

St. Norbert College Digital Commons @ St. Norbert College

Faculty Creative and Scholarly Works

2014

Shedding Gender Stigmas: Work-life Balance Equity in the 21st Century

Erica M. Southworth

St. Norbert College, erica.southworth@snc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/faculty_staff_works

 Part of the [Business Administration, Management, and Operations Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Southworth, Erica M., "Shedding Gender Stigmas: Work-life Balance Equity in the 21st Century" (2014). *Faculty Creative and Scholarly Works*. 2.

http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/faculty_staff_works/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ St. Norbert College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Creative and Scholarly Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ St. Norbert College. For more information, please contact sarah.titus@snc.edu.



Shedding gender stigmas: Work-life balance equity in the 21st century

Erica M. Southworth

Doctoral Program, Urban Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Hartford, WI 53027, U.S.A.

KEYWORDS

Gender stigma;
Work-life balance (WLB);
Workplace culture;
Workplace culture re-creation

Abstract The gender stigma of work-life balance (WLB) policies as concessions for mothers and female caregivers originated with the push by the Women's Movement for gender workplace equity in the late 20th century. Unfortunately, this perception continues in the 21st century and retains the additional stigma of employee participation in these policies—regardless of gender—as a detrimental career move. Thus, home and work responsibilities for professionals of all genders who desire more occupational flexibility remain unreconciled. Despite this dominant national and international outlook, this article encourages new century organizations and professionals to reject the traditional perception of occupational inequity through gender-colored glasses and instead contemplate the benefits of WLB policies void of gender stigmas. Specifically, organizations could re-create workplace culture with stigma-free WLB policies through administrative leaders' embracement of and participation in such policies, which may pave the way for establishing occupational equity. Through workplace culture re-creation, organizations may then offer employees—regardless of gender, marital status, or company position—flexible work options to assist them in leading happy, healthy, and more productive lives.

© 2013 Kelley School of Business, Indiana University. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. When job 'paradise' becomes hellishly constricted

"Seeking to live up to the idealized [occupational] image involves not acknowledging our real selves and not respecting our real values, needs, and talents."

—Joan R. Kofodimos (1993, pp. 59–60)

As a female professional born and raised after the Women's Movement, I was told by my family that I could 'have it all'—marriage, career, family, social life—albeit not without some sacrifices. Because I was a first-generation college graduate from a middle-class working family (who also became a military spouse), I understood the concepts of sacrifice and investment, which allowed me to dive head first into my career as a secondary school educator without hesitation. My ambition and love for teaching spurred me to be the best educator possible, with students and parents taking priority in my 60- to 70-hour work

E-mail address: southwo4@uwm.edu

weeks, while master's and PhD graduate courses occupied whatever time remained. I strove to be one of the best educators possible, and in that determination, I became a poor wife, daughter, sister, and friend. Parenthood, a responsibility I assumed would be mine 'someday,' dwindled to only a passing thought each year, growing ever distant as more and more of my time and energy became consumed with serving as a surrogate mother for the 125 students I taught each semester. Instead of fulfilling an ideal lifestyle, I neglected properly balancing professional- and personal-life components, thus producing more failure than success in my quest to 'have it all.'

However, I represent one of the lucky professionals. Because of my spouse's unbridled support and the generous work-life balance (WLB) policies offered to employees in my career field—regardless of gender—I averted a complete burnout at the age of 31. An unpaid sabbatical to pursue higher education, one of the WLB policy options offered in my field at this time, proved to be a saving grace in helping to instill more sanity in my professional- and personal-life facets. Although not every professional in my field took advantage of them, the success of these policies lay within the organizational climate and workplace culture that overwhelmingly supported the availability of and participation in WLB policies. This contrasts with other public- and private-sector organizations nationally and worldwide that intentionally or unintentionally harbor gender stigmas attached to WLB policies, which may contribute to a higher probability of poor policy success rates.

1.1. A more expansive glass ceiling

Before addressing the problem of WLB policy failure, allow me to more adequately define and retrace our more recent historical steps concerning stigmas and the concept of WLB. In the mid-20th century, Goffman (1963) described a stigma as an attribute used to negatively separate and/or discredit an individual within a setting that had been previously constructed according to specific social standards. This proves applicable for late 20th century women who, upon their entrance into the workforce, found themselves faced with the challenge of achieving success in the confines of an established male structure while simultaneously disputing the 'woman as wife and mother only' stereotype. Thus, career-minded women attempting to break through in the professional work world during the latter part of the century had to contend with being identified as the 'undesired differentness' within the male social norm (Goffman, 1963, p. 5).

This leads us to the introduction of work-life balance policies shortly after the Women's Movement,

which aimed to bring more gender equity into the workplace for women (Kottke & Agars, 2005) via family-friendly work schedules (Bailyn, Drago, & Kochan, 2001; Nilsen, 2011) and flexible work arrangements (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Hochschild, 1997; Spinks & Tombari, 2002). Instead, however, gendered stigmas attached to WLB policies resulted in the formation of a second glass ceiling for females (Hewlett, 2002). This new barrier in the corporate ladder forced females wishing for career advancement to prove 'their masculinity' by excelling in the workplace at the expense of raising a family or participating in WLB policies—both options that could derail their chances of advancement (Hewlett, 2002; Slaughter, 2012). As noted in her early 21st century work, Hewlett (2002) reported that more than 80% of high-achieving career women who participated in her study desired a family, while more than 55% were unmarried. These high statistics were attributed to the demands of maintaining their career and the lack of appropriate WLB policies available.

Making it in a 'man's world' under such circumstances left little in terms of true career equity as was originally intended by the Women's Movement. As a budding feminist researcher, I pay great tribute to those in the generations before me—both women and men—who fought and worked for equity within socio-economic American culture. Without their foundations, I would not be in a position now to suggest the potential of re-creating workplace culture through the redefinition of WLB policies—re-creation that may allow us to venture closer than ever to workplace equity via gender- and position-neutral opportunities for *all* professionals.

Reflecting on occupational patterns and interactions in the 21st century forces us as professionals to explore how we might establish a more equitable workplace culture and portray WLB policy participation as common practice rather than a method for ostracizing others. To be clear, I am not presenting a case for biological equality among the sexes in WLB policy, nor do I believe reflection should perceive the problem as a continuation of male vs. female employees. If an organization retains this perception, it could quite possibly experience only recurring problems of gender inequity by presenting former (unsuccessful) solutions repackaged with different terminology. Instead, it may be fruitful to explore how empowerment rests in an organization's ability to implement a cultural paradigm shift within the occupational sphere, thereby permanently altering employee perspectives on WLB policies. After all, companies employ members of all genders as well as parents, non-parents, single individuals, heterosexual couples, and same-sex couples, all of whom juggle personal and professional responsibilities.

Optimally, such a workplace paradigm shift would produce positive impacts not only for employees but also for the company in terms of loyalty and production output. This potential path for success, however, remains uncharted and by no means represents a 'quick fix.'

2. Trapped in the old skin: Gender stigma in WLB policy

While many variations of WLB policies abound, often dependent on the profession in question, the general goal rests in cultivating more harmonious transitions between one's personal and professional commitments. Policy representations of this goal may include opportunities to construct flexible work schedules, work reduced hours, participate in job shares, embark on approved leaves of absence, or withdraw leave hours from organizational time banks (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Hewlett, 2002; Kofodimos, 1993; Spinks & Tombari, 2002). However, while private- and public-sector organizations may describe WLB policies as being applicable to both females and males, the dichotomous decades-old stigma of these options as company concessions for female caregivers stubbornly lingers. In her multi-year study of executives and employees at 'Amerco' (the participant corporation's pseudo name), Hochschild (1997) noted that even in the 1990s, top male administrators and managers who had invested most of their lives into building their careers perceived the need for WLB policies as "strictly a woman manager's problem" (pp. 70–71). Because of this traditional perception, workplace culture remains unchanged, and male employees might perceive WLB policies as not only gender biased but also threatening (Hochschild, 1997; Kottke & Agars, 2005). In some cases, an angst undertone emerges from men at the possibility of gender role reversal within the traditional 'bread-winner' model (Hochschild, 1997), while the stigma of females as caregivers continues to be socially conditioned into the public, causing distress for professional women (Slaughter, 2012).

2.1. Lingering stigmas abroad and at home

Such sentiments toward WLB remain evident in the United States as well as within other industrially advanced nations. Internationally, studies concerning the failed implementation of WLB policies in Ireland (Drew & Murtagh, 2005) and Norway (Nilsen, 2011) reflect the aforementioned perceptions. In both the Irish and Norwegian studies, the gender stigma

attached to WLB policies as only being available for female workers—rather than perceived as family or personal wellness options for all employees—represented the main cause for the policies' ill success. The poor success reported by Nilsen (2011) was characterized by the persistent existence of a gender-biased workplace structure in which women occupied lower-level jobs, which allowed them to leave and enter the workforce easily but with less opportunity for becoming career oriented. In a similar vein, Drew and Murtagh (2005) discussed how their study—in which females accounted for 14% of participants—revealed both women's and men's fear of being passed over for a promotion if they were to participate in WLB policies. These perceptions arose despite organizations' utilization of gender-neutral terminology in their policies (Drew & Murtagh, 2005) and regardless of Norway's reputation as one of the most liberal countries in the world for parental leave (Nilsen, 2011). Under these circumstances, the workplace culture remained unaffected, and the gender bias surrounding WLB policies appears to have only reinforced the acceptance of traditionally gendered social and occupational roles rather than deterring them (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Nilsen, 2011).

As a result of gender stigmas with WLB policies, professional females avoid taking advantage of them as women are concerned their participation will be viewed as a weakness and may hinder any chance of career advancement (Bailyn et al., 2001; Clutterbuck, 2004; Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Hochschild, 1997). Approximately 41% of women managers who participated in Drew and Murtagh's (2005) study, for example, believed WLB policies concerning flexible work schedules would negatively impact their prospects for promotions. Hochschild (1997) further supported this claim with findings from her qualitative research with male and female executives and managers in which women professionals promoted WLB options for their workers but did not take part in the policies themselves. Rather, these women felt pressured to maintain the culturally engrained work schedule of older male executives in order to exemplify their professional merit (Hochschild, 1997). Even male professionals with an interest in WLB opt not to investigate the policies due to the detrimental career effects participation may bring (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Clutterbuck, 2004; Drew & Murtagh, 2005). Specifically on the topic of job promotion, professionals interviewed by Hochschild (1997) expressed their workplace cultural climate as one in which, despite the external promotion of WLB policies, WLB participants were internally perceived as less ambitious than other full-time employees, thus endangering male

participants' job security. Additionally, [Drew and Murtagh \(2005\)](#) found that 46% of their male participants held this perspective regarding flexible scheduling, and more than 60% of women managers and 50% of male managers indicated a need for "addressing the long hours culture, working from home and actively promoting a WLB policy" (p. 272) to find positive solutions. Thus, current WLB policy implementation fails to serve as the silver bullet for bridging the gap between home and work responsibilities for 21st century career women and men desiring more occupational flexibility.

As I previously discussed, success with WLB policies in the field of education colors my personal experiences, with policy success attributed to the workplace culture that fosters open acceptance of these policies for all, including administrators. Family leave, child-rearing leave (biological or adoptive), maternity and paternity leave, and higher education sabbaticals comprise a large offering of WLB policies available in my profession, all with job assurance after the approved absence. However, I am not implying that this or any organizational policy remains challenge free. Although never in an executive position myself, dialogue with administrator colleagues attest to the findings of [Kofodimos \(1993\)](#) and [Muna and Mansour \(2009\)](#) in describing leadership as a position that extracts vast quantities of time at the expense of leaders' families and personal well-being. Because of leaders' extremely hectic schedules and relatively constant subjection to high-stress situations, many forgo participation in WLB options and may find themselves negatively projecting onto others, ultimately resulting in damaged employee morale ([Muna & Mansour, 2009](#)). Such a scenario did, in fact, occur at my former place of employment as one of the female leaders embodied the bread-winner model by sparing no expense in establishing her career while her working spouse assumed the primary care of their three children. She spent long hours at school either attending meetings or assigning multiple new projects to her employees. As a result, her actions and projection drove a wedge between the administration and employees, one that made trust unrecoverable.

3. Shedding the gender stigma skin: Equitable implementation

To what extent, then, might gendered perceptions be minimized and a more harmonious, productive work culture be instilled? While originally intended for a managerial audience, the quote by [Kofodimos \(1993\)](#) introducing this article highlights the realization of the ideal versus the true self and promotes career and

organizational success in congruence with personal beliefs and responsibilities, which proves to be very applicable to all organizations. Implementing change within workplace climates may help diminish the gender stigmas attached to WLB policies and improve policy success among all employees regardless of gender ([Bailyn et al., 2001](#); [Clutterbuck, 2004](#); [Hewlett, 2002](#); [Kofodimos, 1993](#); [Kottke & Agars, 2005](#)). More specifically, the re-creation of workplace culture via administrative role modeling of stigma-free WLB policies could generate both organizational and employee success ([Beauregard & Henry, 2009](#); [Drew & Murtagh, 2005](#); [Spinks & Tombari, 2002](#)). Through male and female administrators' participation, options like flex-time and versatile technology may become integrated into the normal work culture and become viewed as unthreatening career tools for employees. Thus, organizations and professionals may not only reduce gender stigmas in the workplace but may also build loyalty and encourage productivity.

3.1. Off with the old and in with the new?

Unfortunately, scant literature has surfaced regarding the successful implementation of non-gender-biased WLB policies in professional settings in the United States and throughout the world. Many articles offer advice concerning how WLB processes could be implemented in general, yet a paucity of empirical data exists concerning implementation success rates ([Beauregard & Henry, 2009](#)) or the elimination of gender stigmas associated with the policies via workplace culture reformation. Nevertheless, cues for embarking on workplace culture re-creation and WLB policy could be taken from the positive policy achievements of the Royal Bank Financial Group (RFBG) in neighboring Canada. As part of their goal for company improvement, RFBG offered WLB policies of flexible work schedules, job-share opportunities, and sabbaticals to any interested employee without risk of career stagnation ([Spinks & Tombari, 2002](#)). The company's investment in human capital produced a decline in employee absenteeism by more than 50%, and employees reported lower stress and higher energy levels, while their job performance either remained consistent or, in some instances, improved ([Spinks & Tombari, 2002](#)). These results reflect similar findings by [Hochschild \(1997\)](#), who reported that more than 75% of the employers she studied attributed lower employee absentee rates to family-friendly policies. When considering the results from [Spinks and Tombari \(2002\)](#), however, it is advisable to remember that employee self-reporting remained unquantifiable and that gender stigmas did not constitute a large variable in the

success of RBF^G's WLB policies as the company operated with a 70% female employee base. This particular example does, however, demonstrate high success with WLB policies when the majority of employees believe the policies exhibit workplace equity without hindering career advancement.

4. Emergence of a new animal: Non-gendered WLB policy

With consideration of the current economic climate both nationally and globally, I realize I raise the issue of workplace culture reformation at a time when organizational change may appear risky or financially unsound. However, because of this uncertainty, perhaps this climate may serve as *the* opportune moment for re-creation. Recent events in the United States, such as the Occupy Wall Street Movement and debates over the immense national debt, as well as global concerns regarding warfare, violence, and economic downturns, pose looming threats to job security. As a professional and as an employee, my top priorities center on self and family preservation, goals I believe are inherent of most people regardless of occupational position. For organizations, a constant influx of new employees would, in all likelihood, prove more financially draining than the re-creation of workplace culture with WLB policies. The high interest level of an organization's commitment to its employees' quality of life could serve as an important factor when establishing respect and loyalty in occupational relationships.

4.1. Organizational creations: WLB composition

As an educator and employee, my job description entails the use of finely honed time-management skills; my expected availability to students, parents, and colleagues during a specific timeframe; and the active pursuit and accomplishment of short- and long-term professional goals. Very little variation exists between my career expectations and those of an individual in a different field, as demonstrated in the reporting of RBF^G's success with WLB policies. Major findings within this financial institution's study included an increase in employees' time-management skills and a decrease in absenteeism, both attributed to the positive connotations associated with flexible work arrangements and the open lines of communication maintained between coworkers and managers (Spinks & Tombari, 2002). While one of the major goals of this study centered on women's advancement in the workforce, Spinks and Tombari's findings also support the theory put

forth by many others concerning the implementation of WLB policies coupled with good communication: an organization can establish positive rapport with employees through frequent communication on WLB policies, which then leads to a potential increase in retention rates and lowered absenteeism without decreasing quality output (Bailyn et al., 2001; Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Clutterbuck, 2004; Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Hewlett, 2002; Hochschild, 1997). Additionally, financial savings may also be accrued for an organization regarding the distribution of lowered salaries and/or benefit costs attributed to employees who participate in job-share options (Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

While stipulations of labor laws and the possibility of policy abuse may cause concern for leaders, potential solutions are not elusive. Referencing the implementation of WLB policies by RBF^G once again, the establishment of mandatory office time blocks within the work week helped alleviate communication conflicts among employees and administration (Spinks & Tombari, 2002). The organization's requirement for employees to have in-office presence during a specific time period allowed the company to facilitate meetings and increased employee-to-employee communication for effectively meeting project deadlines (Spinks & Tombari, 2002). This particular example may also provide a salient solution for leaders who are apprehensive about participating in WLB options due to fear of not exhibiting enough of a presence in the company or not providing sufficient face-to-face contact for employees.

Organizations that re-create workplace cultures to fully integrate non-gendered WLB policies may serve as pioneering examples of positive alteration in national and international cultural perspectives. The former idealized viewpoint of any woman or man successfully juggling the roles of spouse, career person, and parent without sacrifices in one or more of these areas remains woefully inaccurate (Hewlett, 2002). By replacing the traditional perception of women requiring special treatment in terms of WLB policies with a cultural perspective embracing all genders as equal beneficiaries of such policies, organizations may publicly demonstrate and validate respect for the multifaceted lives of every employee (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Nilsen, 2011; Slaughter, 2012). Such connotations may even lead us to the realization of the Women's Movement goal for equity in the workplace on a much grander scale.

Consider for a moment how stigma-free WLB policies may help stem the rapid rate at which professional fields lose educated, highly abled young women due to the forced choice of advancing their career or raising a family (Hewlett, 2002), a phenomenon that I believe is more aptly described

as ‘female brain drain.’ Additionally, men would be released from the grips of the bread-winner economic stereotype and would be free to engage in family and personal wellness activities without fear of negative occupational backlash.

4.2. Breaking the cycle: Careers void of stagnation

Successful WLB policies implemented without gender stigmas could be perceived by professionals as a distinct benefit and incentive to continue employment with an organization. As fully integrated, non-threatening career options that also encourage workers’ ownership in managing all aspects of their life, these policies could cultivate trust and respect within the workplace and in employer-employee relationships. Such policies may not only benefit professionals but also ideally serve as a measure to regulate accountability among policy participants and non-participants. More specifically, the gravity and magnitude of the employee’s contributions to the organization might be examined during promotion time rather than the quantity of time the employee spends in the office (Spinks & Tombari, 2002). In this fashion, employees who attempt to abuse the policies or produce few contributions despite their regular office presence could be reviewed accordingly. As an integral part of the reformation of workplace culture, WLB policies may easily be implemented as part of diversity training or mandated culture training (Clutterbuck, 2004; Spinks & Tombari, 2002). An organization’s firm belief in workplace reformation, as demonstrated through training sessions and administrative participation, is likely to instill a high regard for WLB policy offerings while simultaneously promoting a competitive marketing edge. Prospective employees (or those contemplating a career move) may take exceptional consideration to WLB offerings—whether it be a 3-year sabbatical option for child-rearing, time off for continuing education (Hewlett, 2002), or an employee-generated flex-time plan (Spinks & Tombari, 2002). If the mere presence of such policies increases positive attitudes toward work, regardless of employee participation percentages (see Beaugregard & Henry, 2009), imagine what might result in workplace cultures with WLB policies void of gender stigmas.

5. A 21st century rebirth

As recent history demonstrates, our inability to remove gender bias in WLB policies within national and global workplaces endures due to the negative

and esoteric cultural perception of these policies as concessions for women or for mothers. However, successful implementation of WLB policies has occurred in organizations when a majority of members within embraced and participated in the policies, as mentioned previously in regard to the financial (Spinks & Tombari, 2002) and educational fields. By demonstrating acceptance at the administrative level and re-creating workplace culture, gender stigmas around WLB policies may erode. Optimally, organizations would present each employee—regardless of gender, marital status, or company position—with participatory options in WLB policies without the employees fearing negative effects on their career advancement.

6. Recommendations for action

As a 21st century professional woman who has witnessed and participated in WLB policies free of gender stigmas, I believe this path may become a positive reality for organizations willing to engage in an occupational paradigm shift. However, refashioning workplace culture around WLB policy poses a significant challenge; little data and few—if any—frameworks exist to guide organizations in eliminating gender stigmas from these policies. This, in turn, leaves us to ponder two important caveats. First, organizations wishing to address this challenge may need to adopt a pioneering attitude and engage in risk-taking decisions to obtain a best-practice method for workplace culture re-creation as well as to implement demonstrative leadership practices. Second, workplace culture re-creation may require a considerable investment of time and energy in analyzing an organization’s unique characteristics to produce and administer a successful WLB policy formula. To assist organizations in how to begin this process, the following compilation of five general guidelines may provide insight for leaders whose curiosity I have now piqued.

6.1. Step #1: Preliminary investigation

First and foremost, organizational leaders should conduct an investigation of current employee perspectives on WLB policies to determine if and what gender biases exist. Regardless of size, an organization may receive the most honest feedback from all employees via an anonymous survey online as this represents a non-invasive and unthreatening method for data collection. Initial survey composition material could include asking participants to identify what gender they are, whether they are aware of the organization’s WLB policies or know what WLB

policies are, under what circumstances they would (or have) participate(d) in WLB policies, and why they would (have) or would (have) not participate(d). Organizations might also look to previously conducted WLB studies for potential questions, such as the questions asked in the study by Drew and Murtagh (2005, p. 265): “What are the issues that impede the adoption of work-life balance?” and “What strategies could be adopted to address these issues?” Responses from such questions could be thematically categorized to help sift out indications that gender bias exists among employees. The survey could be employed either by the organization itself through the human resources department or via a third party, such as an information-collection service or external agency.

6.2. Step #2: Data discussion and feedback collection

The collected data may then be presented as a neutral basis upon which to engage in collaborative discussions concerning WLB policies and to glean employees’ suggestions on how to eliminate the gender-biased stigmas attached to the policies (if any exist). An appropriate forum for this second step should—once again—be constructed based on the organization’s size and could range from small discussion cohorts or departmental group gatherings to a single office-wide meeting. Large organizations may opt to address WLB policy and gender-bias concerns through a combination of these options. Thus, a general procedure might entail initial collaboration among organizational leadership and department leaders, who then relay the data collected back to all employees and follow up with individual department meetings, thereby encouraging informal, open conversation. Department leaders could then take this opportunity to seek more extensive employee feedback and convey it to the administration. Depending on the volume of feedback and/or the tension levels that may surround it, leaders may find it beneficial to encourage multiple informal discussion-and-feedback sessions, as noted in [Table 1](#).

6.3. Step #3: Executive action meeting

Upon receiving employee feedback, the next prudent step would be for organizational leaders to review it in conjunction with WLB policy options and determine the best course of action for WLB policies and workplace culture re-creation. Conclusions could be presented to all personnel at an executive action meeting and could detail leadership’s proposed actions or alterations for WLB policies and

how employee input assisted in the steps toward re-creating workplace culture. This forum would also present a prime opportunity for leaders to candidly express their intended involvement in WLB policies and their goal to serve as WLB participant role models. Additionally, while the magnitude of policy alterations will most likely depend on an organization’s financial state, leaders should communicate to employees the degree to which change will occur and the future date for reassessment. If an organization employs a considerable amount of people, the formation of a WLB committee composed of administrators, department heads, and other volunteer employees may prove valuable in securing the new changes and handling workers’ additional questions. Optimally, employees of all genders and status levels will experience a sense of opinion validation, leading to an increased sense of personal investment within the organization.

6.4. Step #4: Execute and inform

Execute, execute, execute. Striving for an immediate implementation of the new or altered WLB policy decisions as declared at the executive action meeting markedly demonstrates the organization’s commitment to the well-being and retention of all employees and reaffirms its respect for employee input. While we do not live in a perfect world and delays may occur, it is in the organization’s best interest to keep employees updated on the status of WLB policy changes should the implementation date deviate from the original timeline. Once the changes are initiated, leadership should maintain frequent communication with employees to assist them in successfully utilizing the revised WLB policies as well as to inform them of written language revisions, additions, and/or eliminations that may appear in future contracts and/or handbooks. Communication forms like email or printed memos might serve as a means to effectively distribute policy updates, although administrative leaders or the WLB committee should also consider hosting informal Q&A sessions. Regardless of whether the organization deems the implemented policy change(s) to occur on a trial basis or permanently, failure to administer and communicate decisions based on the collected data may foster mistrust between employees and leaders, potentially leading to low morale and/or mistrust.

6.5. Step #5: Reassessment and maintenance

Due to the unique, exploratory nature of an organization’s attempt to eliminate gender stigmas from

Table 1. Five-Step guide toward WLB policy and workplace culture re-creation

Step	Focus Questions	Possible Initiation Methods
1. Preliminary Investigation	<p>What type of workplace culture does the organization presently foster, and to what degree are WLB policies incorporated into that perspective?</p> <p>Do gender biases currently exist? If so, to what extent?</p>	<p>Anonymous survey (online) administered by human resources.</p> <p>Data-collection agency consultation services.</p>
2. Data Discussion & Feedback Collection	<p>What insight could employees offer to the organization on how to positively eliminate gender stigmas from WLB policies?</p> <p>What insight could employees offer to each other on how to positively impact workplace culture re-creation?</p> <p>How might the organization and employees prevent the creation of future gender barriers with WLB policy?</p>	<p>Small groups/departmental meetings.</p> <p>Mandatory meeting for employees.</p> <p>Combination of the above.</p>
3. Executive Action Meeting	<p>What course of action constitutes as best practice for WLB gender-stigma eradication? Is it harmonious with employee input?</p> <p>What benchmarks will be utilized for measuring the success or failure of the implemented changes?</p> <p>How will all of the above be communicated to employees?</p>	<p>Mandatory meeting for employees hosted by leadership.</p> <p>Creation of a WLB committee with administrators, department heads, and other employee volunteers.</p>
4. Execute & Inform	<p>What steps will help ensure the smooth progression of the projected timeline for the implementation of WLB policy decisions?</p> <p>How will all of the above be communicated to employees?</p>	<p>Communication via email and/or printed memos.</p> <p>Meetings to address concerns about the new/revised WLB policies.</p> <p>Combination of the above.</p>
5. Reassessment & Maintenance	<p>To what extent did the implementations meet success in minimizing gender stigmas and re-creating workplace culture?</p> <p>What steps will ensure the continuation of successful WLB policies and workplace culture? Is there a need for further alterations and/or refinements?</p> <p>How will all of the above be communicated to employees?</p>	<p>Data collection of employee perspectives & discussion similar to Steps 1 & 2 (conducted by leadership or WLB Committee).</p> <p>Policy reviews conducted by human resources, administrative leadership, and/or WLB committee members.</p> <p>Investigation into candidate assessment tests as part of the hiring process for future employees.</p>

WLB policy, tweaks will be needed. Unanticipated concerns or implementation roadblocks may crop up even before the formal reassessment date, and additional discussion sessions may need to occur. However, the re-evaluation of WLB policy changes should take place as previously scheduled in the original (or updated) timeframe and may assist in cultivating more effective solutions for working out any issues. Examining the success or failure of the new changes concerning gender stigmas connected to WLB policy and workplace culture might include employee data collection and a discussion of feedback—namely, revised versions of Steps 1 and 2 above. Whether conducted by administrative leadership or the WLB committee, the collected data may shed light on possible alterations, additions, eliminations, and/or refinements for the WLB policies. Again, I encourage strong communication with employees upon the reassessment's completion—reminiscent of Step 4—since this procedure may serve as a beneficial learning process for all within an organization.

In the ideal situation, an organization should adjust the aforementioned five steps to best fit its business structure and then successfully maneuver through all steps smoothly and in a timely fashion. The end results should greatly reduce gender stigmas formally attached to WLB policies and encourage positive workplace culture re-creation embraced by all employees. After such a labor-intensive process, it is imperative that discussions concerning the continuing success of these changes be held. Once again, deciding on the best methods of tackling this task will rest on the size and financial freedom of the individual organization. The least invasive measures may include an annual or bi-annual review of employees' utilization of the policies by the human resources department, administrative leadership, and/or the WLB committee.

Additionally, organizations desiring more intricate, longer-term solutions may wish to investigate the potential of adding employee candidate personality tests to their interview process. While it is often expensive to implement measuring tools like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator tests ("What Does," 2007) as well as fraught with legality and ethical concerns (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004), hiring consultants to develop pre-employment assessments specifically designed for an organization has gained both popularity and success in the 21st century (Gale, 2002). Developing such an assessment to assist with the selection of future employees whose personalities match characteristics projected in the organization's workplace culture and policies could prove advantageous by yielding high retention rates. However, time, employee input, and legal

and financial resources must be tapped for this possibility to work. Organizational leadership should also perceive the utilization of such tests as methods of data generation related to the hiring process, not as an iron-clad manner for weeding out gender-biased individuals.

7. Leading happy, healthy, productive lives

While I truly hope the preceding recommendations for action provide beneficial food for thought, I would like to reiterate once again how these suggestions represent only one general outline—not a rigid framework—for workplace culture re-creation. Furthermore, this task may prove more arduous if no WLB policies presently exist within an organization; thus, alterations to the aforementioned five-step process would include additional phases to formulate such policies. If, however, successful workplace culture re-creation and leadership participation helps reduce gender-stigmatized WLB policies, the benefits for both the employee and the organization could prove richly rewarding. The 21st century offers us the possibility of achieving previously unmet goals concerning gender equity in the workplace, but more importantly, it could also lead us to happier, healthier, and more productive lifestyles.

References

- Bailyn, L., Drago, R., & Kochan, T. A. (2001). *Integrating work and family life: A holistic approach*. Retrieved June 10, 2012, from <http://web.mit.edu/workplacecenter/docs/WorkFamily.pdf>
- Beauregard, T. A., & Henry, L. C. (2009). Making the link between work-life balance practices and organizational performance. *Human Resource Management Review, 19*(1), 9–22.
- Clutterbuck, D. (2004). How to get the payback from investment in work-life balance. *The Journal for Quality and Participation, 27*(3), 17–19.
- Drew, E., & Murtagh, E. M. (2005). Work/life balance: Senior management champions or laggards? *Women in Management Review, 20*(4), 262–278.
- Gale, S. F. (2002). Three companies cut turnover with tests. *Workforce, 81*(4), 66–68.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Hewlett, S. A. (2002). Executive women and the myth of having it all. *Harvard Business Review, 80*(4), 66–73.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1997). *The time bind: When work becomes home and home becomes work*. New York: Metropolitan Books Henry Holt & Co.
- Kennedy, R. B., & Kennedy, D. A. (2004). Using the Myers-Briggs type indicator in career counseling. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 41*(1), 38–44.
- Kofodimos, J. (1993). *Balancing act: How managers can integrate successful careers and fulfilling personal lives*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Kottke, J. L., & Agars, M. D. (2005). Understanding the processes that facilitate and hinder efforts to advance women in organizations. *Career Development International*, 10(3), 190–202.
- Muna, F. A., & Mansour, N. (2009). Balancing work and personal life: The leader as acrobat. *Journal of Management Development*, 28(2), 121–133.
- Slaughter, A-M. (2012, June 13). Why women still can't have it all. *The Atlantic Magazine*. Retrieved October 20, 2012, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/1/>
- Spinks, N. L., & Tombari, N. (2002). Flexible work arrangements: A successful strategy for the advancement of women at the royal bank financial group. In R. J. Burke & D. L. Nelson (Eds.), *Advancing women's careers* (pp. 220–242). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- What does it cost to perform a personality assessment? (2007). *T+D*, 61(12), 88.