International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology 2003 Volume 18

Edited by

Cary L. Cooper
and
Ivan T. Robertson

University of Manchester
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
International review of industrial and organizational psychology.
—1986—Chichester; New York; Wiley, c1986–
v.: ill.; 24cm.
Annual.
ISSN 0886-1528 = International review of industrial and organizational psychology

1. Psychology, Industrial—Periodicals. 2. Personnel management—Periodicals.
[DNLM: 1. Organization and Administration—periodicals. 2. Psychology, Industrial—periodicals. W1IN832UJ
HF5548.7.157 158.7′05—dc 19 86-643874
AACR 2 MARC-S

Library of Congress [8709]

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-470-84703-4

Project management by Originator, Gt Yarmouth, Norfolk (typeset in 10/12pt Plantin)
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wilts
This book is printed on acid-free paper responsibly manufactured from sustainable forestry in which at least two trees are planted for each one used for paper production.

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EDITORIAL FOREWORD

The 2003 volume of the *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* continues with our established tradition of obtaining contributions from several different countries. This edition includes chapters from Germany, Belgium, New Zealand, Austria, Canada, the USA, and the UK. The presence of contributions from such a diverse range of countries indicates the international nature of our discipline. One of the purposes of the international review is to enable scholars from different countries to become aware of material that they might not normally see. We hope that this issue will be particularly helpful in that respect.

Specific issues covered in this volume reflect the growth and complexity of the I/O psychology field. A range of topics from very contemporary issues to well-established topics. The chapter by Lievens and Harris on 'web-based recruiting and testing' and the chapter by Kirchler and Hölzl on 'economic psychology' focus on contemporary topics that we have never dealt with before in the review. Other chapters, such as the review of ethnic differences and cognitive ability by Baron, Martin, Proud, Weston, and Elshaw cover long-standing issues. Another interesting feature of this volume concerns the extent of the international collaboration between authors. Two of the chapters are based on collaboration between authors from different countries.

Overall this volume reflects the diverse and dynamic nature of our field. We hope that readers will find something of interest in it.

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May 2002

Chapter 1

FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS: IMPLEMENTATION, OUTCOMES, AND MANAGEMENT

Suzan Lewis
Manchester Metropolitan University

Flexibility has become a buzzword in organizations. However, flexibility is an overarching term that incorporates a number of different types of strategy. Flexible working time and place arrangements, which are the subject of this chapter, are only one strand along with functional, contractual, numerical, financial, and geographical flexibility. This chapter focuses on flexible working arrangements (FWAs), that is organizational policies and practices that enable employees to vary, at least to some extent, when and/or where they work or to otherwise diverge from traditional working hours. They include, for example, flexitime, term time working, part-time or reduced hours, job sharing, career breaks, family-related and other leaves, compressed workweeks and teleworking. These working arrangements are also often referred to as family-friendly, work–family, or more recently work–life policies. This implies an employee focus, but the extent to which these policies primarily benefit employees or employers, especially in the 24/7 economy (Presser, 1998), or contribute to mutually beneficial solutions, has been the subject of much debate (e.g., Barnett & Hall, 2001; Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001; Purcell, Hogarth, & Simm, 1999; Raabe, 1996; Shreibl & Dex, 1998). Other work-family policies such as dependent care support can be used to complement FWAs and much of the research addresses them simultaneously. The term FWAs will be used in this chapter except where the research under consideration explicitly addresses work–family issues. Non-traditional work arrangements such as shift work or weekend work which are 'standard' in certain jobs are not considered here.

International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2003 Volume 18
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There are two increasingly converging strands of research on FWAs. One stems from a long tradition of examining flexible working as a productivity or efficiency measure (e.g., Brewster, Hegwisch, Lockhart, & Mayne, 1993; Dalton & Mesch, 1990; Krausz, Sagie, & Biderman, 2000) but increasingly also recognizes that these strategies have implications for work–personal life integration. The other has emerged from the work–life literature and depicts flexible working initiatives as tools for reducing work–family conflict or enhancing work–life integration, but has increasingly addressed productivity and other organizational outcomes (e.g., Barnett & Hall, 2001; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Grover & Crooker, 1995; Hill et al., 2001; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998, 1999; Lewis, Smithson, Cooper, & Dyer, 2002; Prutchno, Litchfield, & Fried, 2000; Smith & Wedderburn, 1998). This review draws on literature from both traditions, although most studies are within the work–family paradigm. It focuses on three major current research themes: (i) empirical and theoretically based discussions of the factors contributing to organizational decisions to implement FWAs; (ii) research on the work-related outcomes of FWAs; and (iii) research focusing on issues in the management of flexible work and workers.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FWAs

Some forms of flexible working schedules such as part-time work, compressed work weeks, annualized hours, and flexitime have a long history and have traditionally been introduced largely to meet employer needs for flexibility or to keep costs down, though they may also have met employee needs and demands (Dalton & Mesch, 1990; Krausz et al., 2000; Purcell et al., 1999; Ralston, 1989). These and other flexible arrangements are also introduced ostensibly to meet employee needs for flexibility to integrate work and family demands under the banner of so-called family-friendly employment policies (Harker, 1996; Lewis & Cooper, 1995). Often a business case argument has been used to support the adoption of FWAs; that is, a focus on the cost benefits (Barnett & Hall, 2001; Bevan, Dench, Tamkin, & Cummings, 1999; Galinsky & Johnson, 1998; Hill et al., 2001; Lewis et al., 2002; Prutcho et al., 2000). Other contemporary drivers of change include increased emphasis on high-trust working practices and the thrust toward gender equity and greater opportunities for working at home because of new technology (Evans 2000). Nevertheless, despite much rhetoric about the importance of challenging outmoded forms of work and the gradual association of FWAs with leading-edge employment practice (DfEE, 2000; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Friedman & Johnson, 1996; Lee, McDermid, & Buck, 2000), the implementation of these policies remains patchy across organizations (Glass & Estes, 1997; Golden, 2001; Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham, & Vivian, 2000). A major direction of recent research, therefore, has been to examine the factors that influence organizational responsiveness to work–family issues and hence the development of FWAs.

This research initially emanated from North America (e.g., Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons, 1995; Milliken, Martins, & Morgan, 1998; Osterman, 1995) but also includes some recent research from Europe and Australia (Bardoel, Tharenou, & Moss, 1998; den Dulk, 2001; Dex & Schreibl, 2001; Wood, De Menezes, & Lasaosa, forthcoming). It has focused on identifying factors associated with the adoption of formal FWAs and other work–family policies rather than actual practice and employee use of these initiatives. Organizational size, and sector and economic factors are widely identified as being associated with the adoption of policies (Bardoel et al., 1998; den Dulk & Lewis, 2000; Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons, 1995; Milliken et al., 1998; Wood, 1999; Wood et al., forthcoming). The research suggests that large organizations are more likely to provide formal FWAs than smaller ones; public sector organizations are more likely to develop initiatives than private sector companies; and, within the private sector, arrangements are more common in the service and financial sector compared with construction and manufacturing (Bardoel et al., 1998; Forth et al., 1997; Hogarth et al., 2000; Ingram & Simons, 1995; Morgan & Milliken, 1992). These sectors employ more women, and it is usually believed that having more women in the workforce creates internal pressures that are associated with the development of work–family polices. However, findings on the influence of the proportion of women in the workforce are mixed. Some studies find this factor is associated with the likelihood of adopting FWAs and work–family policies such as childcare (Auerbach, 1990; Bardoel et al., 1998; Glass & Fujimoto, 1995; Goodstein, 1994), while this relationship is not found in other studies (Ingram & Simons, 1995; Morgan & Milliken, 1992). This may depend on the position of women as there is evidence that organizations with a relatively large share of women managers seem to provide work–family arrangements more often than organizations where women's employment consists mainly of lower skilled jobs (Glass & Fujimoto, 1995; Ingram & Simons, 1995). However, when access to flexible work schedules rather than work–family policies (which include dependent care and family related leaves) are considered, women are less likely than men to have access to them (Golden, 2001). Other research suggests that organizations with relatively 'progressive' employment policies and philosophies, seeking to implement high-commitment management, may also be likely to develop FWAs and other work–family supports (Auerbach, 1990; Osterman, 1995; Wood et al., forthcoming).

Theoretical Frameworks

The majority of studies in this tradition have been based on the analysis of large-scale surveys of policies implemented in organizations, usually testing predictions derived from variations on institutional theory (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons, 1995; Kossek, Dass, & DeMarr, 1994; Ingram and Simons, 1995; Morgan et al., 1998). The institutional theory approach begins with the basic assumption that there is growing institutional pressure on employers to develop work–family arrangements. It is argued that changes in the demographics of the workforce have increased the salience of work–family issues, and that public attention to these issues and/or state regulations have heightened institutional pressures on employers to be responsive to the increasing need for employees to integrate work and family demands. Variability in organizational responses to these normative pressures is explained by differences in the visibility of companies and in the extent to which social legitimacy matters to them. Hence public sector and large private sector organizations are most likely to develop policies because of concern about their public image. Pressure is also exerted when other organizations in the same sector introduce flexible policies (Goodstein, 1994). Critics of the traditional, institutional theory approach maintain that this underestimates the latitude available to employers to make strategic decisions in adapting to institutional pressures. Goodstein (1994) argues that responsiveness to institutional expectations depends on both the strength of institutional pressures and on economic or other strategic business or technical factors, such as the need to retain skilled staff and the perceived costs and benefits of introducing work-family arrangements. More recently a number of variations of institutional theory and other theoretical approaches have been proposed, differing in the extent to which they focus on institutional pressures, organizational factors, and technical or business considerations (Wood et al., forthcoming). Recent attempts to identify significant factors associated with the adoption of policies, however, suggest that, while all theoretical approaches have some value, no single theoretical perspective can explain all the findings (Wood et al., forthcoming; Dex & Shreibl, 2001). Institutional pressures, strategic business concerns, local situational variables, and human resource strategies may all influence organizational decision making to some extent.

Two major limitations of research examining the factors associated with organizational responsiveness to work–life issues (and indeed much of the other literature in this area) have been the tendency to focus on large organizations and on formal policy rather than informal practice. There is a growing consensus that the availability of formal FWAs alone is not necessarily indicative of their use in practice (e.g., Cooper, Lewis, Smithson, & Dyer, 2001; Lee et al., 2000; Lewis et al., 2002; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002), and this is discussed in later sections of this chapter. The neglect of small- and medium-sized organizations also relates to this policy/practice distinction. The scope for informal practices and flexibility in smaller organisations is often overlooked.

Small- and medium-sized organizations

There is some indication that smaller organizations are more likely than larger ones to develop informal practices, which are often implemented in an *ad hoc* way, to meet the needs of individual employees (Bond, Hyman, Summers, and Wise, 2002; Cooper et al. 2001; Dex & Schreibl, 2001), although one survey failed to confirm this (MacDermid, Litchfield, and Pitt-Catsouphes, 1999). Findings that the size of companies is a predictor of FWAs may thus be an artefact of what it is that is measured. More informal FWAs may well be more appropriate for small- and medium-sized organizations because of their fewer resources and their greater difficulty in, for example, getting cover for colleagues on leave or working flexible hours. However, as with larger companies, no single theoretical approach appears to explain why FWAs are implemented in small- and medium-sized enterprises. For example, Dex and Shreibl (2001) describe a range of formal and informal arrangements that were introduced in small businesses in response to institutional, business, and economic pressures as well as ethical concerns. They found that small organizations were more hesitant about introducing flexibility and were particularly concerned about costs; but it was also in small businesses compared with large businesses in their study that attempts were made to introduce a culture of flexibility (e.g., encouraging employees to cover for each other). Lack of formalization of policies in small businesses could be associated with inequity. On the other hand, formal policies in larger organizations are not necessarily applied in an equitable or consistent way (Bond et al., 2002; Cooper et al., 2001; Lewis, 1997; Lewis et al., 2002; Powell & Mainiero, 1999), and there is some evidence that employees in small organizations with informal practices can feel more supported than those in large organizations with a coherent programme of policies but difficulties in practice (Cooper et al., 2001).

The role of national social policy and state legislation

Recent research, particularly European and cross-national studies, have begun to examine the processes whereby social policy and state legislation might influence the adoption of workplace policies (den Dulk, 2001; Evans, 2000; Lewis et al., 1998). Social policy, such as the statutory provision of childcare and legislation to support work and family integration, varies cross-nationally. For example, paid parental leave is an entitlement in many European states, and in some countries, particularly in Scandinavia, fathers as well as mothers are encouraged to take up this entitlement (Brannen, Lewis, Nielson, & Smithson, 2002; Moss & Deven, 1999); maternity but not parental leave (for either parent) is paid in the UK and parental leave is unpaid in the USA. Employees are more likely to take up parental leave entitlements if they are remunerated (Moss & Deven, 1999), so organizations develop voluntary FWAs, especially in relation to leave, in different contexts. In Europe state legislation requires organizations to implement policies such as parental leave, the right to take leave for family emergencies, or the provision of equal pro rata benefits for part-time workers. Legislation may also help to create a normative climate that gives rise to higher expectations of employer support (Lewis & Lewis, 1997; Lewis & Smithson, 2001). Edelman argued, 'when a new law provides the public with new expectations or new bases for criticising organisations, or when the law enjoys considerable societal support, apparent non-compliance is likely to engender loss of public approval' (Edelman, 1990, p. 1406). Social policies such as the provision or absence of publicly provided childcare also contribute to institutional pressures on organizations to take account of work-family issues. Evidence from a five-country European study of young workers' orientations to work and family suggests that supportive state policies including legislation and public childcare provision can enhance young people's sense of being entitled to expect support for managing work and family, not just from the state but also from employers (Lewis & Smithson, 2001), which may increase internal as well as external pressures on organizations.

There has been some debate about whether statutory entitlements and provisions encourage employers to implement more voluntary FWAs and other work-family policies, which would be in keeping with institutional theory, or whether it absolves them from responsibility for employees' non-work lives, which might suggest that economic factors are more important (Brewster et al., 1993; Evans, 2000). An overview of analyses of provisions in EU countries suggests that voluntary provision by companies are highest in countries with a medium level of statutory provision such as Austria and Germany. They are least likely to be implemented in those countries with the lowest levels of statutory provision such as the UK and Ireland and in those with the highest levels of support also; that is, the Nordic countries (Evans, 2000). One explanation of this finding may be that national legislation tends to encourage private provision up to a point, after which it tends to replace it, although Evans cautions that it is also necessary to take account of the possible impact of cultural attitudes toward the family on both public policy and the behavior of firms. Another possible explanation for the finding that high levels of statutory provision appear to be associated with lower employer provision may be that national surveys of employer policies tend to focus on childcare support, and on family leaves beyond the statutory minimum, to a greater extent than flexible forms of work. Dependent care policies are less relevant in, for example, the Nordic countries where public provision of childcare is high and statutory leave rights are generous. Elsewhere employers may introduce voluntary provisions to compensate for lack of state provision (den Dulk & Lewis, 2000), while employers in countries with a higher level of statutory provision do not have to give so much consideration to providing support for childcare or parental leaves and are therefore free to focus on flexible ways of organizing work. Indeed, it has been suggested that the need to organize work to accommodate family leaves can oblige employers to develop such flexibility (Kivimaki, 1998). More cross-national studies focusing specifically on FWAs will be necessary to examine this possibility. Cross-national studies focusing on the development of good practice from the employees perspective rather than policies as reported by organizations would elucidate further the impact of national policy.

Organizations thus implement flexible and work–family arrangements in response to internal and external pressures although technical factors are also taken into account. One of the most influential technical factors is the business case; that is, the argument that the development of FWAs is cost-effective and has a positive impact on recruitment, retention, turnover, and other work-related variables (Bardoel et al., 1998; Bevan et al., 1999; Prutchno et al., 2000). But how viable is this argument? Much of the human resource (HR) literature that sets out the business case is based on small-scale or large-scale but organizationally specific case studies (e.g., Bevan et al., 1999; DfEE, 2000; Hill et al., 2001). It also fails to consider the possibility that if FWAs have no costs (rather than an actual bottom-line benefit) there may still be an important case for their implementation (Harker & Lewis, 2001). Another theme of recent research in this area has been to examine more critically the organizational outcomes of flexible working practices.

THE OUTCOMES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Evaluation studies vary in the FWAs that they address, the methods they use, and the outcome variables studied. Furthermore, even when the same outcome variables are employed different measures are often used, making comparisons difficult. Nevertheless research on the outcomes of FWAs demonstrates that, although there can be some positive work-related outcomes, a simple business case argument neglects much of the complexity in this area.

Outcomes vary by types of FWA and outcome studied

Numerous studies and several recent reviews and meta-analyses of outcome research have concluded that flexible working arrangements can have positive organizational effects, at least in some circumstances (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Glass & Estes, 1997; Hill et al., 2001), although the results are not always consistent and reported outcomes are sometimes minimal and often contingent upon other factors. Kossek and Ozeki (1999) carried out a meta-analysis of studies examining (a) the relationships between work-family conflict and organizational outcomes, (b) work–family policy (including both FWAs and dependent care policies) and organizational outcomes, or (c) the overall links between policies, conflict, and outcomes. Criteria for inclusion of studies were that they reported a correlation between a work–family conflict measure and one of six work-related outcomes (performance, turnover intentions, absenteeism, organizational commitment, job/work involvement, and burnout) or that they estimated the effects of an HR policy or intervention on one of the six work-related outcomes or work–family conflict. They found qualified support for the relationship between policies and the work-related outcomes although the results varied somewhat according to the policies and outcomes studied. FWAs tended to be more strongly related than dependent care measures to work-related outcomes but policies did not necessarily reduce work-family conflict nor improve organizational effectiveness in all circumstances, particularly if they did not enhance employees' sense of control over their work schedules.

Many of the studies reviewed by Kossek and Ozeki (1998) were cross-sectional in design so that effects over time were not clear. Baltes et al. (1999) carried out a meta-analysis of the effects of experimental intervention studies of flexitime and compressed work weeks selecting only those studies that included pre- and post-intervention test measures or normative experimental comparison and found that results varied according to the policy and outcomes assessed as well. The meta-analysis was theory driven with hypotheses derived from a range of theoretical models including the work adjustment model, job characteristics theory, person–job fit, and stress models. Baltes et al. (1999) concluded that both flexitime and compressed work weeks had positive effects on productivity/or self-rated performance, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with work schedules but that absenteeism was affected by flexitime only. They suggest that the different effects on absenteeism are because compressed work weeks are less flexible and therefore do not allow employees to, for example, make up time lost through illness or other reasons, as flexitime does. However, this appears to contradict another of their findings, namely that the degree of flexibility is negatively associated with the organizational outcomes studied (Baltes et al., 1999). This suggests that too much flexibility is a bad thing. This finding, which is both counter-intuitive and also counter to theory-based predictions, is explained by Baltes et al. in terms of the possible difficulties in co-ordinating and communicating with others that might arise if there is too much flexibility. However, it is worth noting that, although their analysis is relatively recent, the studies examined in this meta-analysis were mainly conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, many of them before the recent developments in information and communication technologies that are so crucial for many forms of flexible working. In the age of mobile phones and emails, communication difficulties may be much less pertinent. Other more recent research, albeit not experimentally based, suggests the opposite: that more rather than less flexibility is associated with more positive outcomes, at least in terms of self-reported outcomes. For example, Prutchno et al. (2000), in a survey of over 1,500 employees and managers in six US corporations, found that daily flexitime, which they defined as schedules that enable employees to vary their work hours on a daily basis, was much more likely than traditional flexibility to be associated with self-reported positive impacts on productivity, quality of work, plans to stay with the company, job satisfaction, and a better experience of work–family balance. Other studies have suggested that the impact of flexible working arrangements on organizational outcomes may depend less on the objective extent of flexibility than on psychological factors such as preferred working schedules (Ball, 1997; Barnett, Gareis, & Brennan, 1999; Krausz et al., 2000; Martens, Nijhuis, van Boxtel, and Knottnerus, 1999) or the extent to which flexibility provides autonomy and control (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001; Thomas & Ganster, 1995), as discussed later in this chapter.

The possibility of having too much flexibility is, however, raised in research focusing on teleworking, that is, working from home for some or all the week, which has produced mixed results. There is some evidence of positive work-related outcomes such as higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and lower turnover among teleworkers than office-based workers and of enhanced flexibility and integration of work and non-work roles in some circumstances (Ahrentzen, 1990; Dubrin, 1991; Frolick, Wilkes, & Urwiler, 1993; Olsen, 1987; Rowe & Bentley, 1992). However, other research reports negative outcomes such as lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment, less positive relationships with managers and colleagues, greater work–family conflict and more tendency to overwork such as working during vacations (Olsen, 1987; Prutchno et al., 2000). Many studies imply that teleworking can be a double-edged sword with the potential for both positive and negative outcomes (Hill, Hawkins, & Miller, 1996; Steward, 2000; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). The tendency to overworking may be regarded as symptomatic of the increased blurring of work and non-work boundaries that appears to be becoming widespread, facilitated by developments in information and communication technologies (Haddon, 1992; Steward, 2000; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). Although the outcome measures used in research on telework often differ from those used in relation to other forms of flexible working arrangements, research does seem to suggest that too much flexibility in the context of information and communication technology in the home as well as the workplace may raise a different set of issues about impacts on individuals, their families, and organizations that will require further exploration and research (Standen, Daniels, & Lamond, 1999). The effects of teleworking also appear to be highly gendered. Qualitative research shows that teleworking women are more likely than men to multitask and less likely to have a room of their own, men more likely to be able to shut themselves away and work without interruptions from family members (Sullivan, 2000; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). This may explain why, in a recent UK national survey, men were more likely than women to wish to work from home (Hogarth et al., 2000).

The different dependent variables used in outcome research makes comparison difficult. This is particularly evident in relation to measures of performance and productivity. Measures used in the research include sales performance (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996), self-rated performance (Cooper et al., 2001; Prutchno et al., 2000), self-efficacy ratings (Kossek & Nichol, 1992; Netemeyer et al. 1996), and supervisor ratings (Kossek & Nichol, 1992), as well as more objective measures of productivity in the case of manufacturing workers (Baltes et al., 1999; Shepard & Clifton, 2000). It can be argued that studies that predetermine outcomes inevitably limit to some extent what can be learnt about FWAs. Action research, which begins at an earlier stage with the problem to be solved rather than the evaluation of policy to be implemented, may have advantages in this respect. Rather than just predetermining what outcomes will be measured, this approach enables other outcomes to emerge, grounded in the specific organizational context. For example, action research carried out in a number of companies in the USA explored systemic solutions that could meet both strategic business needs and employees needs for work–life integration as well as gender equity—what the researchers term the dual agenda (Bailyn, Rapoport, Kolb, and Fletcher, 1996; Fletcher & Rapoport, 1996; Rapoport et al., 2002). Interventions developed as a consequence of the research team working collaboratively with employees, examining the nature of the work, and identifying, surfacing, and challenging assumptions about working practices, included introducing periods of quiet time so that work could be carried out without interruptions, and removing management discretion about FWAs in order to empower work teams to develop their own schedules. It is worth noting that the outcomes identified from these interventions were both more varied and more directly bottom-line-oriented than those in most experimental or survey research. They were specific to the work unit studied and included improved time to market, enhanced product quality, and increased customer responsiveness as well as more traditional measures such as reduced absenteeism (Fletcher & Rapoport, 1996; Rapoport et al., 2002).

Processes and Intervening Variables

The action research discussed above focused on evaluation of the process of bringing about change rather than policy. In contrast, much of the research evaluating FWAs neglects process, although this is crucial for explaining how and why some FWAs are effective in some circumstances. There have, nevertheless, been a number of attempts to theorize the outcomes of FWAs or work-life policies and the factors which facilitate or undermine them. Research has examined the role of work–family conflict, worker preferences, perceived control and autonomy, perceptions of organizational justice, perceived management and organizational support, and organizational learning. These studies tend to address the processes explaining outcomes of FWAs for those with family commitments, primarily childcare and eldercare demands. Less attention has been paid to the processes whereby FWAs may impact on work-related outcomes among employees more broadly or on more fundamental organizational change.

Work–Family Conflict

It is often argued that FWAs can contribute toward positive integration of work and personal life (Galinsky & Johnson, 1998; Hill et al., 1996). However, much of the research operationalizes this in terms of absence or minimization of work–family conflict. Kossek and Ozeki (1999) argue that work–family conflict is a crucial but often neglected variable for understanding the process whereby FWAs may relate to work-related outcomes. Studies examining work–family conflict increasingly distinguish between work conflicting with family and family conflicting with work rather than more global measures (e.g., Burke & Greenglass, 2001; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997; Kelloway, Gottlieb, & Barham, 1999; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998, 1999; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Kossek and Ozeki (1999) conclude from their meta-analysis that, although work conflicting with the family role is not necessarily related to productivity and work-related attitudes, there is substantial evidence that family conflicting with the work role is. To understand why and how FWAs influence individual work-related attitudes and behaviours, they argue, it is necessary to examine how they affect different aspects of work–family conflict, which in turn influence outcomes such as performance and absenteeism. For example, there may be different implications of the effects of FWAs on time-related strains or emotional conflict: 'not being able to do two things at the same time may impact differently from feeling bad about it!' (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999, p. 18). As Kossek and Ozeki (1999) point out there is a need for more longitudinal research looking at the impact of FWAs on work–family conflict to extend our understanding of the processes whereby policies impact on individual and organizational outcomes. The impacts of FWAs on work–family conflict and subsequent work-related outcomes may vary for different groups of workers and this too needs to be taken into account in this research. Gender is a crucial variable (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999) as well as the gender composition of workplaces (Holt & Thaulow, 1996; Maume & Houston, 2001). Age (or generation) may be a further relevant factor. For example, in a study of chartered accountants in the UK, the link between work–family conflict and intention to leave was particularly strong among the younger generation (Cooper et al., 2001), who were also more likely to say they would use FWAs.

Employee Preferences

As would be predicted from person–job fit theory, the impact of FWAs appears to depend on employee preferences (Ball, 1997; Krausz et al., 2000; Martens et al., 1999). The work-related outcomes can be positive if FWAs fit in with employee needs but may be non-effective or even detrimental if not freely chosen (Martens et al., 1999; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Martens et al. (1999) concluded that FWAs were only beneficial to employees who could choose and control their own flexibility, after finding significantly more health problems among Belgian employees working flexible schedules than among a control group working traditional hours. However, the FWAs examined in this study included long or irregular shifts, on-call work, and temporary employment contracts, implemented for employer flexibility.

Control and Autonomy

A closely related factor influencing the outcomes of FWAs is the extent to which they are perceived as providing control and autonomy over working hours (Krausz et al., 2000; Martens et al., 1999; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Thomas and Ganster (1995) distinguished between family supportive policies and family supportive managers, both of which they found related to perceived control over work and family demands, which, in turn, were associated with lower scores on a number of indicators of stress among a sample of healthcare professionals. While there is much support for the view that perceived control and autonomy explain positive outcomes of some FWAs (Dalton & Mesch, 1990; Kossek & Oseki, 1999; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001), this does seem to depend to some extent on the populations studied. Baltes et al. (1999) found that the benefits of flexitime and compressed work weeks were lower for managers than other employees and argue that this is likely to be because managers already have considerable autonomy and therefore these polices are less relevant. Other research however, contests the idea that management autonomy provides flexibility. It is often more difficult for managers to work flexibly, particularly in the context of long-working-hours cultures (Kossek et al., 1999; Perlow, 1998; Bond et al., 2002; Hochschild, 1997; Lewis et al., 2002) and the beliefs that managerial or supervisory tasks cannot be performed flexibly (Powell & Mainiero, 1999). In fact a theme in much current research is that those workers who have opportunities to work flexibly and have autonomy to manage their own work schedules often use this to work longer rather than shorter hours (Holt & Thaulow, 1996; Lewis et al., 2002; Perlow, 1998).

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