

# STRATEGIC ROLE OF MANAGERS FOR THE UTILIZATION OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE POLICIES: A SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the need for organizational responsiveness to family-friendly workplace policies and examines the strategic role of managers for their implementation to organizations. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate whether key managers in positions to implement family-friendly workplace policies do so, considering the differences between the formal family-friendly policies or companies, and their actual, informal application. The effect of managers own opinions and lifestyle on this process will also be examined. Therefore, this paper has some propositions and suggestions to improve practical adjustment of the family-friendly policies, which stresses on their advantages to the organizations and to overall society's well-being from the social responsibility perspective depending on the key managers in organizations.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the amount of research into the linkages between work and family has grown dramatically. Prior scholarly research on work and family interconnection is voluminous and work-family balance has received increased attention recently due to dramatic changes in the work concept, workplace environment, and family life over the past decade. Indeed, changing family structures and society values cause changes at work in many different ways. Organizations have introduced flex-time, work-at-home options and the 4-day work week to support workers in their work-life balance (Ezra and Deckman, 1996). Moreover, the personal computer and the Internet have cast a paradigm-shift in the manner that people function both at work and home. These societal changes and technological advances have in an incidental way created a serious potential for interference, conflict, and competing demands between the expectations of the workplace and personal needs at home. Often, the pressures from the job and family domains are mutually incompatible and thus can create conflict or dissonance (Peelers, Montgomery, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005). Furthermore, in a technologically advanced, global marketplace, traditional 9-to-5 schedules have fallen by the wayside. As explained above, the introduction of cellular phones, pagers, portable computers, and e-mail are making it harder for workers to physically and psychologically draw boundaries between their work and family lives.

Consequently, the demands originating from these domains are frequently in competition, leading to conflict between work and family. Recurring conflicts

between work and family may result in a variety of negative outcomes including risks to physical and mental health, poor job performance, poor parental performance, incidence of work withdrawal behaviors (e.g., tardiness, absenteeism, turnover, low job involvement), low morale, and low satisfaction with job, life, marriage, and family (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006; MacDonald and Liff, 2007). Recent research has applied these various conceptualizations of work-family linkage such as work-family inter-role conflict. Findings indicate that high levels of interference from one role can result in a dissonant state where dysfunctional behaviors (e.g., absenteeism, tardiness, leaving work early, personal use of the work phone) become evident (Hammer, Bauer, & Grandey, 2003) or, more ominous, the employee experiences burnout (Peelers et al., 2005). Frone, Russell, and Cooper (1992) analyzed data from a longitudinal study of 631 white and blue collar employees and found that 41% of their participants reported feeling work-family conflict at least occasionally. Similarly, Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, and Weitzman (2001) surveyed 6,451 IBM employees and found that approximately 50% of their participants reported having problems achieving work-family balance. These findings are consistent with those of the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW; Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998) that uncovered a trend over the previous 20 years of decreased security, increased demands, and increased time-consumption (i.e., longer working hours). Conversely, organizational support of employee flexibility and family needs has been found to be associated with higher levels of work-family balance and a concomitant decrease in job dissatisfaction and somatic complaints (see Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

There are number of studies on organizational responsiveness to work-family issues (Morgan & Milliken, 1992; Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons, 1995; Osterman, 1995) from the institutional theory perspective. This paper addresses the need for organizational responsiveness to family-friendly workplace policies and examines the strategic role of managers for their implementation to organizations based on Morgan and Milliken's study (1992). In addition, the paper focuses on individual level (managers), which is one of the four proposed factors affecting the implementation of family-friendly management policies from Harcar's typology (2003).

In view of the assistance between companies' family-friendly workplace policies and their actual application, the main purpose of this paper is to investigate whether managers in key positions to implement family-friendly policies do, in fact, take the initiative to do so, since

there is still a huge gap between formal family-friendly business policies and their informal applications in organizations. From this perspective, the key research question here is: how willing managers are to adopt of family-friendly management policies, and how far this willingness to implement such policies is affected by their own personal opinions and personal lives.

The importance of answering this question comes from two different views: The first is company's point of view; it is known that a company that offers a family-friendly workplace will have an advantage when recruiting the high skilled employees as a competitive advantage in today's global world (Coyle, 1999). Besides this, increased productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, and decreased turnover and stress are the major benefits of these policies to the companies (Durst 1999; Newman & Mathews, 1999; Overman 1999; Scott, 1999; Regan, 1994; Solomon, 1994; Goodstein, 1994; Morgan & Milliken, 1992). Second, it is also important to answer this question from the family point of view; indeed, employees' work/family conflict seems to have been underestimated, first affecting family life, but also society's well-being as a whole. The positive relation between marriage and subjective well-being has been consistently replicated in national and regional surveys conducted in the U.S., Canada, and Norway as well as in international studies. The large-scale surveys reveal that married people report greater happiness than those who were never married or are divorced, separated, or widowed. Marriage and well-being correlate significantly even when variables such as age and income are controlled (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Linehan and Walsh's (1999) suggested that stressful work experiences, such as overload and conflict can affect employee well-being which can, in turn, negatively affect the quality of marital relationships. The findings suggest that, despite profound changes in workforce composition, organizational policies and practices are still largely predicated on the outmoded assumption that employees are predominantly males from traditional families. The traditional family defined as one in which the husband is the sole bread-winner and the wife is the home-maker and child-rearer (Linehan & Walsh, 1999). In any case, a fast-paced economy squeezes the time a healthy society needs for its parents to spend time with their families (Wechsler, 1999).

At this point, it is important to define the major concepts of the paper to understand the theoretical base, which tries to explain family-friendly workplace policies and its linkage among the organization, family and societal well-being.

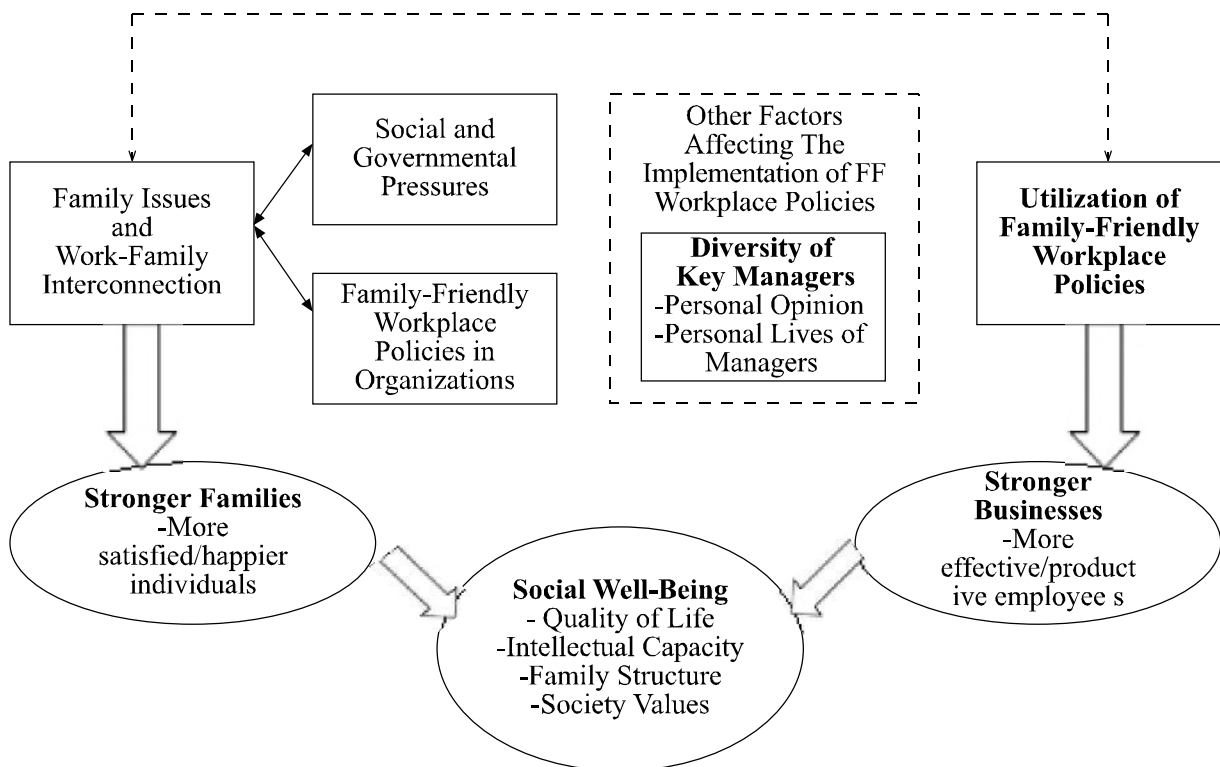
## Theoretical Approaches to Family-Friendly Workplace Policies and The Conceptual Framework

For the purpose of this paper, family is defined as persons related by biological ties, marriage, social custom, or adoption; and work is defined as instrumental activity intended to provide goods and services to support life (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Fundamental changes in the substance and structure of work and family roles, such as the increasing prevalence of dual-earner couples, the influx of women into the workforce, and family arrangements that deviate from traditional gender-based roles, have debunked the myth that work and family are independent. Instead, work and family are closely interconnected domains of human life, and linkages between work and family are very important to organizations, families, and society as a whole. Figure 1 shows the scope of the paper and explains the relationships and limitations in a theoretical framework.

As can be seen from the conceptual framework, managers specifically play an important role in the implementation of family-friendly workplace policies. In addition to this, linkages between work and family affect organizational performance and family

functioning, both of which are important markers of societal well-being (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Indeed, social integration is a basic ingredient of any description of a good society. All should have the opportunity to realize their full human potential, i.e. to realize their own goals and aspirations. This is also part of the social responsibility of private sector firms and, therefore, an integral aspect of business ethics (Schokkaert & Sweeney, 1999). To understand the linkages between work, family and social well-being better, family-friendly workplace policies need to be defined and analyzed in depth.

In general, it is difficult to assign a priori 'friendliness' or 'unfriendliness' to a particular flexible form of employment. In most cases it is a relative category, which is related to the mode of usage and specific circumstances of a particular job classifying particular forms according to the freedom given to the individual to allocate their working time and how it influences their life. As 'unfriendly' forms of flexible employment and work we classified those that increase the intensity of work and heighten the insecurity of employment. As 'friendly' forms of flexible employment we classified those that, at least formally, give the employee greater autonomy about the decision on where and when they will work. We are, of course, aware that each friendly form of flexible employment can also be unfriendly in particular circumstances and



**Figure 1-A Model for The Utilization of Family-Friendly Workplace Policies (Harcar, Feb 2008)**

that many choices are made out of necessity and do not reflect the needs or desires of an individual. As relatively 'unfriendly' forms of flexible employments we classified: weekend work, shift work, overtime, temporary work, fixed-term work. As relatively 'friendly' forms of flexible employment we identified: annual, part-time work, job sharing, flexitime, home-based work and tele-work (Mrčela and Ignjatović, 2005).

Among other definitions (Durst, 1999; Overman, 1999; Wood, 1999), family-friendly workplace policies are broadly defined as arrangements designed to support employees faced with balancing the competing demands of work and family in today's fast-paced, complex environment. These policies usually target greater cost efficiency, increased worker commitment and productivity, better customer service, and improved family-life. Employees are viewed as whole people, multi-dimensional individuals, with full lives both inside and outside their job. The goals of these programs are to enhance worker productivity, as well as represent an exemplary first step which employers can relieve crisis in their families and the problems such as latchkey children and juvenile crime (Newman & Mathews, 1999).

Characterizations of family-friendly benefit programs are subjective and vary from organization to organization. There is no generally accepted list of family-friendly programs, but there are ways of flexible forms of employment, which supports to implement the family-friendly programs in organizations. Among other variations in literature, Table 1 presents an extensive list of flexible forms of employment (Mrčela

and Ignjatović, 2005). As a whole, this category of programs supported by these flexible forms of employment, is intended to enable employees to manage family responsibilities better, which frequently involves the care of children or dependent parents (Durst, 1999; Overman, 1999). This paper will be based on Morgan and Milliken's (1992) family-friendly policies categorization. According to their study (1992), efforts to improve the balance between work and family life generally fall into three categories: family leave, flexible work option and dependent care (Morgan & Milliken, 1992).

With regard to the organizational responsiveness to such family-friendly management policies, companies are increasingly responding to the changing character and needs of today's workforce by adopting work/family, or so called-work/life programs. Despite the proliferation of these programs, only a handful of companies have succeeded in transforming their corporate cultures to become truly family-friendly organizations. Unless the cultural barrier can be broken, work/family initiatives will fall short of their goals. In many companies, the goal is to create a working environment that fosters maximum productivity and serves as a source of competitive advantage in attracting and retaining talented employees (Regan, 1994).

National policies are frequently connected to employers' policies which, on the other hand, mean that employers are not obliged to repeat those policies already installed by the state. Trade unions also have an important role in the development of policies at the national level, and mostly have a negative attitude to the introduction of flexible forms of employment

**Table 1: Types of flexible forms of employment regarding the basic dimensions of employment (Mrčela and Ignjatović, 2005)**

Time	Conditions of work/employment	Place of work
Part-time work Temporary-constant Fixed-variable Flexitime Compressed working week Annually defined hours Partial retirement Seasonal workforce Casual work Zero hours contract/work on call Sabbaticals Voluntary reduced working hours Prolonged working hours Overtime work Shift work	Sharing of work Combining of tasks of several jobs (job enlargement) Work rotation Sharing of job Fixed-term employment Contractual work Independent contractors Consultants Agency workers Landed workers Substitute workers Workers in other companies that occasionally perform work Workers paid by the state	Flexi-place Work at home Tele-working Distance working

regardless of any potential positive impact on the family and employee relations. One justified critique is that only a limited share of employees has access to them or that they are not equally accessible to all employees that would otherwise use them.

Regardless of the shift towards the greater utilization of advantages given by the mentioned forms of flexible employment, one can establish that such forms of employment have not (yet) become the permanent practice of most organizations. Thus Lewis states: "While a growing number of organizations have recognized that it is in their interest to adopt policies which might be regarded as family-friendly and this has sometimes helped some people to manage work and family, these policies have not brought about fundamental changes in organizational behaviours or values. This is because the policies continue to be widely regarded as benefits, conferred upon women or at best parents, and are therefore perceived as being marginal to the organization, rather than a central business concern" (Lewis and Lewis, 1996).

Thus, there are two assumptions in this paper. First, even if organizations have formal family-friendly management policies, informally they are not widely accepted as a new cultural norm in organizations (Coyle, 1999; Dex & Fiona, 1999; Overman, 1999; Osterman, 1995; Solomon, 1994). Second, because of this, employees are afraid to use family-friendly management policies so as not to cause a disadvantage in their career advancement (Davis, 1999; Newman & Mathews, 1999; Solomon, 1994).

Indeed, according to research (1994) by a Work/Family Advisory Board of thirteen experts, including Human Resources professionals, academic professionals and consultants, there was a significant disparity between existing policies and their use. Even if technology frees employees to have greater flexibility and autonomy, when it comes to work/family balance, corporate cultures are largely inflexible. Managers still guard employees who are tethered to their desks from nine to five. Employees still prefer to say they have car trouble rather than childcare problems. Workers still get little support in caring for their elderly parents, school-age children or teens. Employees do not believe they can take leave or use flex time without jeopardizing their careers. A changing workforce means organizations must help people manage their multiple responsibilities (Solomon, 1994). According to a survey, more than half (54%), of executives said firms are only somewhat successful in their efforts, while 43% said business are unsuccessful in helping their staff juggle these dual commitments (Coyle, 1999). In another survey, 48% of respondents say they

feel guilty if they leave work on time. As many as 41% of the sample say they are disappointed with the work/life balance they find in their current job. Overall, the crucial feature that emerges is that even among employees who are generally satisfied, getting the work/life balance is a constant problem (Davis, 1999). Taking working arrangements separately, nine out of ten employers in 1996 provided at least one family-friendly arrangement. The same study reported that voluntary provision for these four categories of family-friendly initiatives (maternity benefits, paternity leave, childcare arrangements and non-standard working hours) was found among just 5% of employers; the study called this minority group "model employers" (Dex & Scheibl, 1999).

It can also be stressed that a very important role in the introduction of family-friendly policies (forms of employment) is played by formal rules in the organization, however behind such formal rules the informal rules used in the organization/company are usually hidden. These informal rules are not written anywhere but are still a very important in the behaviour of individuals in the organization. Informal rules have a great influence on employees' possibilities to balance out work and family life (Mrčela and Ignjatović, 2005).

At this point, it can be proposed several arguments regarding the managers' informal effects at individual level in organizations, not only for the introduction of family-friendly workplace policies but also for their implementation in companies. Table 2 summarizes the following four propositions.

**Proposition 1:** Managers who have a family and who support the family concept would be more likely to favor of family-friendly workplace policies

**Proposition 2:** Managers who do not have a family and who do not support the family concept would be less likely to favor of family-friendly workplace policies

**Proposition 3:** Managers who have a family but who do not support the family concept would be less likely to favor of family-friendly workplace policies

**Proposition 4:** Managers who do not have a family but who support the family concept would be more likely to favor of family-friendly workplace policies

Indeed, the biggest hurdle to creating a family-friendly workplace is the reluctance of supervisors to grant employees necessary flexibility. Wariness on the part of supervisors and a distrustful organizational culture are two examples of the forces inhibiting the effective operation of family-friendly workplace policies. Along with the attitude of management and a lack of trust,

other barriers include a “workaholic” culture, limited communication and training, an overburdening of resources, a detriment to morale, stigma of non-professionalism, incompatibility with job function, and administrative convenience concerns (Newman & Mathews, 1999).

To clarify the concept of support, a “supportive manager” is someone who engages in two-way communication with subordinates, provides positive feedback, mentors employees, allows employees autonomy, recognizes that employees have a life outside work, and facilitates the completion of job tasks by making sure employees have the tools and training they need. Many managers are reluctant to integrate the initiatives into the company culture. According to a report, too often front line managers may convey the message, directly or indirectly, that flex-time scheduling creates more work for them, or that they are uncomfortable with telecommuting because they prefer to have their staff members working where they can see them. If management gives no more than a cursory nod to the value of work-life initiatives, employees could be wary of utilizing them. A 1998 Gallup poll of more than 1000 employees showed that work-life benefits were rarely used. Employees said that while they would like to take advantage of these benefits, they felt that corporate culture discouraged them from doing so. Duxbury and Higgins found a tremendous amount of inequity in organizations today as supervisors act as gatekeepers to many of the benefits offered by the firm. Employees who work for “supportive” supervisors, who trust and respect their employees and who base their decisions on circumstances rather than rigid rules report less stress and greater productivity than employees who work for managers, who deny their employees any degree of flexibility (even when such arrangements are technically available). Only one third to one half of the employees surveyed gave their managers high marks for their supportive behaviors. However, it is management’s responsibility to help employees to be successful in their work life and in their personal life. It is based on trust factors, but this can be difficult to learn, both for managers and employees (Overman, 1999).

**Table 2: Personal Opinions / Personal Lives of Managers at Individual Level and Their Effects on Implementation of Family-Friendly Workplace Policies in Organizations (Harcar, Feb 2008)**

I Having a Family / Supporting The Family Concept (More likely)	II Having a Family / Not Supporting The Family Concept (Less likely)
III Not having a Family / Not Supporting The Family Concept (Less likely)	IV Not having a Family / Supporting The Family Concept (More likely)

From the Morgan and Milliken's study (1992), diversity of top management team or whether top decision-makers have experienced work/family conflict, gave the idea of characteristics of the managers according to their personal opinion and personal life. According to their study, it was found that if any of the top three decision-makers in a business were women, were married to a working spouse and had children under 18, were a single parent, or had significant eldercare responsibilities, that the company might be more open to responsive policies. On the other hand, upper-level male managers were the least likely of all gender and occupation-level categories to believe that companies should provide financial support for childcare (Morgan & Milliken, 1992). In this present paper, the focus is on mid-level managers in who have a key positions or with impact on implementation of the family-friendly management policies in organization. Therefore, if a manager in this position has a family and supports the family concept, there would be high implementation of family-friendly policies in the organization. Similarly, if a manager has no family but still supports the family concept, implementation would also be high. However, if a manager does not support the family concept, regardless of whether he/she has a family, this would mean low implementation of the policies overall in the company culture.

Organizational structures are therefore not the only obstacles, more often people are. Especially managers are not trained to work within flexible arrangements. For example, telecommuting presents a dramatic change from tradition. Managers wonder how to be sure employees are working if they cannot see them (Solomon, 1994). Individual differences in managerial style have an impact on the utilization of family-friendly workplace programs, "old-style" managers

are simply not open to new ideas as advanced by family-friendly initiatives (Newman & Mathews, 1999).

## Future Suggestions

To achieve success in utilization of family-friendly workplace policies, simultaneous changes are needed in the organisational structure of companies and managerial practices (See Kanter, 1997) as well as in organizational culture that would respect and try to harmonise on the job demands with demands outside the work place - in everyday life. Further, the collaboration of all social partners should be ensured at the organizational level as well as at the systemic level, where labour market flexibility should be adjusted along with the social welfare system's flexibility. Thus, instead of work intensification that represents a short-term strategy of securing profit, the transition is recommended to a more long-term sustainable strategy of securing profit through the introduction of forms of flexible employment and an adequate institutional environment, that would be desired by both employers and employees (Mrčela and Ignjatović, 2005).

Family-friendly policies are tools for enhancing productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness and such will need to be managed in a meaningful fashion. Human resources personnel and other managers will need training if these programs are to be implemented and used effectively. 76% of seventeen respondents expressed a need for specialized training to manage both simple and more complicated family friendly programs (Durst, 1999). Organizational placement of the administration of work/life programs, such as the Work/Life Program Manager, may be a partial predictor of success (Newman & Mathews, 1999). Therefore, for companies that want their work/family initiatives to reach their full potential, there are three key cultural changes that they need to make. Organizations must first educate their managers on the business rationale behind work/family initiatives. They must also hold managers accountable using such objectives as sensitivity to employees' needs to balance work and personal life, as measured by subordinates, peers and senior management, adopting department-wide work/family assistance programs, and partnering with individual employees to develop creative solutions to their specific problems and conflicts. Lastly, organizations must provide visible top-level support because middle managers are not likely to change their way of doing things without encouragement, empowerment and examples from top management. Ultimately, lasting organizational change cannot occur

until senior managers recognize that work/family conflicts are not merely women's issue (Osterman, 1995) or even an employee-relations issue, but a business issue.

## Conclusion

Today, forward-thinking executives are beginning to see that providing a work environment that values individual differences and helps employees balance their career and personal interests will be a key to competitive advantage in the marketplace (Regan, 1994). Also, employees with supportive managers are more likely to have high job satisfaction, high organizational commitment and lower levels of job stress and life stress. They also are more likely than those with nonsupportive managers to feel that the organizational policies of their company were supportive of them. Therefore, organizations need to alter their culture and the behavior of their managers and supervisors to facilitate any form of permanent change. They also have to measure progress in these objectives and make sure managers are held accountable for progress in their areas. Organizations must remember the importance of measurable progress.

These programs have direct and tangible benefits for employers. These benefits are high productivity and better job performance resulting in reductions of employee absenteeism and stress. Among the 103 organizations represented in a survey, it was the general consensus that family-friendly programs have positive effects on employees and the organization. Most respondents believe that productivity is increased, turnover is decreased, and recruitment efforts are enhanced in their organization as a result of these programs. Managers should spend time considering the individual relationship between an employee and manager. A manager needs to understand what is important to each individual employee and what motivates the employee to be more productive. Some may be motivated by compensation while others may be motivated by job flexibility. Assessing the employee's needs by employee surveys, focus groups, systematic interviews and conversations with selected employees and supervisors, and evaluating family friendly programs are essential steps toward justifying these programs. The success of a particular program or set of programs will depend on the employer's efforts to customize the program for their employees and workplace. (Durst, 1999; Overman, 1999).

Family-friendly workplace policies have made a positive difference in the work lives of many men and especially women. These same policies, viewed from a more critical perspective, may also represent little

more than sculpting around the edges of an entrenched masculine organizational structure. In addition, those who take advantage of these policies (mostly women with young children and growing number of elder-care) may be perceived as less motivated or less willing to make the sacrifices necessary to succeed in their work. If these policies are to be widely utilized, they must be relatively free of such negative connotations. It has been argued that so long as a core group of employees (notably men) continues to advance without the use of the new family benefits, the structure and culture of the workplace are likely to remain unchallenged. Obviously, a work environment and organizational culture that promotes a "no risk implementation" of family friendly workplace policies for employees represents a necessary first step to their broad utilization. A workaholic cult which sacrifices family life on the altar of efficiency is no longer (if it ever was) tenable. Alternative approaches to organizing, performing and evaluating work are conducive to improved workplace productivity (Newman & Mathews, 1999).

Macarov (2000) in the past explained work as one of the most widely spread and deeply embedded elements in individual psyches, the structure of societal institutions, and value system of industrial civilizations. Nevertheless, when satisfaction at work is studied in depth, it seems that few people get active satisfaction from their work. Therefore, if work is embedded in people's lives and society's structural body one way or the other, then there is an obvious need to define the family and work concepts not only from the economical perspective, but also from the humanitarian perspective, which affects society at the end.

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