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# Work-life Inclusion for Women's Career Equality: Why it Matters and What to Do About It

Ellen Ernst Kossek, Kyung-Hee Lee

*A highly productive female associate professor with a stellar record at a top U.S. business school asks to meet with her dean on a personal matter. She shares that her mother-in-law, who lives in Asia, has been diagnosed with late-stage cancer and requests family leave to fly overseas to care for her. The dean asked whether other family members are living nearby. She responds that her husband has two younger sisters who live in the mother-in-law's city. The dean lifts his eyebrow and says, "So, why do you have to go then?"<sup>1</sup>*

Gender equality has become a hot topic in management as business leaders face growing pressures to advance women who remain significantly under-represented in key leadership jobs and face an on-going pay and stock equity gap. Business schools around the globe have responded by offering – for a hefty price tag – “diversity” classes to “develop” women leaders and “train” men to be allies. Growing market interest has also spawned diversity and inclusion research centers led by star faculty as organizational vehicles to enhance fundraising, social relevance, and

reputation. Then, Covid- 19 hit, and work-life tensions related to gender equality, which existed before the pandemic, were accentuated as women's' default parenting, schooling supervision, and other domestic roles rose at the same time that often-mandated remote work skyrocketed. Therefore, as leaders prepare to manage through and beyond the pandemic, it is important to identify how gender interacts with work-life inclusion issues in order for managers to take action to advance women's career equality.

In this article, we share evidence-based insights from work-life and diversity thought leaders who convened at a 2019 workshop held at Purdue University sponsored by the U.S. National Science Foundation entitled *Fostering Gender and Work-Life Inclusion for Faculty in Understudied Contexts: An Organizational Science Lens*. on the role of work-life challenges in gender equality in employing organizations. The NSF workshop and a subsequent 2019 National Academy of Management Professional Development Workshop entitled *Fostering Work-Life Inclusive Business Schools: Improving Organizational Science & Women's Equality* that was organized by the authors examined career issues facing women faculty and scientists in business schools and other professional contexts where women are largely under-represented such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math).<sup>2</sup> These challenges are not limited to universities, but are highly relevant to business leaders. From Fortune 500 companies to start-up firms, women are similarly under-represented in leadership roles, and face comparable barriers. Business leaders are also consumers of business education and hire talent pipelines from business schools and

<sup>1</sup> This example and others in the paper came from discussions, and presentations at a 2018 U.S. NSF workshop entitled *Fostering Gender and Work-Life Inclusion for Faculty in Understudied Contexts: An Organizational Science Lens* <https://www.krannert.purdue.edu/events/nsf-work-life-workshop/home.php> (Grant # 1837920, E. E. Kossek, Principal Investigator) and a 2019 National Academy of Management Professional Development Workshop organized by Kossek, E. E. & Lee, K.-H., 2019, August, 10 entitled *Fostering Work-Life Inclusive Business Schools: Improving Organizational Science & Women's Equality*; Boston, Mass., as well as authors' contacts. Some details in each example changed to preserve anonymity.

<sup>2</sup> STEM has now become expanded in some research to be referred to as STEMM order to refer to the inclusion of Medicine as well.

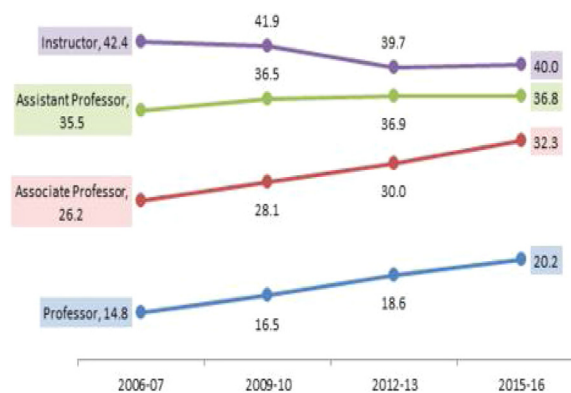
universities. Further, half of all students in universities are now women, and higher education has long been a lever for equal opportunity societal change. Thus, it is important that educational contexts exemplify positive work-life and gender-inclusive environments. We, as did the experts we convened, believe that the impact of work-nonwork dynamics on gender career equality is under-developed as a continuing barrier to women's advancement in diversity and inclusion (D & I) strategies. This omission is surprising as work, family, and personal life identities and demands squarely intersect with gender and shape career diversity and inclusion experiences, including lasting downstream effects on pay, glass ceilings, and talent retention.

Below we review statistics highlighting the gender gap in tenure track and tenured women's faculty representation, which provide an illustrative lens to mirroring challenges that many business organizations face. Then, in order to humanize these trends and because managers often learn from vivid stories, we share examples, from the workshop and conference presentations and discussions that illustrate how gender and work-life issues intersect in the workplace. Next, we define "work-life inclusion" and review four challenges that the experts identified as key themes. Finally, we conclude with seven actions leaders can take to create a more work-life inclusive culture. Let's begin by examining quantitative data on business schools' track record in advancing women.

## MANY BUSINESS SCHOOLS ARE HARDLY ROLE MODELS FOR BUSINESS

Although shining a light on societal gender equality gaps is "big business for business schools," most are rarely the model employers that they exhort other employers to be. Yet, business schools' gender inequality gaps (and higher education more generally) receive far less media scrutiny than those in Silicon Valley or STEM workplaces, or in CEO, Board, and C-suite representation. Recent data (Fig. 1) from AACSB (the business school accreditation body) indicates that *only 20% of all business school full professors are women*- suggesting a "leaky pipeline" as *nearly half of business school doctoral students are women*. Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics reports that women's underrepresentation at senior levels is even worse in more quantitative disciplines like supply chain, finance, IT (information technology), economics, and biotech areas, reflecting the "business of STEM." *Forbes* reports that women receive over half of undergraduate business bachelor degrees but are only a third of MBA degrees at top schools. Research by Herman Aguinis and Ernest O'Boyle found that women's representation in prestigious leadership roles (e.g., chaired professor and dean) and in being recognized as elite "star performers" is extremely low- a statistic most vividly illustrated in the dearth of Nobel prizes awarded to women.

Explanations for these gaps are that business schools not only have failed to make advancing women a top priority but also they have given insufficient attention to "work-life inclusion" as a core form of D & I (diversity and inclusion). There has been insufficient attention to how work-life issues intersect with gender to marginalize women and limit their workforce participation and career advancement. Consider



**Figure 1** Percentage of Female Full-time Business School Faculty by Job Rank.

U.S. Business Schools Leaky and Stalled Pipeline for Women's Career Equality

Source: J. Brown, 2016 "The Percentage of Women as Full-Time Faculty at U.S. Business Schools: Surging Ahead, Lagging Behind, or Stalling Out?," AACSB Data and Research Blog, February 24, 2016, <https://aacsbblogs.typepad.com/dataandresearch/2016/02/the-percentage-of-women-as-full-time-faculty-at-us-business-schools-surging-ahead-lagging-behind-or-.html>

the examples below that were presented in the workshops in order to help humanize the statistics. The issues included: problems in implementing family leave, backlash from leave use, dual career and remote working difficulties, being a nontraditional older job entrant or being single and having non-family related nonwork passions. While these challenges can also impact men who have work-life inclusion needs, we explain below with evidence from the academic literature that these issues usually have a far greater adverse impact on women's careers than those of men.

## WOMEN'S WORK-LIFE INCLUSION EXPERIENCES

### Ambiguous Maternity Policy Implementation Issues

#### *Grading from the hospital bed*

Mary was the first untenured assistant professor *ever* to be pregnant in her department and her unit's first test case to potentially use the university's newly-adopted maternity leave policy. Implemented with few guidelines or resources, the university left it up to each department chair to have the final decision over whether to approve the request and how it should be implemented. When Mary asked her chair about using the policy, she was vaguely told that "maybe something could be worked out," where she could have a class release right after birth, but she would have to "make up" the class with a heavier teaching load when she returned from leave. There was simply no funding for staffing replacement. Mary felt that this was not a viable solution, as she would be doubling up teaching, while nursing and caring for an infant and conducting research. She felt no choice but to teach her entire annual load right up to her due date in order to avoid any teaching load carryover, resulting in her grading exams

from her hospital bed within 24 hours of giving birth. Concerned about the stigma of requesting “accommodation” that male faculty or women without children did not require, Mary engaged in career impression management and what researcher Bob Drago identified as “bias avoidance” behaviors. She avoided using available work-life policies because of fear of backlash for not living up to “ideal worker norms” that scholar Eden King notes reflect employers’ overwhelming preferences for workers who always prioritize career over family.

### ***Post-Maternity performance and pay ratings jeopardy***

Mary was right to worry about the career downsides of using maternity policies with weak organizational support. Several years later, as a recently tenured faculty member, now with job security, she again needed to request maternity leave. It did not go well. The day she told her new chair that she was pregnant and needed help with rescheduling classes, he yelled in the hallway: “I can’t believe this; giving you a teaching release helps you, but it doesn’t help me.” After realizing that he did not have a lot of choices, he approved the leave; but retaliated the next year by giving Mary her lowest performance rating and pay increase ever. This chair also lowballed the performance ratings, verbally threatened, and denigrated the reputation of another female faculty member who took maternity leave a year or so later. Although both women shared their concerns about the bias with the EEO office, the university did nothing to rectify the poor climate. Such stories are not uncommon as research by Colleen Manchester and colleagues shows that maternity policy users (still) habitually receive lower pay and performance ratings, even after controlling for productivity.

### **Gendered Career Mobility Family “Strains and Stains”**

#### ***Overlooking “trailing spouses” and families***

Dual-career women faculty face a host of family-related career-limiting mobility challenges that have been identified for decades but remain largely unsolved. One reason for this is that, a report from Stanford University on academic couples show, male faculty still tend to be more likely to be the primary job candidate in their families. By having a partner with a secondary career or a stay-at-home spouse, men faculty are often more geographically mobile and find it easier to accept new career opportunities, manage child and elder care and school moves, compared to women faculty. In contrast, women faculty are more likely to have an academic partner or one whose career is viewed at least as equal in primacy, creating what is also known as the “two-body problem,” which is a metaphor from physics applying the idea that two rotating particles movement must be coordinated to the problems two academics find in getting two equal academic jobs in the same location. Because women faculty and women of color are more likely to be married to another academic and often be the “partner hire” and not the main hire than men, this makes it harder to find a quality faculty job at the same institution for dual career women. Take April, who was poached from a competitor and offered a wonderful chaired faculty position with a hefty raise from a

leading business school. Unfortunately, the business school only half-heartedly began to recruit her spouse sequentially after April’s offer was made. Not only was she not offered any meaningful and timely dual-career help with her husband’s job needs, April received little support to help her come up with realistic solutions to manage the disrupted lives of her school-aged children. One child would be vocally miserable about leaving a large circle of friends. The other was receiving school support for special needs that would be challenging to replicate in a new district without considerable effort. April knew that she would be the main parent managing these transitions, since her husband would be job searching as the university had offered little help. She turned down her dream job.

#### ***Real administrators don’t work remotely***

As a solution to the “two-body problem,” many academic couples live apart, requiring a long commute over the weekend or sometimes months. Flexibility to be able to work remotely when needed can reduce the burden of commute. However, sometimes that flexibility is not accessible or frowned upon. Moreover, research shows that the women face more career harm from using flexibility than men. Consider Sally, who, after being heavily recruited from the west coast to take a position as a dean, resigned from her position after three years of commuting as her spouse remained at his university out east. The commuting situation occurred because no comparable spousal position was offered in Sally’s new university, despite his being an esteemed academic. As their children were grown, Sally thought commuting could work. She took the new job even though she was disappointed by the lack of dual-career help. After living apart most of the school year except for weekend airplane shuttling, as a last-ditch effort, Sally asked her dean if she could telework two days a week, giving assurance that she would be available for conference calls any time needed, attend all important face-to-face events, and hold regular office hours. Yet, her dean did not even put the request forward, saying the university would not consider a partial telework arrangement for an administrator- even as a trial. The lack of flexibility, added expenses of two households and airline tickets, perennial fatigue, and the pure weekday loneliness became too much. Sally resigned as dean after her first contract cycle was up, going back to a lower-paid faculty position with more remote working options.

#### ***Out of labor cohort step: not a fresh young face***

Another family-related career-limiting challenge that many women face is the difficulty of re-entering the job market after “opting out” to care for children or family. Some scholars such as Kate Weisshaar at the University of North Carolina says that women are blocked out of the labor market due to being career “stained” when they have job lapses for family. Studies show more women than men exit the job market to care for children (18–20% of mothers compared to 1.2% of fathers) as reported by University of Minnesota Professor Sarah Flood and colleagues’ analysis of U.S. population survey data. Moreover, negative attitudes and bias can intersect to marginalize women based on, what researchers Itzin and Phillipson called “gendered ageism,” which refers to the idea that women’s status declines

quicker than men's; That is women tend to experience ageism in work contexts at a younger age than men. Moreover, experimental studies such as by European researchers Kornadt, Voss, and Rothermund, report that in the work domain older men tend to be generally rated more positively than older women.

Take Rosa, a truly exceptional newly-minted Ph.D. who was re-entering the job market after taking time off to have children. Despite having a first-authored "A" publication, stellar recommendations, and previous high-powered corporate experience, she did not receive *any* fly backs to interview at top business schools. She wondered whether it was because she was well over a decade older than most assistant professors. Rather than fight these market signals that her age and career gaps "stained her," she lowered her career goals, telling everyone (and herself) that she preferred a local teaching school near her husband's job.

### Single Women's Struggles with Work Commitment Stereotypes

#### *Nonwork passions not fitting the mold*

Some work-life inclusion issues have little to do with dual-career or family care issues. They involve nonwork identity interests intersecting in gendered ways with marital status or other social identities. Many leaders hold implicit assumptions that single people — especially those without children — do not have significant nonwork interests that conflict with the "call of duty." Although any single faculty, regardless of their gender, may face these challenges, the fact is that more women faculty are single than men faculty (34% and 18% respectively according to U.S. Census Bureau) and, thus, these challenges are likely to affect more women faculty than men faculty. Connie, an untenured assistant professor, had a passion for acting during weekends in a community theater in a nearby town. Spending her nonwork time in the theater was a critical part of her identity, provided an important social support group of friends and regular exercise, and prevented workaholicism. Connie vigorously tried to keep her artistic activities private from work, as she was once told by a mentor that she would not be taken seriously as a professor if she disclosed them. Recently, Connie faced a dilemma when she was asked with short notice by her dean to teach a weekend executive education course. Unfortunately, all of the dates conflicted with key rehearsals and performances. Connie told the dean that she was deeply sorry, but she could not teach the course due to a personal conflict.

The next day, the dean called her into his office and asked, "Can you tell me a little more about this commitment that keeps you from teaching Exec Ed?" Connie was uncomfortable and dismayed. First, she did not want to disclose any nonwork interests that might be seen as frivolous and incompatible with her identity as a career-committed professor. Second, she had noticed the implicit message that non-family-related commitments were not seen as valid reasons to turn down job demands — especially executive education — a critical cash cow for the school. When she relented and disclosed how important it was to her and her friends to prioritize the theater events, the dean said he understood. He easily found someone else to teach. But Connie felt she

had been pressured to disclose more than she was comfortable with and didn't know if she would face subsequent career backlash. These preceding stories, coupled with the data on the dearth of full rank female professors, suggest that work-life inclusion is a concept of growing management and diversity and inclusion importance and remains a significant barrier holding back women's careers.

### What is Work-Life Inclusion and Why it Matters

How should work-life inclusion be defined? Organizational work-life inclusion occurs when work cultures and structures are generally perceived as supporting an individual's ability to thrive authentically in family and personal life roles on and off the job, while progressing in a career. In such workplaces, individuals would not feel s/he would have to sacrifice key nonwork identities such as mother, spouse, elder caregiver in order to succeed at work. These family relational roles often intersect with gender as working women do the majority of child and elder care in societies and invest heavy cognitive and emotional energy in organizing and managing these arrangements to support family members' well-being. Work-life inclusion role challenges are not just limited to those related to the family. Individuals in a work-life inclusive workplace would not have to forgo participation in personally meaningful nonwork activities, such as regularly exercising to support a healthy lifestyle, volunteering in religious or community organizations, having time for hobbies, or socializing with friends to advance in careers.

Research on women's career equality by Professors Kossek, Su & Wu published in the *Journal of Management* shows that inclusive contexts shape under-represented members' intentions to remain in occupations and organizations, their career advancement, well-being, feelings of belongingness, and work-nonwork career outcomes. Inclusive contexts involving gender and career equality are those where women are fairly treated, have their talent leveraged, and receive support for important gender, work-life, and job-related values and needs. We know that in such organizational contexts, individual women are more likely to experience career equality as there is a positive alignment of culture, structure, and practices. In work-life inclusive cultures, women (and men) of all sexual orientations and family types feel psychologically safe to openly disclose family and other personal life interests and concerns to others without fear of backlash. Such nonwork identities may not only intersect with gender but those related to class and race, which are often connected to societal power or lack thereof. The degree to which one feels supported by one's employer and society more generally for nonwork needs, enables one to be able to live the life of one's dreams. Increasingly, individuals seek support for nonwork relationships involving not only blood family members but friends and work colleagues, particularly as growing numbers of adults are delaying marriage or foregoing having children at all. Diversity scholar Mor Barak argues that employers need to reduce their blind spots of what "life" means and learn how to more inclusively support nonwork identities. Below we elaborate on the evidence underlying these blind spots.

## GENDERED WORK-LIFE INCLUSION CHALLENGES

Across the NSF workshop expert presentations on the career equality challenges, we identified four main work-life inclusion challenges facing women faculty in business schools and related disciplines, issues often mirrored by women professionals in business and society in general. They are: 1) overwork cultures; 2) extended work connectivity demands; 3) poor implementation of dual-career supports; and 4) a flexibility stigma. It is important to note that while many employers focus work-life initiatives on “work-family-life benefits,” such policies, while valuable, do not address the cultural and structural career-related work-life issues we identify below and are often not well integrated into diversity and inclusion initiatives nor talent management strategies.

### Theme 1: Overwork, Motherhood Guilt, Parental Burnout, and Downshifting Career Ambition

Experts agree that overwork cultures, where putting in long work hours and jobs first before all other life roles (parent, partner, self-care) is strongly socialized for career success, fosters gender inequality. Contrary to popular perceptions that being a professor is a cushy job, a recently completed study by Professor Tammy Allen of how faculty spent their time found that, on average, faculty members spend over 76 hours a week on work, including 13 hours on weekends. But despite long work hours and 24-7 response pressures, department chairs think that faculty often spend their time as one leader aptly referred to as “*dithering*.” This perceptual gap between leaders and faculty members increases overwork and inauthentic impression management pressures in an “up or out” tenure-track world. Similar to “tournament promotion systems” in business consulting, for example, where those who don’t make partner or plateau are fired when they are not able to rise to the “C-suite,” faculty denied tenure must re-enter the market as “tainted goods.” Adding to these stresses is strong socialization to link personal ego and careers with behavioral norms focused on “careerism” to “always put work first.” These strong career ideals have gendered impacts because they conflict with “ideal mom” pressures. Women’s careers tend to be more negatively impacted by family role enactment “ideals” for time-intensive mothering, such as never missing a soccer game or intently supervising children to make sure they take the time they need to prepare for the end of the year exams. In contrast, men face different pressures that lead them to focus on “work first,” enabling career advancement. Researcher Joan Williams and colleagues note that in the U.S. culture, for example, the image of being an ideal dad typically involves being a good economic provider first. Further, research from the PEW Charitable Trust reports that many heterosexual married couples are ashamed to disclose when a woman partner earns more than the male. For women, however, economic roles are sometimes downplayed and model parenting roles are accentuated. Data from the COACHE survey, the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education, which is a recurring national survey of over 70 leading universities, backs this up. Over

40% of female faculty report an inability to balance work and family/life compared to only 20% of male faculty. Not only do women report twice the rate of difficulties as men do in managing work-life roles, but working mothers experience significantly higher guilt over work interfering with family than working fathers do. One expert shared the vivid story of a female professor who felt that she was being “mean” to her children all summer long because she was consumed with working on a manuscript revision, which was ultimately rejected. Rather than repeat her guilt for not being a “good mother” over summer break with poor results to show for the sacrifice, the professor rejected funding for the following summer so she could focus on caring for her children.

Faculty are not alone in perceiving a constant tradeoff between the enactment of mothering and career. A study by researchers Mueessen and Van Laar of 169 working mothers in the U.S. and the U.K. found that when mothers report high ideal mother pressures, they also report higher parental burnout, which decreases their career ambition. These work-life experiences create gendered career paths resulting in lower promotion and tenure rates for women (with the exception of those of Asian descent) than men in disciplines such as economics – which is a common business school discipline. A study by Chen and colleagues analyzing a cohort of graduates with a doctorate in economics found that women are not only significantly less likely to be tenured than men, even when the tenure clock is automatically extended, but they are more likely to *not* be working in academia eight years after receiving their degrees – a higher occupational dropout rate.

### Theme 2: The Dark Side of Telework: Extended Availability, Work Tethering & Interruptions

Despite the benefits of technology in granting faculty flexibility and options to work outside of the office 24-7, it can tether faculty to work in ways that harm well-being. Tracy Dumas’s research shows that this “extended availability” is often associated with greater conflict, a greater feeling of interference, not being able to have enough time to handle everything, and emotional exhaustion. Although these pressures existed before the pandemic, they are accentuated as work-life integration is a fact of daily life, unless one takes active steps to separate or detach from work at times. Researcher Furst-Holloway argues that when it is one’s choice to be contacted throughout the workday with extended availability, stress and conflict can be reduced if the department culture enables individual discretion to separate from work via boundary management tactics that fit one’s personal values and context.

In fact, studies by author Ellen Kossek with colleagues on employees’ boundary management styles found that individuals who prefer integrating work and life more (e.g., bringing work home, working after hours or on weekends) are likely to be “dual centric” in their identities- that is, they value work and family highly at the same time. Yet, a caveat of this strongly dual identification with *both* work and family roles is that such individuals are more likely to engage in constant higher work to nonwork interruptions (and the reverse), since they have difficulty detaching from each role. Consequently, dual centric individuals (often women)



report lower levels of work-life balance, less job satisfaction, lower boundary control, higher exhaustion and depressive symptoms.

Research suggests that allowing these permeable boundaries where personal and work roles are constantly crossing over can actually harm women's careers. Women faculty are often expected to "dance backwards in high-heels," an analogy that scholar El-Alayli and colleagues use to refer to the greater service expectations students place on female faculty compared to male faculty. They use the example of dancer Fred Astaire's equally talented but less acclaimed partner Ginger Rogers who often danced backwards in routines. The study found that students tend to send female professors more emails for help, more requests for personal meetings, and more invitations to social events than to male professors. These pressures may socialize women faculty to reinforce these expectations by regularly engaging in nurturing availability, such as giving out their cell phone numbers to students more often than men as a way to be viewed as a caring professor to improve reputation and course ratings. Yet, these time-intensive contacts and frequent interruptions do not support focused time for research and writing, and count little in pay, promotion, or tenure decisions.

### Theme 3: HR System Gender Gaps in Dual-Career Supports, Service Demands, Evaluation, and Pay

Although women's hiring rates may be slightly improving for entry-level tenure track positions, as Fig. 1 showed, scholar Chen and colleagues data show that the gender gap persists when it comes to dual-career hiring, service workload, performance, promotion, and tenure. A Stanford University study of dual-career hiring in over a dozen universities found that 74% of "second partner" hiring slots involved women who often ended up taking non-tenure-track positions when no additional tenure track position emerged. Besides lack of equal dual-career hiring supports, women faculty generally end up taking on far more committee service work than men and often feel pressured to say "yes," which can become a vicious cycle as women rise in rank. Tammy Allen's study shows weekly work hours up to 83 hours a week for female full professors compared to 80 hours a week for male full professors, which adds up to working several weeks longer every year. One reason for this significant time allocation gap is that female faculty are approached more often to mentor students, an activity that counts little toward promotion, as Professor Maria Triana observes. Regardless of productivity, a study by sociologist Kate Weishaar shows that gender bias systematically shows up in performance evaluation and promotion. Women are systematically less likely to be tenured or promoted than men with a similar record, and when they are, it is typically at a less prestigious university. Experimental studies by MacNell and colleagues show that, when the exact same courses are taught online, simply substituting a female for a male identity (regardless of the professors' real gender) results in systematically lower teaching evaluation by students than male professors. Another example involves the gendered evaluation of co-authored publications. Unlike men with similar records and the number of co-authors, a study by Sarsons found that women professors have significantly less likelihood of getting

tenure if they have more co-authored papers and when they co-author with men. A common assumption is that the women needed "help" to get publications. Lastly, the lack of female professors at top levels in universities contributes to a persistent gender pay gap which increases at the most senior ranks, a gap that could take up to 40 years to close in some countries such as the United Kingdom, as reported in *The Guardian*, a national newspaper.

### Theme 4: Gendered Flexibility Stigma, Penalties (and Privilege) of Using Family Policies

Many universities have adopted a "seemingly equal and gender-neutral" "stop-the-(tenure) clock" policy where both male and female professors can extend the tenure clock to account for the time they take for family needs. Such across-the-board policies that are seemingly equal in availability can be linked to unintended consequences of increasing gender inequality related to pay and tenure. Research by Tae Youn Park and colleagues analyzing fifteen years of nationally-representative U.S. Data revealed that each year of using paid maternity leave lowers a woman's wage growth rate by 3.1% during the first year after using the policy. In some disciplines such as economics, where women are significantly under-represented at higher faculty ranks, having an organizational-wide policy of automatic tenure clock extension actually *harmed* women's tenure chances while helping men's tenure probability. Using economic departments' data from 1985-2004, a national study by Antecol, Bedard, and Stearns found that "stop-the-clock" policies increased male professors' chances of being tenured by 19%, while decreasing female professors' tenure likelihood by 22%. One explanation of why automatic leave policies can have an adverse impact on women's careers more than men's is because these policies ignore the fact that women are the ones who actually go through the physical aspects of pregnancy and childbirth, and often spend more of the leave time on childcare than men. In contrast, male professors can take advantage of the paid leave, extended tenure clock, and teaching and service release to publish more, increasing their chances of getting tenured. Thus, as Professor Mary Fox's research surmises, the implementation of automatic parental leave policies is not gender-neutral, and neither are the institutional and social policy effects.

Evidence of flexibility stigma is also growing – the negative perceptions that faculty who use flexible work arrangements for family reasons (and not overwork) are not as committed to work is a perception that may be exacerbated in more masculine work contexts. Erin Cech and Mary Blair-Loy's study of female faculty in STEM disciplines found that women faculty perceived a higher "flexibility stigma" – marginalization for using flexible work practices – than men faculty, which was related to women's perceptions of being devalued and greater intentions to leave the current job as well as academia all together for industry.

### The Path Forward: Seven Leader Actions to Advance Gender and Work-Life Inclusion

Given these challenges, there is much opportunity for leaders to capitalize on the growing interest in improving organizational diversity implementation in ways that will

advance gender and work-life inclusive contexts. Integrating the experts' suggestions with the experiences of deans from several major U.S. business schools, we identified seven leader actions to improve work-life inclusion. They are: 1) leverage the power of leader messaging, 2) expand definitions of career success, 3) improve implementation of dual-career supports, 4) address bias in HR systems, 5) balance support and disclosure of diverse work-life identities, 6) enhance work-life boundary control and combat overworking, and 7) pilot innovative experiments to "nudge" change.

### **Enhance Leader Messaging for Work-Life Inclusiveness**

Leadership attitudes, language, and behaviors signal inclusive expectations to the employees and set the tone for the organization. Dean Kathy Farrell at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln explains the importance of language to create work-life inclusive workplaces by recalling her recent experience. "[We] held a fall family picnic [for] faculty and staff. Well, some of our single faculty and staff, and our married with no children faculty and staff didn't think they were invited . . . I thought we were being very open and very inclusive, and it was actually perceived not that way, and so we realized there was a problem with our communications, and we needed to do a better job of communicating. Here we thought we were doing this really great community-building event, and it turned out to not be perceived in the intent and the manner in which we were doing it. So I learned a valuable lesson. We will communicate very differently next time." Leaders need to be aware of the power of the conscious and unconscious messages they are sending through their attitudes, language, and behaviors and use that power to change organizational culture.

### **Broaden Definitions of Career Success**

Leaders can be very instrumental in broadening definitions of career success and taking more holistic approaches to tenure and promotion, which can help countervail rigid career advancement options. Dean Srilata Zaheer at the University of Minnesota argues that everybody should be able to define success differently, because they may want to have different career trajectories based on their nonwork needs and interests. She speculates, "the question really is how can we make each and every person successful in this career, in this job that they've taken on, allowing for the fact that each one might define success differently? What does success mean to that person, and how can we facilitate that individual being successful however they want to be successful? I think that's a big challenge for us at the individual level. I think, at the organizational level, it's really about how do you create the systems, the processes, and the culture to allow people to find their own success. If there is only one definition of success, it may not actually work for everybody. Particularly, how do you create a culture of conscious support, a culture of conscious inclusion at every level of the organization?" She elaborates: "We have to allow people to define success the way they want to define it, and we have to help them be successful in whatever way they want to be successful. So, there may be somebody who decides to (only rise to) be an

associate professor, but loves teaching and is an outstanding teacher. Can we . . . celebrate that and honor that and let them be that?"

Dean David Hummels at Purdue University agrees that business schools and employers in general need more holistic evaluation approaches to tenure and promotion. Hummels believes that it is time to question the norms around faculty evaluation for tenure and promotion. He suggests, "there's this interesting interplay between the influence you have as a dean and the appropriate role for faculty governance and faculty autonomy in making these decisions. I really believe that having a series of earnest conversations with decision-makers and influential voices among the senior faculty to ask what scholarship excellence looks and what excellence in the classroom looks like to you [will help]. I think that's something that we can make real progress on." University of California at Berkeley scholar Laura Kray argues that loosening talent assessment norms from being fixed (often linked to highly masculine cultures) to being more permeable in regards to learning mindsets is a path toward positive change toward gender equality. She argues that "if we get people, especially men, into a growth mindset, by affirming their basic values, and helping them to see these issues as self-relevant, we may be able to close the gap in terms of perceptions of what the problem is and how much of a problem there is."

### **Seriously Increase Dual-Career Support Resources and Avoid Partner "Othering" Language**

Many universities give only lip service to dual-career and family issues and often use approaches and language that are relics of the past traditional male breadwinner-led family configuration model. To start, let's ban the term "trailing spouse" — which could be viewed as what Columbia University's Professor Derald Sue refers to as a micro-aggression, an implicit derogatory labeling, as it implies that the spouse is not as career capable of being recruited on his/her own merits. Utah State's Associate Dean Meredith Thompson recounts her experiences being recruited as a "trailing spouse" while interviewing for jobs as part of a potential dual-career couple hire earlier in her career. During the visit, I was introduced as 'This is our spousal hire.' I had no name, no qualifications. My only element of significance was being married to someone the university wanted to hire. Thus, I began my job from a lower position." Such devaluing dynamics can lead to increased marital tensions and divorce.

Establishing a clear process to work with other departments on dual-career hiring can be effective. As Purdue's Dean David Hummels shares, "One of the things that we started doing over the last few years is that as part of the faculty visit, we embed time with HR representatives during their visit, and the notion of it is that it's a time for the faculty candidate to sit down with an HR representative, talk about options and support, connect them with a faculty concierge to help them if they have a spousal situation or if they have other kinds of needs. I think that's been a really healthy thing to enable people to talk very freely out of earshot of the individuals who are going to make a hiring



decision about what kind of opportunities there are . . . I always keep a spare (faculty) line to be used for exactly this purpose [spousal hire], and as a consequence, we've had successful hires each in the last four years because we always had that slack."

Besides increasing internal resources, working more closely with the community outside campus to find jobs is another way to successfully recruit dual-career hires as University of Nebraska Dean Kathy Farrell shares, "One of the spaces that we've tried to work really hard in addition to dual academic careers is also creating more connections in the business community to help with the dual-career spouse placing in the business community . . . I think it is particularly difficult when you're trying to attract women as the faculty and the dual-career, or the male counterpart or female counterpart doesn't have an opportunity because we are a little smaller. The state has actually invested very heavily in our infrastructure in terms of from a communications perspective so that we can support more flexible work for dual-career . . . It can have really significant implications for recruiting and retention."

### **Address Cultural Bias in HR Systems and Make Leaders Accountable**

When it comes to hiring and promotion, setting clear criteria, expectations, and requirements may help reduce bias and discrimination in the evaluation process. For example, diversity scholar Stefanie Johnson has done research working with a business school to blind the names and affiliations of the applicants for a tenure-track job and develop a new algorithm to score the applicants based on the search criteria. She found that these processes yielded an over-representation of women in the final candidate slate — three women were invited for the on-campus interview compared to one man. Her studies show that if women are represented in lower ratios in the final pool, they have little chance of being hired. In a paper coining the phrase "proof or pedigree", Johnson's research also found that the prestige of a man's doctoral institution predicted their subsequent rank and the quality of their career placement years later, but not women's. Using blinding in reviewing curriculum vitas can be a useful tool to countervail bias.

Management Professor Carrie Leana argues that a two-way evaluation system and holding senior faculty accountable for junior faculty's success may help change the culture. Leaders need to communicate to senior faculty members and department chairs that they need to see themselves as accountable for the joint work-life well-being and career success of junior faculty. If junior faculty, especially women and those with families, are having challenges getting promoted or, worse yet, are turning over, leaders need to message that there is a need for their organizations to examine the work-life culture to better understand why it is not working inclusively for all faculty. They need to solicit honest, respectful feedback, and understand what barriers need to be removed.

Besides addressing cultural barriers, leaders must monitor structural barriers. While making the "stop-the-tenure-clock" an automatic process when a professor has a child may help reduce the stigma of use, the possible unintended

consequences of using the policies must also be examined to understand the gendered experience of childbearing, childbirth, and childcare. Economist Colleen Manchester argues that universities need to systematically collect and monitor scientific evidence on possible differential career effects of the extended tenure clock for family leave use on women's promotion, pay, and performance evaluation compared to men's in order to assess implementation effectiveness.

### **Broadly Support Intersectionality in Diverse Identities While Balancing Disclosure Choice**

Most professional jobs are demanding and sometimes require career sacrifices when an individual finds it difficult to align the preferred allocation of time and energy with valued multiple identities and roles (e.g., wife, mother, partner, professor) that conflict with work. Inclusion scholar Lynn Shore argues that people need to feel they belong to the work-groups that they are part of (belongingness) at the same time as they also feel that they can bring their whole unique selves to those group experiences and be perceived as a valued member (uniqueness). Yet, Harvard Professor Lakshmi Ramarajan argues that individuals must perceive that they have control over how much and when they want to reveal because, for some individuals, bringing your whole self can be oppressive. That is, some faculty may want to separate their personal identities from their professional ones in order to have some privacy.

Leaders can play a key role in supporting the choice of how to manage and the extent to which employees feel compelled to disclose these multiple identities. For example, management scholar Laura Little's research suggests that women tend to receive less career encouragement from supervisors when they disclose their pregnancy at work, while men receive more career encouragement, which her findings suggest may lead to the higher turnover intentions of women post-pregnancy.

Leaders also need to take an intersectional lens to more effectively support faculty's needs related to their multiple identities and roles. Professor Ann Marie Ryan argues that such an approach would enhance the focus on the unique and specific experiences associated with the intersection of social identity categories (e.g., African-American women and older LGBTQ workers) generally and those involving work-life categories (e.g., single mother, dual-career father, only child elder caregiver, and childless partner in a commuting marriage). Wharton Professor Stephanie Creary also sees many advantages of taking an intersectional lens to look at work-life issues. She notes that looking at multiple overlapping identities fosters leaders to get more of the big picture by allowing them to think about specific needs, specific conflicts, and how those are promulgated by power differentials. Right now, many universities' EEO offices (and workplaces more generally) are stuck in the past, counting people's individual demographics as discrete measures without necessarily linking them into a person-centered clustered approach and thinking about how they intersect across diverse identity configurations. Creary notes that when supporting faculty's multiple roles, leaders and organizations need to pay special attention to single faculty. Most of the current work-life policies tend to focus on married (often

white) faculty with children. Such policies may inadvertently ignore the needs of the single faculty, especially black women faculty, who have their own unique work-life inclusion challenges and needs.

Further, many work colleagues assume that single faculty have more time, especially if they do not have children to care for, and that their personal needs are not as important as other faculty's family needs. Leaders need to acknowledge and validate the personal interests, identities, and needs of single faculty to create an inclusive culture where everyone can thrive. This does not have to be framed as a win-lose contest between the needs of singles and marrieds, or those who are childless versus those with caregiving, but rather the idea of work-life friendly environments for all people of many different work-life backgrounds.

### Take Action to Enhance Employee's Work-Life Boundary Control and Mitigate Overworking

While much has been written about the ideas of "work-life conflict" and "work-life balance," leaders that focus on enhancing "work-life boundary control" are more likely to have success in creating a work-life inclusive culture. Leaders can educate members on how to increase boundary control over availability and connectivity. Studies by Kossek and colleagues show professionals have higher psychological well-being, greater work-life fit, and are less likely to turnover when they can choose when and the degree to which they separate and integrate work and nonwork roles as part of their boundary management styles. Moreover, employees need to feel they have the flexibility to control over which identity is most salient at a particular time in order to avoid contradictions and constantly competing expectations in their lives. Sometimes referred to as "psychological role flexibility" control, Management Professor Jamie Ladge argues that those with higher control are able to define who they are in what context. Namely, what identity as a faculty member, as a parent, other personal life roles are most salient at any given time, instead of overloading faculty to try and be all these roles to all these different stakeholders simultaneously.

One tangible way that leaders can enable control over work-life boundaries and determining which work-life role is most salient when is to consciously take action to increase leader supportive behaviors. Experts at the workshop suggested that leaders: 1) schedule all meetings between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. to align with schools getting out; 2) refrain from sending out emails or at a minimum not expecting email responses over the weekends; 3) encourage faculty to take vacations and the leaders themselves role model taking vacations and setting an automatic email response stating "please do not bother me – I am on vacation"; 4) celebrate equality in co-parenting when male leaders taking a semester off to be the primary caregiver of a new baby while their partners work; 5) celebrate faculty's nonwork achievements including but also beyond children such as winning a bridge tournament or running a marathon; and 6) schedule some social events taking into account the schedules and interests of families.

Leaders also may need to monitor, with the current pandemic, whether the effects of using flexibility for "overworking" versus carework, may help individuals such as men who are using flexibility for productivity reasons such as being online for an extended workday. Leaders should monitor if they are rewarding such virtual presence with extra pay and promotion. Likewise, they need to make sure

that they are not biased and give lower rewards for individuals' (often women) who may use flexibility for a greater extent for caregiving reasons.

### Consider Innovative Employer Experiments to Nudge Change in Work-Life Norms

Leaders and organizations might partner with gender and work-life experts to craft and evaluate innovative caregiving gender equality experiments that would explore how employers can better support change in male and female norms when implementing initiatives. For example, parental and elder care leaves might be designed to give more time off if both men and women engage in child care or eldercare. Such nudges are needed as the reality is that while many men in their 20s and 30s today profess support of gender equality, the *New York Times* reports that this espousing has not necessarily translated into more time spent on household tasks. Currently, most women, even if working full time, are the main caregivers of the very young and the very old in our societies. These demands are increasing with growing "parenting workload pressures." Not only do children have rising academic demands and increasing number of extra-curricular activities, adolescent years are becoming more and more challenging with rising social media and mental health issues. And with the trend to delayed adulthood of financial independence and marriage, many parents are assisting their children well into their 20's as many children boomeranged home during the pandemic. Given that research (see recommended reading at the end of this article) shows that professional women are more likely to handle these family demands and have less career support than similar men, employers need to focus on men's work-life inclusion needs at the same time we support those of women. The challenge is that societal institutions and norms of gender and caregiving are still unequal. Leaders need to unpack the unintended consequences and adverse impact of how work-life practices are being implemented to ensure we are not advantaging one gender group over another. Diversity researcher David Dwertmann would like to see an in-depth evaluation of factors shaping employee perceptions of work-life inclusion and how they interact with positive employee and employer outcomes, which may provide a starting point for organizational change.

**Closing.** Business schools, universities, governments, and business organizations have opportunities to be leading exemplary employers on how to enhance diversity and inclusion and transfer organizational learning between each other. Increasing leader awareness of the work-life inclusion challenges, the concept and benefits of fostering work life inclusion, and the actions we identify in this article may foster positive change for all employees, but especially women. Yet unfortunately, as management professor Russell Matthews notes, work-family policies are inherently bureaucratic, lack customization to diverse employee needs, and are under-resourced given changing business models to invest less into long-term employee relationships.

The questions remain: Are business schools and universities even aware of the need to lead by example to foster greater work-life inclusion to advance women's career equality? Will they be successful in fostering broader societal change as they socialize students, future business and government leaders, and policymakers to advance gender

equality? Leaders across society have a strategic opportunity to transform their workplaces to integrate and leverage work-life inclusion actions into broader diversity and inclusion strategies in order to help close the persistent gender equality gap.

### **AUTHOR CREDIT STATEMENT**

Dr. Kossek came up with the idea and main themes of the paper. She led in writing and editing the majority of the paper submitted and its revisions. The paper builds on findings from

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Dr. Lee was a co- PI on the grant and helped Dr. Kossek write the grant, organize and complete the workshop and grant administration reports. She helped Dr. Kossek as a second author on the paper in writing some of the paper rough draft, early editing, and also helped find additional articles to augment the workshop findings or support for revisions.



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