

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND CONSTRAINTS ON WORK-FAMILY POLICY USE: CORPORATE FLEXIBILITY POLICIES IN A GLOBAL FIRM

MARY BLAIR-LOY*

University of California, San Diego

AMY S. WHARTON*

Washington State University

ABSTRACT: *Academics, policy makers, and human resource professionals advocate flexibility policies as a way to help employees balance work and family and to promote a more committed workforce for employers. This mutually beneficial scenario assumes that employees are interested in work-family policies and perceive themselves as being able to use them. We examine these issues among managers and professionals in a global, high-commitment firm. Our analysis of individual-level and work group-level factors that contribute to workers' feeling constrained from using a corporation's generous official flexibility policies reveals that those with the heaviest job demands and least supportive work groups are most likely to feel unable to use these policies. Further, this sense of constraint is associated with lower organizational commitment. These findings suggest contradictions in the high-commitment model of employment as it has been applied to managers and professionals in the rapidly changing, competitive financial services industry.*

U.S. corporations face a series of dilemmas regarding their managerial and professional workforces. Two decades of mergers, acquisitions, downsizing, deregulation, and "investor capitalism" (Useem 1996) have led to record layoffs of white-collar workers and created demoralization and longer, more stressful work hours for other employees. At the same time, corporations need to motivate their highly skilled professional and managerial employees to meet the demands of the fast-changing and competitive global economy (Powell 2001). Firms that have succeeded in the global economy have, among other strategies, tried to elicit creative collaboration from their most highly skilled employees (Harrison 1994). However,

* The authors contributed equally to this article. Direct all correspondence to: Mary Blair-Loy, University of California, San Diego, Department of Sociology, 9500 Gilman Drive, #0533, La Jolla, CA 92093-0533; *e-mail*: blairloy@weber.ucsd.edu; and Amy S. Wharton, Washington State University, Department of Sociology, 14204 NE Salmon Creek Ave., Vancouver, WA 98686; *e-mail*: wharton@wsu.edu.

downsizing and the flattening of firm hierarchies has reduced managers' job security and eroded their organizational commitment (Osterman 1996; Powell 2001; Scott, O'Shaughnessy, and Capelli 1996).

Concurrent with these developments, work hours have increased for managers and professionals (Jacobs and Gerson 2004), who are expected to demonstrate commitment by working long hours and making work the central focus of their lives (Bailyn 1993; Blair-Loy 2003; Fried 1998; Schor 1991). In addition, the increase in mothers' labor force participation and the rise in dual-earner couples have exacerbated the time squeeze for families (Clarkberg and Moen 2001; Jacobs and Gerson 2001).

In the midst of mergers, layoffs, and long hours, how do firms retain their best employees and inspire the committed effort required in the competitive and complex global market? One response has been to adopt policies and programs designed to help employees balance work and family responsibilities. Work-family specialists, government officials, and human resource managers have developed a "business case" for work-family policies, arguing that these programs are mutually beneficial for workers and employers because they help employers to recruit, retain, and motivate a committed and productive workforce (Kelly 1999).

The business case rests on three key assumptions that are the focus of this article: that employees desire work-family policies and would be interested in using them if available, that employees perceive themselves as able to use these policies, and that employees repay employers who provide work-family policies with higher levels of commitment. Each of these assumptions is a matter of spirited debate in the literature.

For example, regarding employer interest in work-family policies, research has centered on Hochschild's (1997) claim that workers are unlikely to take advantage of work-family policies even when offered. She argued that few workers took advantage of flexibility policies in the firm she studied because they preferred time at work over time at home. Similarly, Blair-Loy (2003) finds that some senior financial executives have an extremely high personal investment in and devotion to work; presumably, they would have little interest in policies designed to reduce the time or energy they give to their jobs. If these findings are correct, many employees lack interest in work-family policies and choose not to use them.

But in a critique of Hochschild's argument, Hays (1998) counters that employees do not lack interest in work-family policies but rather feel constrained from using them. Along these lines, several studies have found that many workers wish they could work fewer hours and are very interested in work-family policies but fear that using them could hurt their careers (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002; Clarkberg and Moen 2001; Jacobs and Gerson 2004). From this perspective, many employees are interested in work-family policies but pessimistic about their ability to actually use them.

A third area of contention concerns the links between work-family policy availability, use, and commitment (Eaton 2003). Work-family policies are assumed to induce commitment by signaling that employers are invested in their employees. Researchers suggest that the availability and use of these policies can help to sustain

employees' beliefs that their long work hours and intensified work efforts are appreciated and rewarded by employers (Gittelman, Horrigan, and Joyce 1998; Konrad and Mangel 2000; Osterman 2000).

These literatures on work-family policy interest, usability, and effects on commitment have provided valuable information. Yet, because they remain separate and self-contained, the assumptions behind the business case for work-family policies have only been examined in a piecemeal fashion. If workers are uninterested in work-family policies or feel unable to use them, then these policies may not engender greater commitment, as the business case assumes. In fact, if firms offer corporate programs on paper but make it impossible for workers to use them, they may undercut the very loyalty they are trying to induce.

We address these issues by examining managers' and professionals' interest in and intended use of work-family programs in a multinational financial services firm we call International Finance (a pseudonym). We analyze data from our own survey of managerial and professional workers, supplemented by a confidential personnel database from the company and by semistructured interviews with thirteen employees.

There are many different types of work-family programs; in this article, we focus on flexibility policies. These policies include flextime, in which employees decide when to start and stop working, and flexplace or telecommuting, which allows employees to conduct some of their official business at home. Advocates argue that flexibility policies are highly desirable to workers and enhance their well-being (Friedman and Greenhaus 2000; Golden 2001a, 2001b). Some research suggests that flexibility policies are those most desired by workers with family responsibilities (Rodgers 1992). Further, the use of flexibility policies is claimed to decrease turnover and increase productivity, thereby being profitable for businesses to promote (Baltes et al. 1999; Barnett and Hall 2001; Galinsky and Bond 1998).

A previous analysis of our International Finance survey data revealed that about a quarter of respondents were currently using or had recently used flexibility policies and that patterns of use are shaped by individual and work group characteristics (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002). Our previous research focused on explaining policy *use* (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002). This article goes further by making distinctions among the population of nonusers and analyzing the individual and workplace factors that distinguish between nonusers who positively assess their chances of using flexibility policies in the future and those who would like to use these policies but feel they cannot. Thus we go beyond assumptions of individual choice implicit in much work-family research and instead consider constraint as a socially produced experience.¹ In addition, this article investigates how, among nonusers who are interested in these policies, patterns of perceived ability or inability to use flexibility policies are associated with their organizational commitment.

Rather than study these processes among typical or representative employees, we selected an extreme case of employees most likely to face the contradictory pressures of a global corporation. Our firm is in an industry strongly affected by global competition (Fraser 2001; Powell 2001). International Finance is one of the largest, multinational financial service institutions in the world. Following the

trend of other global banks, it completed a huge merger in the late 1990s, followed by a massive layoff. The company has multiple lines of businesses in more than fifty countries. It regards the handful of other global financial institutions in the world as its competitors.

On the one hand, the dedication of our high-skilled and expensive-to-replace respondents is essential to the firm's success in meeting the challenges of the fast-changing, global marketplace. International Finance officially offers an extensive set of work-family policies and is lauded in the business press as a family-friendly company. On the other hand, its employees face conditions that may limit their willingness and ability to use work-family policies, such as rounds of layoffs and precarious job security. These factors, along with stressful working conditions, a recent merger, and deteriorating pension rewards may be undermining the intense commitment the firm would like to induce.

The extreme nature of this case is useful. It calls attention to the gulf between a firm's official adoption of work-family policies and employees' willingness and ability to use them, and it throws into sharp relief the contradictory forces of inducement and attenuation of employee loyalty. This case highlights these paradoxical pressures, which may well be found in other organizations in less extreme form.²

EXPLAINING PERCEIVED INABILITY TO USE FLEXIBILITY POLICIES

As noted above, there are several reasons that workers employed by firms with generous work-family policies on the books might not take advantage of a seemingly popular option like flexibility. For example, nonuse could be due to a general lack of need for or interest in the policy; it could be a temporary situation for people intending to use the policy in the future; or it could stem from an inability to use a particular policy. The business case for work-family policies assumes that this latter group—nonusers who feel constrained from using officially available work-family policies—should be a small minority of employees. As research on a variety of work practices suggests, however, adoption of a policy does not necessarily mean that the policy can or will actually be used by employees (Edelman, Uggen, and Erlanger 1999; Fuller, Edelman, and Matusik 2000).

We consider two sets of factors that might distinguish those who would like to use flexibility policies but feel constrained from doing so from those who feel optimistic about their ability to use flexibility policies. First, feeling constrained from using flexibility policies may arise from an individual's characteristics, including gender. An employee's gender may affect whether or not he or she feels able to take advantage of flexibility policies. In our homogeneous sample of relatively privileged workers, societal norms about men's commitment to work and women's responsibility for family care may make it more difficult for male employees to take advantage of work-family policies, net of other factors (Fried 1998; Hochschild 1997).

In addition, several studies suggest that people's perceived ability to reconfigure their work lives is highly dependent on the nature of their jobs (see Friedman and Greenhaus 2000; Meiksins and Whalley 2002). In general, the less discre-

tion one has at work, the more difficult it is to make changes. This suggests that employees with low levels of job control and autonomy may feel unable to take advantage of work-family policies (Flack and Reskin 1998). Work demands may shape people's perceived options in other ways as well. For example, people with line responsibilities, that is, whose jobs require them to interact with customers or clients outside the organization, may feel more constrained from using flexibility policies than those who have a staff function and do not have to regularly meet the demands of external clients. People with high levels of responsibility—especially supervisory responsibility—may feel less able to deviate from a conventional work schedule. A work load requiring long hours may make people feel more pessimistic about being able to take advantage of policies that might ease these job demands. These observations lead us to our first set of hypotheses.³

Hypothesis 1a: Men will be more likely than women to feel constrained from using flexibility policies.

Hypothesis 1b: People with high job demands will be more likely to feel constrained from using flexibility policies than those with less demanding jobs, net of other factors. Specifically, employees with line responsibilities will be more likely to feel unable to use flexibility policies than those in a staff function. Employees who are supervisors are more likely to feel constrained than those who do not supervise others. Workers with less job control and who work longer hours have a higher probability of feeling constrained than those with more job control and shorter work hours.

Second, features of the workplace social context may affect employees' perceptions of their inability to use work-family policies. We examine the social environment by studying aspects of the respondent's work group, the work unit that shares responsibility for a common portion of business and works under one supervisor. Having a supportive supervisor might increase employees' optimism about using flexibility policies in the future (Flack and Reskin 1998; Fried 1998; Glass and Estes 1997; Kelly and Kalev 2002; Kossek, Barber, and Winters 1999). Similarly, employees might be more likely to feel they can use flexibility policies if they have coworkers who share their interest in and are thus perhaps more supportive of using these policies. Moreover, workers who are socially integrated into their work group may also feel more support from by their colleagues and thus be more likely to feel able to use flexibility policies.

Because many work-family benefits are not fully institutionalized (Kelly 1999), the social support of powerful actors may be important in allowing employees to feel comfortable using these contested policies (DiMaggio 1988). Our earlier research on this sample found that employees were more likely actually to use policies when they had powerful supervisors and coworkers who buffer them from the perceived risks. Perhaps this effect also extends to those employees who would like to use these policies in the future.

More powerful individuals and groups generally receive more of the organization's resources, including salary (see Mowday 1978; Pfeffer 1997; Reskin and Ross 1995). Employees with more seniority are likely to have developed more

extensive networks (Davies-Netzley 1998) and be more socially involved with coworkers than those with less organizational tenure. Workers with longer tenure may also have greater access than others to more desirable jobs and work assignments and to positions involving more autonomy and discretion (Mowday, Porter, and Steers 1982). This research suggests that employees in work groups with higher average salaries and longer average tenures are surrounded by powerful coworkers, whose support could enhance their assurance in using the policies in the future.

Hypothesis 2a: Employees in a less supportive work group will be more likely to feel constrained from using flexibility policies, controlling for other factors. Specifically, employees with unsupportive supervisors will be more likely to feel constrained than those with supportive supervisors. Employees in work groups with a higher proportion of men and a higher proportion of people without children will be more likely than others to feel unable to use flextime and flexplace. Employees who feel less socially integrated into their work group will feel more constrained than those who feel they are fully part of their work group.

Hypothesis 2b: Employees with less powerful coworkers, specifically, those with a higher proportion of lower-paid and junior work group members, will be more likely to feel constrained from using these policies than their counterparts with more highly paid and senior colleagues.

Organizational commitment has been well studied by others (e.g., Berg, Kalleberg, and Applebaum 2003; Caldwell, Chatman, and O'Reilly 1990; Lincoln and Kalleberg 1990; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Mowday, Porter, and Steers 1982; Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly 1992). While a general examination of organizational commitment per se is beyond the scope of this article, we study the association between employees' perceived inability to use flexibility policies and their organizational commitment, net of other factors. Many researchers have suggested that employers who provide work-life benefits, including flexibility policies, reap the rewards of higher employee commitment (Dalton and Mesch 1990; Friedman and Greenhaus 2000; Grover and Crooker 1995; Rodgers 1992; Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness 1999). This is not surprising, given the view that many employers provide work-family policies to professionals (and managers) in part to increase their loyalty and encourage work effort (Konrad and Mangel 2000; Osterman 1995). Using an exchange model, Lambert (2000) finds a positive relationship between workers' views of the usefulness of work-family benefits and organizational citizenship. Lambert (2000:811) suggests that the provision of work-family benefits "may create a generalized sense of obligation to the workplace," leading employees to engage in a variety of behaviors helpful to their company. Her model assumes that norms about reciprocity influence employee behavior: employers provide benefits that employees need and want, and employees reciprocate by being better corporate citizens.

But what are the consequences when this relationship breaks down? What occurs when employers provide benefits that employees need and want, but

employees feel constrained from using these policies? In a sample of technical and professional workers, Eaton (2003) found that the presence of flexibility policies alone did not increase organizational commitment but that it was the *perceived usability* of such policies that mattered. Similarly, we expect that the company's promise that flexibility policies are officially available coupled with workers' inability to use these policies (e.g., because of intense job demands) should lead to feelings of frustration and diminished commitment.

Hypothesis 3: Employees who feel constrained from using flexibility policies will report lower levels of organizational commitment than other employees.

DATA AND VARIABLES

Data

In 1998 International Finance gave us permission to study work-family policies in their organization and provided us with a confidential personnel database, from which we constructed variables measuring supervisor characteristics and aggregate characteristics of work groups. We constructed another data set based on our own survey of managerial and professional employees' characteristics and their use of and attitudes toward work-family policies at this firm.

In 1999, after first pretesting our survey at another organization, we administered it in three divisions at International Finance.⁴ One division in the sample provides professional staff services to the organization; the other two serve customers in core line functions. We sent the United States survey analyzed here to all U.S.-based managerial and professional employees of two of these divisions and to a subset of the third division.⁵ One division in the sample provides professional staff services to the organization; the other two serve customers in core line functions. Because we are interested in the social context of work, we kept track of work group membership and surveyed all work group members, including the supervisor. These work groups range from two to seventy-three employees, with a median of thirteen. Each group works on a common portion of business and shares one supervisor.

The total number of usable surveys completed was 519, 52 percent of our original survey population.⁶ We analyze a subset of this sample here. Our aggregate work group variables are constructed from the personnel database provided by the company, which had information on more than 90 percent of our original survey population.

Dependent Variables

Our dependent variables measure *whether employees feel constrained from using flextime policies and flexplace policies*. Sample members were asked about their interest in and use of nine work-family policies, including flextime and flexplace. These items were worded as "Flextime: Employees determine the hours at which they start and stop working" and "Flexplace/telecommuting: Employees work

part of the time away from the office." The response categories are (1) "have used/am currently using";⁷ (2) "could possibly use in the future"; (3) "would like to use, but doubtful I will be able to"; and (4) "no need/no interest."⁸ Because our focus here is on nonusers, we eliminate current and previous users of flexibility policies (the first response). *Constrained* is a dichotomous variable constructed from the third response category. We constructed separate measures for each flexibility policy.⁹

Our other dependent variable is *organizational commitment*. This variable represents employees' average level of agreement with six survey items (Cronbach's alpha = .78). These items, all drawn from previous commitment research (e.g., Caldwell, Chatman, and O'Reilly 1990; Mowday, Porter, and Steers 1982; Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly 1992), are as follows: I am willing to put in a great deal of extra effort beyond that normally expected in order to help International Finance (IF) be successful (reverse coded); I feel very little loyalty to IF; I find that my values and IF's values are very similar (reverse coded); I could just as well be working for a different company as long as I was doing the same type of work; I really care about the fate of IF (reverse coded); IF really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance (reverse coded). Higher values of this variable indicate higher levels of organizational commitment. Response categories are: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = somewhat agree, 3 = somewhat disagree, and 4 = strongly disagree.

Independent Variables

To test Hypotheses 1a and 1b, we included a measure of *gender* (1 = female, 0 = male) and several measures of *job characteristics and work demands*. For our job control item, respondents indicated their level of agreement (strongly disagree through strongly agree) with the statement "All things considered, I have a lot of control over how I do my work." Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived job control. Other variables are hours worked (measured in hours) and whether one supervises others (1 = supervisor). We also measured whether the individual was a member of a work group whose function was line or staff (1 = staff).

Hypotheses 2a and 2b require measures of supervisor and coworker support and work group power. *Supervisor supportiveness* is an individual-level measure of respondents' perception of their supervisor's support for work-family balance. This variable represents employees' mean level of agreement (from 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree) with four items (alpha = .83): "My supervisor and I approach work-related problems in the same way"; "My supervisor is willing to make informal arrangements to help employees balance work and family/personal life"; "My supervisor has realistic expectations of my job performance"; and "My supervisor and I have similar priorities when it comes to balancing work and family life." Items are reverse coded so that higher values indicate greater perceived supervisor support. To measure coworker support, we use measures of the *percentage of parents in the work group* and the *percentage of women in the work group*. Employees who feel integrated into their work group may also feel more supported. To tap *social integration* into the work group, we include a measure

that workers checked if they felt it described them: "I feel I am really part of the group of people I work with" (1 = item checked, 0 = not checked). Our work group power measures, *mean log organizational tenure of work group members* and *mean log work group salary*, were constructed from the personnel data base supplied to us by the company.

To test Hypothesis 3, our key independent variable was a dummy variable indicating employees who feel constrained from using flexibility policies. This analysis also contained several individual-level variables that previous research has shown to be associated with organizational commitment. These variables are included primarily as controls; our goal in these analyses is not to identify all of the factors that explain organizational commitment but rather to assess the effects of constraint on commitment. Control variables are demographic characteristics, such as age (measured in years), female, and race, and whether the employee was born in the United States. We also included measures of log organizational tenure, salary, and average hours worked per week.

RESULTS

Description

Roughly 23 percent of our sample report recent or current use of flextime; 13 percent report recent or current use of flexplace. This article focuses on the remainder of respondents, those who have *not* used flexibility policies. Most nonusers (roughly 80 percent) are interested in using flextime policies: 50 percent are interested in flextime policies and anticipate using these policies at some point in the future, while 30 percent report interest in these policies but feel constrained from using them. The remaining 20 percent of nonusers report that they have no need for or interest in these policies. The results for flexplace policies are similar, showing high levels of interest.

Tables 1 and 2 compare respondents in these three groups. As Table 1 shows, those who express no need for or interest in flextime policies are older, work longer hours, have higher salaries, and are more likely to be supervisors than the other two groups. They are also more likely than members of the other two groups to have a homemaking spouse. In addition to these differences in job and family characteristics, respondents reporting no need for or interest in flextime policies express the highest levels of organizational commitment of the three groups.

The results for flexplace, shown in Table 2, are somewhat similar. Older workers and supervisors are less likely to express need for or interest in flexplace policies than are other workers. Interest in these policies is significantly lower among those in staff positions and in work groups with longer average tenure. Those uninterested in flexplace policies also report higher levels of organizational commitment than do other groups.

Figures 1 through 6 depict some of these differences. Two patterns are especially noteworthy. First, within this homogeneous group of high-earning, hard-working finance professionals, the minority claiming no need for or interest in flexibility possibilities also tends to occupy the higher levels of seniority, status,

TABLE 1
Comparisons of Means for Three Groups of Nonusers of Flexitime Policies

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Anticipate Using (n = 195)</i>	<i>Constrained from Using (n = 125)</i>	<i>No Need/ No Interest (n = 74)</i>	<i>Total Nonusers (N = 394)</i>
Family and demographic				
Female	.400	.456	.409	.421
Spouse is full-time homemaker	.154	.081	.219	.143*
Age	41.5 (9.4)	42.2 (8.2)	44.2 (9.3)	42.2 (9.4) ⁺
Job				
Average weekly hours worked	51.5 (8.5)	53.6 (10.2)	55.24 (9.9)	52.9 (9.4)**
Supervise others	.041	.096	.162	.081**
Salary	95,235 (48,851)	106,557 (59,436)	118,402 (59,958)	103,155 (55,110)
Log organizational tenure	1.849 (1.1)	1.958 (1.0)	1.936 (1.2)	1.900 (1.1) ⁺
Job control	2.668 (.73)	2.416 (.89)	2.726 (.84)	2.599 (.81)**
Staff function	.626	.512	.583	.582
Work group				
Percent female	.455 (.27)	.481 (.25)	.482 (.23)	.468 (.26)
Percent parents	75.428 (19.2)	72.610 (22.8)	76.389 (18.9)	74.705 (20.3)
Log mean organizational tenure	1.703 (.63)	1.847 (.57)	1.751 (.50)	1.758 (.59) ⁺
Log mean salary	11.298 (.31)	11.321 (.32)	11.363 (.36)	11.317 (.32)
Attitudes				
Organizational commitment	2.805 (.62)	2.602 (.53)	2.887 (.68)	2.756 (.61)**
Supervisor supportiveness	3.021 (.70)	2.898 (.78)	3.154 (.73)	3.007 (.73) ⁺

Notes: Mean difference, * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; ⁺ $p < .10$.

and income. They seem to resemble the ideal type of the devoted executive, one who makes work the center of his or her life and is rewarded for that dedication (Blair-Loy 2003).

In contrast, most sample members are interested in flexibility policies, but there are important differences between those who feel optimistic about their ability to use these policies and those who would like to use the policies but feel they cannot. For example, as the figures show, employees who feel constrained from using flexibility policies fall in the middle of the three subsamples on many measures. They are less likely to be supervisors than those claiming no interest but more likely than employees who use or anticipate using these programs (Fig. 1). They work fewer hours than the devoted executives who claim no interest but more hours than those who are using or who see themselves using flexibility policies in

TABLE 2
Comparisons of Means for Three Groups of Nonusers of Flexplace Policies

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Anticipate Using (n = 224)</i>	<i>Constrained from Using (n = 154)</i>	<i>No Need/ No Interest (n = 70)</i>	<i>Total Nonusers (N = 448)</i>
Family and demographic				
Female	.428	.401	.449	.422
Spouse is full-time homemaker	.147	.113	.197	.143
Age	42.1 (9.6)	41.8 (8.8)	44.7 (9.0)	42.4 (9.3) ⁺
Job				
Average weekly hours worked	52.1 (9.1)	51.1 (8.4)	53.1 (11.0)	51.9 (9.2)
Supervise others	.049	.065	.155	.071**
Salary	97,601 (48,499)	98,926 (54,465)	109,782 (63,642)	99,965 (53,207)
Log organizational tenure	1.871 (1.1)	2.021 (.9)	2.097 (1.0)	1.958 (1.0)
Job control	2.722 (.78)	2.480 (.81)	2.686 (.83)	2.634 (.80)**
Staff function	.737	.562	.437	.630***
Work group				
Percent female	.420 (.25)	.459 (.24)	.517 (.27)	.449 (.25)
Percent parents	75.658 (18.6)	74.198 (21.2)	73.831 (19.6)	74.884 (19.7)
Log mean organizational tenure	1.683 (.63)	1.860 (.50)	1.901 (.50)	1.777 (.58)***
Log mean salary	11.303 (.28)	11.287 (.30)	11.335 (.42)	11.302 (.31)
Attitudes				
Organizational commitment	2.801 (.60)	2.583 (.57)	2.852 (.72)	2.734 (.62)**
Supervisor supportiveness	3.079 (.68)	2.903 (.76)	3.004 (.70)	3.007 (.71) ⁺

Notes: Mean difference, * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; + $p < .10$.

the future (Fig. 2). Their average salaries are also intermediate between the other two groups (Fig. 3). Workers who want to use either flexibility policy but cannot are further pinched by less control at work: on average, they report the least job control of all three groups (Fig. 4).

In sum, in our sample of managers and professionals, those who feel unable to take advantage of flexibility policies are close to—but not at—the top in terms of supervisory status, income, and concomitant long work hours and demands. They feel the most pressured at work, reporting the lowest average level of job control across all three groups. They also tend to have the heaviest responsibilities at home, as they are least likely to have a homemaking spouse (Fig. 5). These valuable employees are among those most in need flexibility policies but find them most out of reach. Moreover, they report the lowest levels of organizational commitment (Fig. 6).

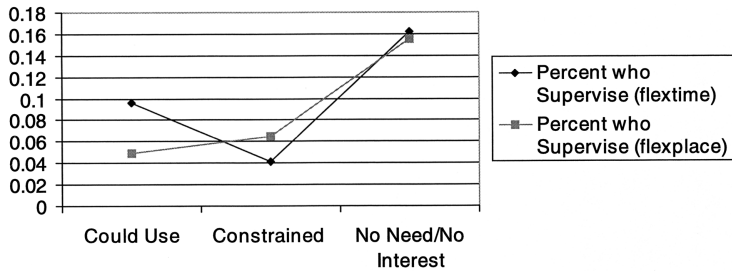


Figure 1
Subsample Comparison of Percent Who Supervise

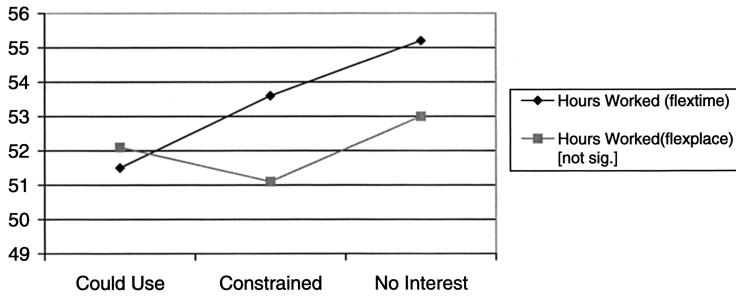


Figure 2
Subsample Comparison of Hours Worked

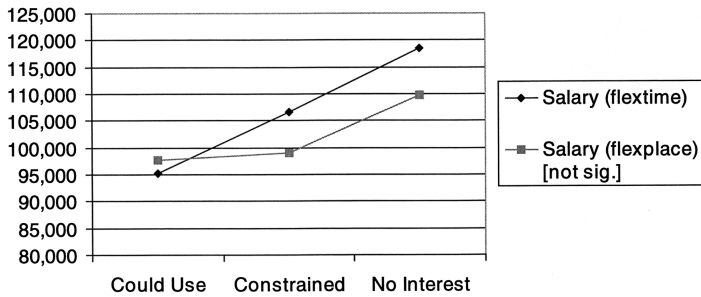


Figure 3
Subsample Comparison of Salary

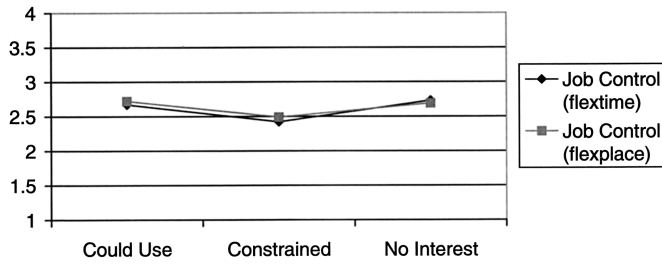


Figure 4
Subsample Comparison of Job Control

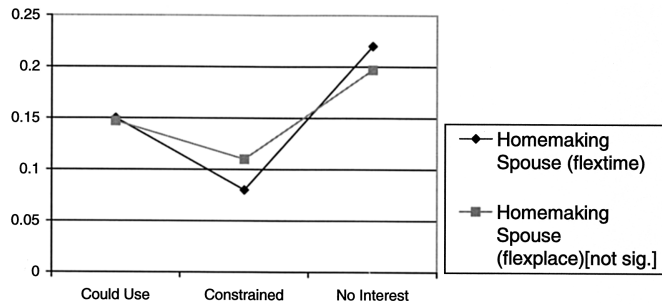


Figure 5
Subsample Comparison of Homemaking Spouse

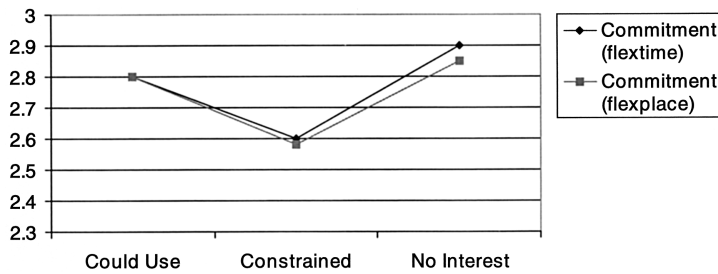


Figure 6
Subsample Comparison of Organizational Commitment

Explaining Constraint

Our next set of results goes beyond these descriptive findings to identify the factors that predict constraint. These analyses identify the differences between those who anticipate using flexibility policies in the future and those who would like to use these policies but feel they cannot. Those expressing no need for or no interest in flexibility policies are eliminated from these models. By systematically excluding people expressing no interest in flexibility policies, we introduce a potential bias into our analyses (Berk 1983). To avoid this misspecification, the results shown in Table 3 include a correction factor in the form of a hazard rate (Berk 1983).¹⁰

Because our data consist of individuals nested within work groups, we used HLM5.0 to estimate a two-level multilevel model (Bryk, Raudenbush, and Congdon 1996; see also Bryk and Raudenbush 1992; DiPrete and Forristal 1994). Multilevel models are useful when data are arranged hierarchically (e.g., workers within work groups). Our two-level model differentiates between individual-level data and data collected at the work group level. Multilevel analyses can take many forms; we use a nonlinear random-intercept model.

The first column of Table 3 shows the effects of gender and job demands on workers' feelings of constraint. These results fail to support Hypothesis 1a but weakly support Hypothesis 1b. In contrast to our expectation that men would feel more constrained than women from using flextime and flexplace, the respondent's gender did not significantly affect constraint. Respondents' perceived ability to use both types of flexibility policies is shaped by whether their work group had a line or staff function. Those with a line function were significantly more pessimistic about their ability to use flextime and flexplace policies than were others. Line managers and professionals, who service external clients, are likely to be at the mercy of their clients' schedules. In contrast, staff managers and professionals may have more latitude in deciding when and where they accomplish the tasks that service the internal organization.

Other job demands either fail to predict constraint or operate somewhat differently for the two types of flexibility policies. Those working longer hours are more pessimistic about their ability to use flextime policies than those working fewer hours, though this effect is only marginally significant in this model ($p = .07$). This effect is consistent with Hypothesis 1b: perceived constraint increases with greater work demands. In the case of flexplace policies, we found that constraint is significantly higher among those reporting lower levels of job control. Ironically, although flexibility policies are designed, in part, to give people more control over their work hours, the perceived ability to use them depends on how much control one's job already provides.

Column 2 shows the addition of six variables measuring the supportiveness of supervisors and coworkers (Hypothesis 2a and 2b). As expected, members of work groups containing lower percentages of parents reported greater feelings of constraint regarding use of flextime policies than did work groups containing a higher percentage of parents. Similarly, employees whose work groups have a lower proportion of women report more constraint in using flextime, although this effect is only marginally significant.

TABLE 3
 Predictors of Being Constrained from Using Flextime and Flexplace Policies^a

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Gender and Job Demands^b</i>	<i>Coworker and Supervisor Support^c</i>
Flextime (<i>N</i> = 283)		
Intercept	-.150	2.149
Supervisor	.783	.837
Job control	-.241	-.215
Hours worked	.030 ⁺	.033 [*]
Staff function	-.637 [*]	-.672 ^{**}
Female	.054	.282
Perceived social integration	—	.271
Percent parents in work group	—	-.011 [*]
Percent women in work group	—	-1.131 ⁺
Supervisor supportiveness	—	-.112
Work group mean log organizational tenure	—	.458 ⁺
Work group mean log salary	—	-.158
Hazard rate	-2.142	-3.039
Flexplace (<i>N</i> = 332)		
Intercept	.156	4.587
Supervisor	.398	.490
Job control	-.395 ^{**}	-.403 [*]
Hours worked	-.019	-.015
Staff function	-.863 ^{**}	-.816 ^{**}
Female	-.336	-.263
Perceived social integration	—	-.102
Percent parents in work group	—	-.007
Percent women in work group	—	-.570
Supervisor supportiveness	—	.045
Work group mean log organizational tenure	—	.521 [*]
Mean log salary	—	-.408
Hazard rate	-1.800	-2.323

Notes: Includes only those who are interested in the policy and either anticipate using it in the future or feel constrained from using the policy. Excludes those who have no need, no interest in policy.

^a Random intercept model, population-average estimates with robust standard errors.

^b Variance component for intercept: .146 (Chi-square = 67.97, *df* = 72, *p* > .50) for flextime; .180 (Chi-square = 80.15, *df* = 71, *p* = .24) for flexplace.

^c Variance component for intercept: .154 (Chi-square = 63.20, *df* = 68, *p* > .50) for flextime; .138 (Chi-square = 74.08, *df* = 67, *p* = .26) for flexplace.

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; + *p* < .10 (two-tailed tests).

In general, however, the hypothesis that employees with more supportive supervisors and coworkers will feel less constrained receives only modest support. The degree of social integration employees feel at work fails to predict constraint for either type of flexibility policy. In addition, contrary to previous research, employees with less supportive supervisors were no more pessimistic about their ability to use either type of flexibility policy than those with more

supportive supervisors. Though having a supportive supervisor may be important in other ways, our results suggest that other factors play a larger role in shaping our managerial and professional respondents' perceived ability to use flexibility policies.

We expected that employees' perceived ability to use flexibility policies would be enhanced if they had powerful colleagues (Hypothesis 2b). However, we find that feelings of constraint regarding both flextime and flexplace are significantly higher among employees in more senior work groups. Although this finding is contrary to our expectations that powerful work groups could facilitate optimism about policy use, seniority may be as much an indicator of work group responsibility and demands as an indicator of work group power. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, as responsibilities increase, employees' perceived ability to use flexibility policies declines. Our other measure of work group power, mean log work group salary, is not associated with constraint.

Generally, we find some evidence that that the social context of work shapes people's perceived ability to use flextime policies. Although a respondent's own gender had no effect, those in work groups containing a higher proportion of men are more pessimistic about their ability to use flextime policies than those whose work groups had a higher proportion of women. Similarly, respondents in work groups containing fewer parents and more senior workers feel more constrained from using flextime than those in work groups containing more parents or more junior workers. Social context plays a more limited role in explaining respondents' perceived ability to use flexplace. Having more senior colleagues augments workers' feelings of constraint. This pessimism is also increased by individual job characteristics, such as less autonomy and a line position.

Relations between Constraint and Commitment

The next step in our analysis is to examine whether feeling unable to use flexibility policies affects respondents' organizational commitment. We use an OLS model in which constraint is the key independent variable and organizational commitment is the dependent variable. Our model also contains several controls that previous research has identified as antecedents of commitment. In general, it has been suggested that commitment should be higher among those who are older, female, and more highly paid, have longer organizational tenure and greater autonomy, and exercise authority (Mathieu and Zajac 1990). We also controlled for hours worked and racial-ethnic background.

These OLS results are reported in Table 4.¹¹ Column 1 reports the findings for flextime. The effects of the control variables shown in this column are roughly consistent with previous research: commitment is significantly higher among older workers, those working more hours per week, and those with greater job autonomy. Supervisors are more committed than nonsupervisors; and nonwhite U.S.-born employees are less committed than U.S.-born whites. Satisfaction with supervisors also increases commitment. The findings for flexplace, contained in column 2, are similar: organizational commitment is higher among supervisors, those working more hours per week, and those with more job autonomy.

TABLE 4
 OLS Analysis of Relationship between Constraint and Organizational Commitment

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Organizational Commitment</i>
Flexitime policies (<i>N</i> = 319)	
Constrained from using flexitime	-.159**
Supervisor supportiveness	.211**
Job control	.170**
Supervisor	.300*
Age	.001 ⁺
Female	.072
Hours worked	.006 ⁺
Salary	-.000
Log organizational tenure	.035
Nonwhite, U.S.-born	-.189 ⁺
White, born outside U.S.	-.036
Nonwhite, born outside U.S.	.092
Constant	1.125**
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.202
Flexplace policies (<i>N</i> = 377)	
Constrained from using flexplace	-.138*
Supervisor supportiveness	.228*
Job control	.132**
Supervisor	.270*
Age	.005
Female	.035
Hours worked	.008*
Salary	-.000
Log organizational tenure	.028
Nonwhite, U.S.-born	-.098
White, born outside U.S.	-.081
Nonwhite, born outside U.S.	.127
Constant	1.079**
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.173

Notes: Includes only those who are interested in the policy and either anticipate using it in the future or feel constrained from using it. Excludes those who have no need for, no interest in policy.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ⁺*p* < .10 (two-tailed tests).

Even with these controls for demographic, family, and job characteristics, however, employees who feel constrained from using flexibility policies have significantly lower levels of organizational commitment than do those who are more optimistic about their ability to use these policies. These results are consistent with others' claims that work-family policy "usability" matters when considering the relationships between policies and commitment (Eaton 2003).

To further explore these relationships, we reestimated our models with the entire sample. These models included all of the control variables used in the previous analyses, and they included three dummy variables: constrained from

using flexibility policies, optimistic about using flexibility policies, and current or past users of flexibility policies. Those indicating no need for or interest in flexibility policies were the reference category.

The results from these analyses (not reported) show that those who are constrained from using both flextime and flexplace policies are less committed to the organization than those with no need for or interest in these policies (though these differences are only modestly significant). Commitment levels do not significantly differ for those who are optimistic about using them in the future and those with no need for or interest in the policies.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Academics, policy makers, and human resource professionals promote flexibility policies as a way to help employees balance work and family responsibilities. According to the business case for work-family corporate policies, employers also benefit as reap the gains of a more committed workforce. This scenario assumes that employees are interested in work-family policies and perceive themselves as being able to use them. Our paper links these issues of employees' interest in flexibility policies, their belief that they can actually use these policies, and the consequences for organizational commitment.

In this sample, employees reporting no interest are in the minority, yet they are among the most senior and most highly paid. These high-ranking employees seem to have the strongest "devotion to work" ethic (Blair-Loy 2003) and, like Hochschild's (1997) respondents, seem to enjoy spending long days at work (see also Friedman and Greenhaus 2000). They put in the longest hours and are the most committed to the corporation. Many have family situations that offer little competition to their work, as they are significantly more likely than other groups to have a homemaking spouse. While the proportion of sample members uninterested in flexibility policies is small, these respondents are likely to have influence over the professional demands, workplace culture, and possible use of flexibility policies among their subordinates.

But most respondents in fact do express interest in officially available flexibility policies. These policies are not radical, considering the degree of autonomy that managers and professionals are likely to have. Unlike policies such as reduced hours and parental leave, flexibility policies do not cut work hours and may even facilitate working longer hours. This is especially true of flexplace policies. Yet despite their benign nature, and consistent with Hays's (1998) argument, roughly a third of nonusers of flexibility policies feel constrained from using them.

Heavy job demands are one important source of these constraints. In our sample, the managers and professionals who would like to use flexibility policies but feel they cannot tend to be in line management. Working long hours constrains employees from using flextime policies, which are designed to allow employees to rearrange their work schedules. Employees who are already putting in long hours have few degrees of freedom available to make these adjustments. Working long hours is not a primary source of constraint for workers interested in using flexplace policies, however. By enabling people to shift the physical location of

work, flexplace policies may actually facilitate a long workday. The lack of job control more broadly is an important source of constraint for workers interested in flexplace policies. For both policies, having more senior coworkers increases managers' and professionals' feelings of constraint.

In the case of flextime, support from having a high percentage of women or parents in one's work group increases the chance that workers will feel they can use flextime. We do not know why these particular work group characteristics were related to constraint vis-à-vis flextime but not flexplace policies. Perhaps use of flextime policies requires somewhat more cooperation from coworkers than use of flexplace policies. Yet having a supportive supervisor is insufficient to enable either type of policy use. Supervisor support alone cannot counteract the effects of a crushing workload. And women are just as likely as men to feel unable to take advantage of both types of flexibility policies.

In sum, even in a corporation lauded as family-friendly, many employees who would like to take advantage of flexibility policies feel that their jobs prevent them from doing so. Ironically, the respondents who may need flexibility policies the most are the least likely to feel able to use them. The potential benefits of work-family policies thus are limited by the same forces these policies were, in principle, designed to address: the intense demands and responsibilities of jobs and family life. The official availability of corporate work-family policies alone is insufficient to alter these patterns.

Some researchers claim that companies offer work-life policies in order to burish their reputations as desirable employers and to aid in recruitment (e.g., Kelly 1999). Further, studies have shown links between the use of flexibility policies and enhanced commitment and performance (Dalton and Mesch 1990; Eaton 2003; Glass and Riley 1998; Rodgers 1992). Our results qualify this argument. In our sample, workers who feel constrained from using flexibility policies are significantly less committed to the firm than are other employees.

Some scholars contend that there has been a general deterioration of commitment among managers and professionals in industries such as financial services (Fraser 2001; Frenkel et al. 1999). This argument is that, despite the popular rhetoric about family-friendly workplaces, various corporate policies, linked in part to globalization, have recently worsened the quality of managers' and professionals' work and family lives. Our findings indicate that corporate work conditions and intense job demands make it hard for many employees, men and women, to take advantage of work-life policies, and these processes could be contributing to the deteriorating work lives studied by previous researchers.

Our results underscore the precarious nature of commitment in a competitive, global economy. Work demands are increasing at the same time that employers face pressures to provide extensive benefits ostensibly designed for greater work-life balance. To the extent that the demands of work interfere with employees' ability to use work-family policies, however, employees' commitment to the firm is likely to decline. This will make it more difficult to sustain the win-win scenario promoted by advocates of the business case for these policies.

Our research focuses on an extreme case: managers and professionals in a formally family-friendly yet highly competitive global company. Our case examines

the elite end of the national distribution of workers. Our respondents have highly paid, high-status jobs in a corporation that offers a generous array of family-friendly policies on paper. Previous research suggests that workers with relatively more privilege are more likely to have access to work-family benefits or flexible arrangements (Glass and Camarigg 1992; Glass and Estes 1997; Glass and Finley 2002; Glass and Fujimoto 1995; Kelly and Kalev 2002). Yet to assume that more privileged workers also have more ability to *use* work-family policies would be misleading. In our sample, managers and professionals with higher levels of responsibility and authority have *less* ability to use these policies than do those with somewhat lower status.

We are conducting research that extends this type of analysis to other kinds of employees, and we encourage other analysts to do the same. Among a broad population of employees with access to work-family policies, future research may establish an inverse relationship, or possibly an inverted U-shaped relationship, between flexibility policy use and workers' level of privilege, responsibility, and authority. Relatively little research on work-family policies has focused on working-class employees. Feelings of constraint may be especially high among this group of workers, who lack the resources available to managers and professionals. The sources of constraint may also be different among working-class employees than among other groups.

We also urge further study of workers' use and perceptions of work-family policies. This is particularly important as more firms make these policies officially available. Similar to Fuller, Edelman, and Matusik's (2000:200) call for research on "intraorganizational constructions of law," we encourage more research on how employees make sense of work-family policies in their organizations and the consequences of these interpretations.

APPENDIX A

Logistic Regression Predicting No Interest in Flextime and Flexplace Policies

<i>Independent Variables</i> ^a	<i>Flextime</i>	<i>Flexplace</i>
Supervisor	.809*	1.146**
Married or cohabiting	-.453	-.563 ⁺
Female	.166	.191
Have young child(ren)	-.162	-.022
Have school age child(ren)	-.153	-.535
Single parent	.240	-.683
Age	-.032**	-.032**
Provide special care	-.095	.553 ⁺
Homemaking spouse	.685 ⁺	.704 ⁺
Constant	2.000	2.358 ⁺
χ^2 (df = 9)	14.237	24.433**

^aAll variables are dichotomous, with the exception of age (coded in years).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; ⁺ $p < .10$.

Acknowledgments: We thank Pui-Ya Lam for expert research assistance.

NOTES

1. We thank an anonymous reviewer for helping us to articulate this point more clearly.
2. Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, and Crouter (2000) also advocate the use of extreme or exemplar cases for identifying social processes of theoretical interest. See also Blair-Loy 1999.
3. We have used the indicator of whether one is a supervisor as a measure of job demands and discussed it in Hypothesis 1b. Alternatively, supervisor status could be understood as an indicator for autonomy or discretion at work. Later, we use mean work group organizational tenure as a measure of work group power (Hypothesis 2b). It could also be viewed as an indicator of job demands (Hypothesis 1b), which may increase with greater seniority.
4. The sample analyzed here is a part of a larger international sample. This article analyzes only U.S. employees, because they had official access to the same set of flexibility policies. The surveys were confidential, and they were anonymous to the extent that we knew what work group a response came from but not what individual.
5. For the third division, the survey was sent to U.S.-based professional and managerial employees in three major geographic centers.
6. It is extremely challenging for researchers to penetrate organizations (see Jackall 1988; Smith 2001). Nevertheless, our response rate is comparable to the 52.9 percent response rate for the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce, a telephone survey of individuals using random-digit-dialing methods (see also Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg 1998). We did extensive tests for selection bias and found no evidence that this was a problem in our data; for details see (see Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002).
7. The questionnaire has one combined response of "have used/am currently using" flextime or flexplace. Since flexibility policies had been introduced to International Finance roughly a year before the survey date, any workers' previous policy use would have been quite recent. Moreover, this combined category captures respondents whose policy use began in the past but has continued into the present.
8. For some workers, a response of "no need/no interest" could be based on a sense of underlying constraint; some may say they have no need for or interest in these policies because use seems outside the realm of possibility. Our data do not allow us to distinguish between those for whom a "no need/no interest" response represents their true feelings and those for whom this response is a way to rationalize lack of opportunity. Under these circumstances, we believe it is appropriate to take this response at face value—as an indication of "no need/no interest" in flexibility policies.
9. There is considerable overlap between these two groups; approximately 94 percent of people interested in flexibility policies were interested in both flextime and flexplace.
10. Our hazard rates were estimated from the logit model shown in Appendix A. These rates represent the predicted probability of having "no interest" in each type of flexibility policy (Berk 1983). Previous research suggests that women will be more likely than men to be interested, net of other factors, because women generally shoulder more responsibility than men for domestic work in addition to their market work (Spain and Bianchi 1996). Further, studies have found that "critical constituents" most interested in work-family policies are mothers (and sometimes fathers) with family responsibilities, especially those without a homemaking spouse (Goodstein 1994:357; see also

Ingram and Simon 1995; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Osterman 1995; Powell 1999; Sandberg 1999; Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness 1999).

11. HLM models for this dependent variable produced substantially the same results as the OLS models. For ease of interpretation, we report the OLS results here.

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