on the organization's perspective on work–life and the primary focus of their efforts as depicted in Fig. 1. These varied perspectives, which we explore below, can lead to different understandings of what constitutes a comprehensive work–life culture.

The Diversity & Inclusion Perspective

Many organizations today couple their work–life initiatives with their diversity and inclusion program, including:

- Management and employee diversity training programs.
- Succession planning systems aimed at increasing the representation of under-represented groups in higher-level roles.
- Creation and maintenance of employee networks and affinity groups (for example, a women's network).
- A wide menu of programs and policies crafted to respond to a variety of employee needs and family situations in different cultural contexts.

For example, IBM Corp.'s work–life efforts, including dependent care, flexibility, and women's advancement programs, fall under the umbrella of the company's Diversity and Inclusion efforts.

The Health and Wellness Perspective

Many organizations see work–life initiatives as a way of extending their employee health and wellness programs. In such organizations, work–life may be closely associated with EAPs, health promotion initiatives, or other related medical programs. This is an issue of ever-increasing importance, as initiatives in this area may be seen as part of a comprehensive solution to the continually escalating cost of health-care expenses for employers and employees.

The ways that organizations address this area varies widely. In an August 2008 column, Boston Globe "Balancing Acts" columnist Maggie Jackson explored the coupling of health and wellness programs with work–life initiatives. The article highlighted the use of workplace coaches who are available to employees at all levels to provide advice on how to manage both work–family and fitness goals. As noted in the article, the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) estimates that nearly one-third of U.S.-based companies now offer health and lifestyle coaching.

The Talent Management Perspective

Talent management encompasses a number of HR functions and attempts to cut across HR's independent silos to find, hire, develop, and retain top talent. Talent management encompasses HR planning, staffing, performance management, and training and development. Organizations who take this more integrated approach see work–life as an important differentiator in making an organization an "employer of choice."

A number of prestigious accounting firms have embraced work–life programs in a way that has led to more flexible ways of working, extended family and personal leave policies, and even dramatic changes to career development programs. Deloitte's Mass Career Customization program, for example, stands in stark contrast to the historical "up or out" career progression system that long epitomized major accounting firms.

The Employee Relations Perspective

Employee Relations professionals are often dedicated to creating and sustaining a positive work environment and helping employees to resolve personal and work-related challenges. Employee relations pro-
grams that help facilitate a better work environment and work–life integration can include employee communications, conflict resolution and avoidance, and policy interpretation for employees who seek to utilize appropriate work-life arrangements.

**The Corporate Citizenship Perspective**

Corporate Citizenship (also known as Corporate Social Responsibility or CSR) is based on the belief that an organization should be a responsible employer and an asset to the communities in which it operates. In fact, recent studies have suggested that the number-one factor in whether an organization was viewed positively in this area was the way it managed and treated its workforce. Perhaps for this reason, a number of high-profile organizations have connected their work–life efforts with their corporate citizenship programs. Other important reasons for this include:

- Because most citizenship efforts involve giving time or money, employee time and volunteerism become a major means to achieving citizenship objectives.
- Outside of the context of their organizational identity, many employees spend a great deal of time in their personal lives giving back to the community. Organizations that emphasize work–life balance and provide flexible schedules enable employees to pursue their own approaches to contributing to citizenship endeavors.

Work–life programs that offer greater balance demonstrate in a very concrete way that success at work, at home, and in the community are not competing, but complementary, priorities. For example, The Timberland Co. makes this connection explicit by offering employees 40 hours of paid time to volunteer in civic endeavors of the employee’s choosing.

**The Total Rewards Perspective**

When closely connected to compensation and benefits departments, work–life initiatives are viewed as a major non-monetary component of the total rewards package. Work–life programs and policies contribute to the intrinsic rewards of the work experience and help attract and retain employees. In this instance, work–life programs often include a set of policies and benefits that enable flexible work arrangements. This perspective may also include other highly sought-after benefits as part of the total rewards package, such as on-site childcare and concierge services. For example, AstraZeneca total rewards strategy offers integrated rewards and benefits schemes that are tied to employee life stages and needs.

**The Cultural Change Perspective**

The cultural change perspective is in many ways quite different from the other perspectives. The focus is not simply on implementing workplace accommodations in response to employee challenges. Rather, it encompases the notion that an organization should constantly adapt to address the ever-changing external environment as well as the changing needs and demographics of its workforce. In many organizations, work–life initiatives are part of a broader strategy to make the organization highly adaptable and create a flexible culture that can withstand or even thrive through the myriad of challenges and changes that are occurring. In such organizations, work–life is most closely associated with organizational development, executive education, cultural change, and process improvement initiatives. Work–life responses within the cultural change perspective often include initiatives designed to create a flexible work environment, where the quality of work is evaluated by outcome measures instead of “face time” and where flexibility is not seen as a perk or an accommodation, but rather a new way of working.

Quality of work–life initiatives that are developed in response to employee surveys often result in increased employee engagement, better working arrangements and conditions, and comprehensive training programs that facilitate greater manager and employee understanding of the benefits of flexibility. A 2007 Reuters article noted several actions taken by firms to align their corporate cultures with their espoused work–life philosophies. For example, British Petroleum extinguished a policy on mandatory smart-phone and other e-mail devices for senior managers to curb constant checking of and replying to messages.

With these many and varied work–life perspectives, staff dedicated to work–life initiatives may report to any of a number of different departments within the HR function. This wide variety of “homes” for work–life responses – policies, strategies, and cultural change programs – can be a strength or weakness for promoting the work–life agenda.

On one hand, this variety may portray work–life as an amorphous concept or function. This can be problematic if it makes understanding and adoption of work–life more difficult, especially for line managers. Managers may not gravitate to a workforce management strategy that is difficult to grasp or define. This variety of homes can also make assessing the “bottom-line” impact of work–life initiatives particularly challenging.

On the other hand, this wide range of placements adds weight to the argument that work–life is not a niche activity, but rather a perspective for the way the workforce is managed, with broad implications. It also conveys the critical importance of connecting work–life initiatives to the broader set of HR/people management practices and priorities. This set of issues, coupled with
future trends in work–life, poses a considerable challenge for work–life leaders. In the next section we identify the most significant trends affecting the future of work–life and reveal the potential inadequacy of a work–life strategy that focuses on policies alone without sufficient attention to the workplace culture.

TRENDS AFFECTING THE FUTURE OF WORK–LIFE

From our interviews and the results of the Future Search Conference, we developed a comprehensive list of workplace trends that participants felt would have an impact on organizations and employees. The prioritized list of trends below was derived from the follow-up survey we conducted with experts in the field, who ranked and weighted the issues that had been identified in order of importance and impact on the field.

The Aging Workforce and Generational Diversity

The increasing number of older workers has become an extremely high-profile issue as early baby boomers are beginning to reach what has been historically viewed as retirement age. Engaging the aging workforce is a challenge that must be addressed in the United States, but even more so in Western Europe and some Asian countries that are also experiencing historically low birth rates. For example, Japan will be faced with a nearly 16% decline in the number of workers ages 15–64 in the next 20 years.

A related issue of changing demographics is the generational diversity that has arisen as younger workers with differing values have entered into workplaces dominated by “boomers.” Challenges in this area include finding ways to address the needs of various age cohorts that reflect their diverse needs at different life stages and helping people across varying generations work together more productively and overcome differences in values and work styles.

Generational distinctions often arise with respect to approach to work, desire for work–life balance, and organizational commitment and loyalty. Organizations are challenged to manage these differences in an effort to recruit and retain top talent and improve the effectiveness of teams made up of employees from varying life stages. The challenge of integrating older workers with younger workers has become even more acute in light of the recent global financial crisis, which is forcing many older individuals to work well beyond their intended retirement age.

A June 2008 Wall Street Journal article explored how organizations are adapting modified communications, learning, and work distribution platforms to manage generational differences in the workplace. Companies such as Aetna Inc., Lockheed Martin Corp., and IBM provide specialized training and mentoring programs for both managers and employees in an effort to recognize and understand generational differences.

The Global Challenge

The challenge of working across cultures and countries is a high-ranking trend that impacts work–life from two perspectives. First, work–life integration is defined and treated differently across geographies and countries culturally, legally, and philosophically. Such differences can present an enormous challenge to HR professionals and others tasked with championing work–life and related workforce management initiatives globally. Second, the impact of globalization has implications for how and when people work. In particular, working globally contributes to the issue of heavy workload and can lead to excessive work hours – or at a minimum, the need to work non-standard hours that have traditionally been reserved for personal and family needs.

Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion challenges are major drivers of work–life programs. The desire for workplace flexibility is in many ways rooted in diversity, with all employees viewed as individuals with unique needs. The trend toward greater diversity in the workforce requires new ways of conceptualizing work and creating inclusive work environments. Many companies are seeing diversity as both a cultural change opportunity and a way to reach increasingly diverse marketplaces both in the U.S. and globally. In this way, diversity can open doors for employees and, in turn, clearly support the business case by demonstrating the relationship between diversity and market growth.

Many leading organizations are hiring chief diversity officers to manage concerns related to diversity and inclusion. The role of chief diversity officer ranges from ensuring suppliers from minority-owned businesses, to recruiting more women and people of color, to organizing flex-time programs for young mothers. As noted in a 2008 article in the New York Post, “…one of the most interesting things that concerns thought leaders in this domain is trying to level the playing field by remaking corporate cultures long dominated by white males; addressing the subtle ways in which talented workers with dark skin, names that are hard to pronounce or a desire to be a mother might be stifled in their efforts to rise through the ranks, or just be taken seriously.”

Overwork and Stress

Increased workloads, longer work hours, and greater stress were also among the top issues identified in our study. As organizations have outsourced or eliminated...
jobs and pursued a seemingly relentless approach to “doing more with less,” employees feel under increasing pressure to cope with shorter cycle times and greater workloads without an accompanying increase in resources. As mentioned, globalization has also contributed to these feelings on the part of employees who may operate in global teams that require working longer days and being available during non-work hours.

The importance of this challenge and of linking organizational work–life initiatives to improving employee health and wellness seems both critical and strategic at this time. According to a 2008 SHRM report, Workplace Visions, which was based on a survey of leading HR directors, the “continuing high cost of health care in the United States” was the number one trend impacting the workplace and the HR profession over the next two years. In fact, three of the top six trends identified in the study were directly related to the need to address escalating health care costs.

**Technological Advancement**

Technological advances such as BlackBerry devices and other personal digital assistants (PDAs), cell phones, and the Internet are among the many forces shaping and re-defining work–life boundaries. Technology can be viewed in this arena as “both a blessing and a curse.” On one hand, technical advances have expanded opportunities for employees to utilize flexible work options, most notably telecommuting. As the Director of Women’s Initiatives at a major high-technology firm stated in the study, “Technology helped people realize that you could work from home, you could work from another location, and the business wasn’t going to be adversely impacted.” On the other hand, technology has led to increased intrusion into people’s non-work lives. Productivity tools have enabled people to work anytime and anywhere, but have also invaded their personal lives and in many cases turned their homes into “satellite offices,” blurring the boundaries between work and home. The concept of “domicile as a refuge” has been severely challenged by the increasing encroachment of work-related technology into the home.

Technology has also fundamentally changed the nature of work relationships in many organizations. A May 2008 Wall Street Journal article revealed that surveys conducted in leading technology firms such as Microsoft Corp., IBM, Sun Microsystems Inc. and Hewlett-Packard Co. (HP) found that more than 20 percent of their employees had never met their bosses face-to-face, with most not expecting to in the future.

**Shifting Career Attitudes and Patterns**

In the past, the majority of workers tended to follow a more traditional, linear career path where rewards such as increased pay and promotions were valued. Today, employees are shifting to more protean career values, in part due to the desire for work–life balance. The protean career model is one in which individuals (rather than their employers) self-manage their careers and goals, and where a greater emphasis is placed on subjective rewards such as feeling respected and doing work that reflects one’s values.

The shift in career attitudes and patterns has often been attributed to the loss of loyalty employees feel toward their employers resulting from the rise in layoffs and lack of job security. However, generational and gender diversity may also be fueling such differences. As mentioned previously, some firms are addressing this issue by developing customized career plans for employees suggesting that there is no longer a one-size-fits all career path.

A May 2008 Wall Street Journal article cited some compelling statistics on the major shift in career attitudes and behaviors of high school students and new college graduates. Half of those graduates believe being self-employed offers greater job security than a full-time job, and 70% of high school students aspire to become entrepreneurs. Futurist and author of the article, Michel S. Malone, concluded “An upcoming wave of new workers in our society will never work for an established company if they can help it. To them, having a traditional job is one of the biggest career failures they can imagine.”

These trends indicate that the breadth of the work–life movement has changed and will continue to change significantly, and that organizations will need to alter their work–life perspectives to address current and future challenges. Most of these trends indicate that not only are the faces of employees changing, but the way they work is also changing. Leaders of work–life initiatives must consider the needs of all types of employees, at all levels, and at all stages of their careers — young, aging, male, female, exempt, non-exempt, and managerial.

Given the broad range of perspectives and activities that operate under the umbrella of work–life, this seems a critical time to examine what needs to be done to secure a successful future direction. Rather than providing work–life programs that simply match a solution with a problem, the next generation of HR management and line leaders will be tasked with creating a fundamental cultural shift around the way work is viewed. In the following section, we outline strategies that can be used to address these key business trends in order to develop and promote a more healthy and balanced workforce and workplace culture.

**FUTURE DIRECTIONS: SHIFTING THE FOCUS FROM POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO CULTURAL CHANGE**

As mentioned, our analyses revealed that work–life efforts have historically focused primarily on HR poli-
cies and programs and far less on changing workplace cultures. While policies and programs are a necessary component of work–life efforts, the consensus of the work–life leaders in our study is that a shift is warranted away from policies and programs – toward fundamentally changing the way we view careers and work.

As most business leaders can attest, initiating and affecting cultural change is never easy. Given this reality, where should work–life leaders focus their time and energy to affect constructive change? Survey respondents’ rankings revealed four main areas that require focus in order to enact work–life change.

Influencing Organizational Leaders

In order to affect successful work–life change, influencing leaders must occur among both executive leadership and line management. Chief executive officers (CEOs) and other senior leaders must signal their level of support for addressing work–life issues. As Ralph Larsen, former chairman of Johnson & Johnson, pointed out:

“The role of the chief executive officer of any organization is to set the tone at the top. The role of the chief executive officer is to give permission for new thinking. It’s not just in the work and family area, but it is also in a wide variety of areas. Certainly, the tone at the top is important. For example, in maintaining the ethical values of the company. These are some things we’re just not going to do. And you convey that. You make sure that everybody understands that integrity is critically important, and that you will not tolerate anything less. But you can also convey that you have a high regard for, and respect for, the dignity and stability of the family, and you’re open to new ideas – as to how we can develop policies and programs, and so forth, that facilitate that. So it’s setting the tone, giving permission and encouragement, encouraging people to move in a positive way on this front.

However, not all CEOs share Larsen’s perspective, and the challenge for HR leaders is to continually monitor and provide metrics that support the viability of work–life initiatives. This includes keeping up with the latest research and trends that enable these programs to be linked to increasing employee productivity, satisfaction levels, and retention rates. The impact of work–life programs is difficult to measure because often arrangements are negotiated on an individual basis between employee and manager and may not be formally tracked. Thus, the importance of industry research becomes imperative to making the business case.

Line managers require particular attention because they are the ultimate executors of work–life change. Our research revealed that in order to successfully influence line managers, the following elements are needed.

A clear business case. The most important factor in influencing line managers is to make the business case for work–life clear and compelling. This is most successfully done by providing significant data and research supporting the benefits to multiple stakeholders, as well as providing anecdotal evidence that supports the notion that work–life integration makes business sense. Anecdotal evidence might include, for example, the loss of highly valued employees whose departure can be clearly linked to the lack of a supportive workplace culture with regard to work–life issues.

Providing manager flexibility training. Because this movement represents a significant cultural shift for most employers, many managers are not familiar with or skilled at managing employees who are utilizing (or requesting) flexible work options. As a result, managers may find themselves in unfamiliar territory as they negotiate and construct flexible arrangements unless they are given adequate training.

Internal surveys and focus groups. While employee surveys are virtually always anonymous, the ability to stratify survey feedback by performance band (for example, what are top performers saying is critical to them) can make the results powerful. Surveys and focus groups are important for determining and communicating employee needs and desires regarding work–life issues. This information is critical to helping leaders understand how to engage and retain top talent. For example, at IBM – where work–life employee surveys have existed for two decades – feedback from employees, especially those who are highly rated in the organization’s performance management system, is one of senior management’s strongest drivers of commitment to work–life initiatives.

Manager career-life planning. Helping managers make a personal connection to their own work–life challenges is a critical component of changing their mindsets. A key approach to influencing managers is to provide training in which they reflect upon and develop their own personal career-life plans.

Identification and support of champions. In any organizational change effort, there are often line managers who are willing to pioneer innovative work practices, including flexible arrangements and the non-traditional structuring of roles, either for themselves or their employees. Working with these managers, supporting...
their pioneering efforts, and sharing their success stories will help to build the case for work-life integration. In addition, these line managers are more likely than HR professionals to have a direct impact on the willingness of other managers to create flexible work arrangements that can positively impact both business results and the level of employee engagement.

Helping Individuals Make Career Choices

Helping individuals proactively manage their career and work-life options is the next important area of focus for work-life leaders. Below, we offer five priorities for helping individuals with their careers.

Provide individuals with support in working through difficult career-life challenges and decisions. Such support could come in the form of providing career-life coaching as well as resource and referral programs to external sources and service providers. For example, KPMG LLP offers Web-based training for employees and managers to facilitate discussions about their careers and their personal development.

Train and encourage individuals to work with their managers to discuss their career-life aspirations and negotiate optimal job structure. This strategy reinforces the critical role that managers play in making the work-life agenda effective. Policies and programs create the perception that employees are supported in their efforts to achieve work-life integration. As noted earlier, managers at all levels are the critical link to ensuring that the organization practices what it preaches. Because managers play this role, it is important that individual employees be skilled at working with their own managers to develop win-win solutions. In an interview with Carol Evans, CEO of Working Mother Media, she notes:

Individual career choice is a really important area that I think the work-life industry needs to focus on more. Helping people find the right solution, helping people do what I call straight talk, you know -- really talking to their individual manager honestly. [This is where] I see the pain. If I interviewed ten women about their work-life situations, five of them will feel that they work for a company that is good, but that there is a disconnect to their own life somehow -- big companies, small companies, good companies, “on the list” companies. It doesn’t matter. So individual career choices, I think everybody needs to do a better job at.

Identify organizational “success” stories that illustrate a range of different models of success and communicate these to all employees. Too many organizations give credence to a very narrow and stereotypical view of career development and success. Respondents indicated that new “successful career models” must be embraced and widely communicated as appropriate and desirable throughout the organization. The narrow, traditional view that upward promotions are the only path to success suggests that those who opt for non-traditional work schedules or alternative career paths are not “successful.” As we noted earlier, many professional service firms are allowing individuals to customize their own career paths. In 2007, Deloitte Touche Tomatsu launched “Mass Career Customization,” which enables individuals to create their own career paths based on personal obligations or desires.

As we move away from more traditional careers and rigid hierarchies, it is important that individuals be trained on how to establish clear priorities, develop a career plan, and discuss this with their manager to ensure positive outcomes for the individual and the organization. The shift toward a more protean career path requires that individuals not simply look to their employers to develop their career strategies, but rather take ownership for defining their own career objectives and determining their own path to success.

Ensure that individuals understand their employers’ flexible work arrangements. This priority places responsibilities on both the individual and the organization. For the organization, it is important to not only have flexible work arrangements but also to communicate their availability to employees. Clear communications and documentation of work-life programs and policies allow individuals to better understand their options and more readily utilize them.

Developing HR Policies and Programs

HR policies and programs represent the formal or espoused approaches employed to manage and maintain a workforce. One of the pitfalls of this approach is that there is often an inconsistency between stated policies and actual implementation. This is particularly true in the work-life arena. While HR policies and programs were ranked third among the key focus areas, this should not be taken as a sign that they are unimportant, especially in large organizations.

Policies and programs are and will continue to be essential in facilitating successful work-life integration because they:

- Provide guidance to managers on how to implement work-life programs and flexible work arrangements.
- Help to ensure equity across levels and departments. Effective policies ensure that those who

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may feel more vulnerable or at risk are afforded the same opportunities that others in preferred positions enjoy.

- Ensure a level of consistency of implementation.
- Finally, they can help to institutionalize cultural change by making an explicit change in formal policies. These guidelines, in turn, can be codified in HR policy manuals, embedded in management training curricula, shared through communication vehicles, and integrated into the performance management system.

Influencing Social Policy

Influencing social policy, whether at the local, state, or national level, often presents a challenge for work–life professionals. Partnerships with other internal functions such as community relations and government affairs, as well as with external parties including government agencies, schools, child-care and health-care providers and other not-for-profit organizations, can have a positive impact on addressing the needs of employees.

A key theme in this area is to foster public–private partnerships to solve problems that transcend any one employer. These partnerships could focus on issues such as addressing the need for universal health care, resolving area transportation problems, developing community-based after-school programs, or developing a media campaign on the importance of employers’ supporting working people to achieve work–life integration. For instance, in 2007, Corporate Voices, a working families advocacy group, teamed up with KPMG and other organizations to testify before a congressional taskforce on Workforce Protections. KPMG’s Director of Workplace Solutions provided the committee with examples on KPMG’s deployment of work–life programs.

WORK–LIFE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Given all of the things that need to happen to foster work–life integration now and in the future, who is best equipped to lead such organizational endeavors, and what skills and abilities do they require? Most work–life programs today are still owned and championed by the HR function, but a much greater emphasis on strategies that more fully engage senior organizational leaders, line managers, and individual employees is necessary to foster work–life integration. The goal is to reach the stage where all parties have a “shared vision” for an integrated and consistent approach for managing work–life issues. At that point, organizations will truly have a shared view of the work–life benefits and best practices.

We identified five specific areas of expertise which we feel are required by work–life leaders, regardless of where they operate from in the organization.

Change Management Expertise

This study makes one point clear: If one is working in the work–life arena, he or she is already in the organizational change business. There are well-established models, skills, and competencies for managing cultural change. Members of the work–life field need to develop these skills to be successful.

Consulting Skills

Consulting with and educating managers on the importance of flexible approaches and how to use them is increasingly important. As professionals move from managing specific programs to helping broker broad-based workplace solutions, the ability to educate and coach managers on how to use innovative work–life practices is critical.

Ability to Demonstrate How Innovative Workforce Practices Lead to Positive Organizational Outcomes

Respondents believe that work–life and flexibility still face skepticism in terms of bottom-line impact. Until this case can be made, the field will struggle to gain widespread management commitment.

Training Employees in the Skills Necessary to Make Appropriate Career Choices

If we believe that individuals ultimately own the responsibility for their own careers, it is important to provide them with the necessary training to do so effectively. This education could include helping individuals develop a clearer sense of their own identity and priorities as well as developing a better understanding of the organization’s career development and work–life practices.

Understanding How Work–Life Perspectives Can Be Incorporated into a Broad Range of Workforce Management Practices

Earlier we discussed the breadth of the field and the impact that work–life has on virtually every aspect of an organization’s workforce management practices. Given such broad influence, a critical skill for work–life practitioners is partnering with other HR and other functions to incorporate a work–life perspective into all workforce management practices.
CONCLUSIONS

Tremendous progress has been made in implementing innovative work–life policies and programs over the past 20 years, especially in leading companies. However, we still face a significant challenge to institutionalize this new way of working and managing the workforce. Such deepening of organizational commitment will require viewing work–life as a cultural change endeavor to a much greater degree than is the case today. Influencing senior leaders and line managers and helping employees make and negotiate effective career choices are both essential for making the transition to a cultural change perspective. To do so will mean moving responsibility for implementation of work–life initiatives from staff (that is, HR) to line functions. The role of the work–life professional will shift from that of a specialist managing work–life programs to that of a cultural change agent. This change will require building skills in organization development and in facilitating cultural change efforts, often in large and complex organizations.
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