

Work-Life Integration Surveys

Why Organizations Should Invest in Them

Hope Hanner-Bailey, Ph.D.

Assessment Consultant

Management Concepts

Work-Life Integration: An Overview

In recent years, there has been a movement in organizations to help employees manage the events in their lives that occur both on and off the clock. Most busy individuals acknowledge that it is a very difficult, if not impossible, feat to try to keep their personal and work lives fully separate. One reason for this difficulty is that a major ripple in one of these areas is almost always felt in the other. In fact, work-life researchers assert that our work and personal lives are not separate worlds that never intersect but rather, they have constant and immediate impact on one another. Thus, many of these experts prefer the term “work-life integration” over the traditional term, “work-life balance.” An increasing number of researchers now believe that work-life balance is a misnomer since balance is something that can be maintained for only a very short period of time and it is therefore an unrealistic goal. Integration, on the other hand, is more achievable and sustainable. It involves the use of multiple strategies and attempts to combine work with other areas in one’s personal life.

Many organizations are now recognizing how important it is to help their employees integrate both areas of their lives. In fact, *all* of the top ten companies on Fortune’s 2009 Best Companies to Work For rankings specifically address their commitment to work-life integration on their websites (See Table 1). Similarly, on the 2009 Best Places to Work rankings, each of the top 10 government agencies address this topic on their websites, as well. Clearly, the highest echelons of organizations now take work-life initiatives very seriously.

Few organizations can achieve a place on these lists but most organizations today offer at least a handful of programs aimed at helping employees integrate their work and personal demands. For instance, most organizations have Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), which provide various resources that help employees deal with many of life’s major challenges including, marital discord, legal difficul-



ties, and financial concerns. Additionally, it is more and more common for organizations to offer comprehensive wellness programs that promote overall fitness by providing employees with resources such as, on-site fitness facilities, cafeterias with healthy food options, and even free yoga classes, if one are fortunate enough to work for Wegman's, a supermarket chain based in Rochester, New York. Although not in the majority, many organizations cater to working parents by offering paid maternity *and* paternity leave, on-site childcare facilities, and lactation programs and accommodations for nursing mothers.

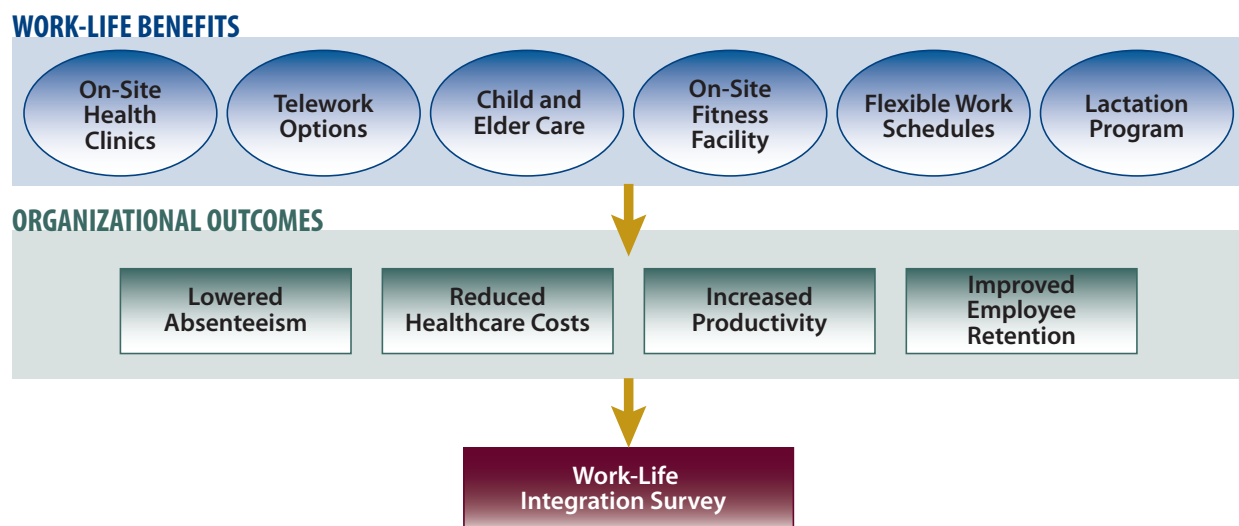
As many federal employees can attest, attractive work-life benefits are not exclusive to the private sector. In fact, the Office of Personnel Management recently created a work-life task force that is responsible for researching possible work-life programs. Ultimately, their research will guide the development of programs and policies to “improve life in the workplace and to assist employees in balancing their work with life responsibilities” through activities such as work schedule flexibilities and care options.

Benefits of Work-Life Initiatives at an Individual and Organizational Level

There are a myriad of benefits that work-life programs and policies provide (see Figure 1). The positive outcomes of such initiatives impact not only the individual employee, but the organization as well.

Lowered Absenteeism. One of the most obvious benefits of a strong work-life integration program is that employees tend to miss fewer days of work. Many organizations that actively support work-life integration have policies that allow for telework or alternative work schedules. In such organizations, parents are not forced to use Paid Time Off (PTO) or vacation time if a child is too sick to go to school. Instead, parents can save those days or hours for when they are actually sick themselves or ideally, for a vacation. Companies such as Genentech offer back up childcare options to those parents whose primary form of dependent care falls through. Unlike many working parents who are stuck when their babysitter calls in sick, Genentech employees are afforded the peace of mind knowing that there

Figure 1: Improving Organizational Outcomes through the Assessment of Work-Life Integration



will always be a place to take their children on short notice.

Reduced Healthcare Costs. Another benefit many organizations enjoy vis-à-vis work-life practices, is a decrease in the amount spent on healthcare costs. In particular, wellness programs that promote active and healthy lifestyles often result in a workforce that gets sick less often and thus, has fewer health insurance claims. Over time, organizations that invest in wellness programs not only experience reduced health costs, but employees themselves tend to be more in control of their overall stress levels.

Increased Productivity. A third benefit that pertains to the provision of work-life initiatives is an overall increase in employee productivity. After all, work-life initiatives are designed to help individuals better manage their stress level, which in turn, allows them to be more physically and mentally present on the job. Employees who receive assistance in managing their stress through a reasonable workload and flexible work arrangements and schedules are more likely to show up to work in the first place and have the mental and physical energy to perform their duties to the fullest.

Improved Employee Retention. Attractive work-life benefits have become an integral method for retaining key talent. Given that a growing number of organizations now acknowledge the significance of initiatives that promote work-life integration, many individuals are prone to look elsewhere if they feel their workload is too extreme or that their job expectations are directly preventing them from having adequate time to devote to their families and personal lives. The availability of work-life benefits is not only linked to the retention of working mothers, but male employees now consider these benefits to play a key role in their job satisfaction and organizational commitment. According to a 2007 survey conducted by Monster, 71% of male respondents indicated that they adopted flexible work schedules when it was offered by their employers and 82% said that they espouse a more positive view of organizations when

they provide a flextime benefit. The adoption of comprehensive work-life programs not only demonstrates concern for the well-being of employees but it has a positive impact on an organization's bottom line by playing an important role in decreasing voluntary turnover.

Work-Life Integration Surveys: Why Should Organizations Administer Them?

While the benefits of organizational commitment to work-life integration are easy to understand, few employers have recognized the need to conduct regular work-life integration employee surveys. Some organizational leaders may simply assume that employees enjoy their ability to work a compressed schedule or use the on-site daycare facility or dine at the cafeteria that now offers healthier food options. But how do these individuals know if these options are being fully utilized, if they need to be improved or if money is being wasted with well-intended but poorly implemented work-life programs? In most employee engagement surveys, employees are asked about overall work-life integration such as, "does your supervisor support your need to manage your work and personal life?" Or, "are you expected to work a reasonable number of hours each week?" These survey items provide limited data on whether costly work-life initiatives are well-liked or well-used. A carefully designed work-life integration survey can delve into the opinions of all available initiatives and determine those that are effective, those that need to be changed or improved and finally, those initiatives that would better be scrapped altogether!

While many HR managers make anonymous suggestion boxes available or keep an open-door policy about all personnel matters, the truth is that many employees do not feel that they have a regular opportunity to offer feedback about HR programs and practices. An employee survey that focuses specifically on work-life integration provides employees with the opportunity to give

Business Case for Work-Life Integration

Over the past 15 years, there have been many research studies that support the business case for work-life integration programs. For example in the journal, *Health and Stress*, Halpern (2005) examined the relationship between flexible work policies and absenteeism. She used data from a large sample (> 3,500) of randomly-selected, employed individuals who participated in a phone survey conducted by the National Study of the Changing Workforce. Results indicate that the greater the number of time-flexible work policies offered by an organization, the fewer absences employees had. Further, the greater the number of these policies, the fewer instances employers had in which their employees either arrived to work late or had to leave early.

organization leaders direct feedback on the quality of their initiatives. If the survey is comprehensive and well-designed, employees will have the opportunity to describe what they like about the current programs and what should be improved. Particularly if the survey is anonymous, employees will feel comfortable giving honest commentary about critical workforce issues such as:

- Is there a reasonable workload?
- Do immediate supervisors support alternative work schedules and teleworking?
- Are there adequate childcare or eldercare options?
- Are employees given sufficient PTO or vacation hours?
- Are there sufficient recreation activities for employees?
- Are there sufficient recreation activities for employees and their families?
- Are there adequate facilities for nursing mothers?

Favorable responses to such questions are key to becoming a vital and competitive organization. Organizations will experience difficulty selecting and retaining key talent if they fail to offer their prospective employees the flexibility that they seek. In fact, a recent survey conducted by the Hidden Brain Drain Task Force,

which focuses on policies related to women and minorities, found that most people now define a great place to work as one that has flexible working arrangements. This view is particularly prevalent among Baby Boomers and those of Generation Y. However, the term “flexible” can mean slightly different things from generation to generation and even from individual to individual. Therefore, a work-life integration survey can provide the data that helps to determine whether one’s work-life programs are truly meeting the needs of the majority of employees or whether they are misdirected.

This type of employee survey can provide HR managers with critical qualitative and quantitative data about work-life programs. From a quantitative perspective, surveys can provide data that pinpoints the percentage of employees who are:

- Overworked versus underworked
- Actually using the work-life programs
- Failing to use the work-life programs because they do not meet their needs
- Failing to use the work-life programs because they do not feel supported by their immediate supervisor
- Seeking out other employers who offer better work-life programs and policies

Assuming that the appropriate open-ended items are asked on the survey, HR managers

can also receive specific information on how they can improve various work-life programs and policies. This information would pinpoint which initiatives are most popular, which are under-utilized, and which may need to be better explained to the workforce. Moreover, employees may become more vested in certain programs if they feel they have been given the opportunity to improve them. Since work-life programs can be extremely costly to an organization and difficult to implement, executives often require some form of evidence that they are making a positive difference in the lives of their employees. And the best return on investment for such programs is to not only retain an employee, but to keep him or her engaged and productive.

Recommended Components of a Work-Life Integration Survey

Like any employee opinion survey, a work-life integration survey should cover a sufficient number of topics to provide critical data yet not fatigue the respondent with a survey that asks items that are redundant, poorly worded, or not actionable by organizational leaders. If HR does not have the intention of addressing a particular facet of work-life integration, it should not be asked on a survey. Rather, the survey should focus on those key elements of a work-life program that an organization wishes to improve. A work-life integration survey should assess the level of satisfaction in areas such as:

- Alternative working arrangements
- Quantity and quality of time spent with family members
- Availability and quality of childcare arrangements
- Availability and quality of eldercare arrangements
- Availability and quality of health and fitness facilities

- Time “leftover” for social life (“social calendar”)
- Time “leftover” for hobbies
- Amount of workload
- Length of typical commute
- Quality of work environment

Conclusion

While there are many differences between public and private sector organizations, one important commonality is that careful attention is now being paid toward employee work-life integration. Employees have certain expectations about work-life integration, particularly Baby Boomers and those of Generation Y. Likewise, organizations who wish to attract and retain key talent must create desirable work-life programs or they are in jeopardy of losing employees or having a workforce that is burnt out. Further, organizations that aspire to be employers of choice must devise exemplary work-life integration programs and policies.

However, these programs are very costly to an organization in terms of time and money spent on their development and implementation. Given the high expenditure involved, it would behoove organizational leaders to administer regular work-life integration employee surveys that hone in on the specific initiatives that are in place. These surveys are excellent, cost-effective opportunities to collect a wealth of information on every program and policy aimed to help employees deal with the stress of their competing professional and personal demands. Why wait years to find out that certain initiatives are not being used as intended or are simply unpopular? A comprehensive work-life integration program should include a survey component that provides continual feedback to executives about the quality and usability of each initiative. This form of assessment is the only true method for steadfast improvement and commitment to work-life integration.

How We Can Help

Assessments, such as employee surveys, need to provide meaningful information that is precise and actionable. Assessment services should enhance your management capability by maximizing your ability to identify and enhance human capital.

Management Concepts' assessment process was developed to accomplish these goals of providing relevant, action-oriented recommendations and advancing the knowledge, skills, and people of your organizations. We have extensive experience in helping your organization improve.

Our assessment process incorporates a continual improvement cycle including:

- Data-driven, proven methodologies to collect accurate data
- Analysis and results interpretation
- Specific and actionable findings that are developed collaboratively
- Prioritized solutions to advance your organization and its employees
- Consultation to implement recommendations

The process continues as new data are collected to further guide your strategy and missions. Our experts work with you throughout the assessment process to develop an improvement plan that aligns with your individual and organizational performance goals. We believe in helping our clients to become self-sufficient so that they can carry out their own solutions.

Professional Services

Management Concepts offers professional services to assist organizations in designing a survey that accommodates your organization's unique requirements. We provide post-survey facilitation to bring the results to life and help to develop and implement appropriate action plans.

In addition, we offer off-the-shelf surveys that can be implemented "as is" or minimally customized to assess many current issues that impact today's organization. Our Work-Life Integration Survey™ measures your employees' perceptions of how your organization and management support their needs to integrate work and life demands. In addition, Management Concepts Professional Skills Practice offers related training courses within our Self-Awareness and Improvement suite of offerings:

- **Increasing Individual Productivity.** Designed to help individuals seeking to better balance workload and workflow, manage time, and get more organized.
- **Minimizing Stress at Work.** Designed to help individuals seeking to reduce workplace stress to create a healthier work environment.

References

- Drago, R. W. (2007). *Striking a Balance: Work, Family, Life*. Boston, MA: Dollars & Sense.
- Gambles, R. & Lewis, S. (2006). *The Myth of Work-Life Balance: The Challenge of Our Time for Men, Women, and Societies*. West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Gurchieck, K. (2007). Work/Life Benefits for Dads Can Give Employers Edge. *Society of Human Resource Management, HR News*, Retrieved August 15, 2009 from www.shrm.org/publications/hrnews/pages/cms_021880.aspx.
- Korabik, K., Lero, D. S., & Whitehead, D. L. (2008). *Handbook of Work-Family Life Integration: Research, Theory, and Best Practices*. Oxford, UK: Elsevier.
- Mason, L. (2002). *The Working Mother's Guide to Life: Strategies, Secrets, and Solutions*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.



**Table 1: 2009 Best Places to Work and Best Companies to Work For
Rankings and Examples of their Work-Life Initiatives**

Ranking	Public Sector	Work-Life Benefits	Private Sector	Work-Life Benefits
1	Nuclear Regulatory Commission	On-site health clinics, eating establishments, child centers	NetApp	Five paid days for volunteer work, \$11,390 adoption aid, and autism coverage, financial training, EAP
2	Government Accountability Office	Telework options, fitness center, day care center, snack bar	Edward Jones	Tuition reimbursement, on-site childcare, paid sabbaticals
3	NASA	Daycare center, lactation program, telework options	Boston Consulting Group	\$5 co-pay for doctor visits, 100% fertility treatment coverage, strict weekend-off policy
4	Intelligence Community	On-site nurses, adoption assistance, eldercare referral services, athletic teams	Google	18 wks paid maternity, first-class dining facilities, gyms, laundry rooms, massage rooms, haircuts, carwashes, dry cleaning, commuting buses
5	Department of State	Fitness facility, Post Office beauty shops, dry cleaner, gift card shops	Wegmans	Free yoga classes, year-round sport league, and a host of family and employee discounts (e.g., movies, cultural events, auto services)
6	Environmental Protection Agency	Fitness Centers, stress labs, telework options	Cisco	Support for nursing mothers, funds for adoptive parents, elder care informational programs, childcare center
7	Department of Justice	Telework options, EAP, wellness program	Genentech	Childcare and backup child and eldercare services, adoption assistance, EAP, lactation programs
8	General Services Administration	Flexible schedules, transit and childcare subsidies, childcare centers	Methodist Hospital	Wellness programs, adoption assistance
9	Social Security Administration	On-site childcare, wellness programs, flexible schedules	Goldman Sachs	On-site childcare, paid sabbaticals, on-site fitness center, telecommuting options, and compressed workweek
10	Department of Commerce	Dependent and elder care, flexible schedules, EAP, telework options	Nugget Market	Flexible schedules, up to five weeks of paid vacation per year

The Best Places to Work Institute and The Great Place to Work Institute, 2009.