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# Building a Citizenship Argument on Top of the Business Case Argument: A Systemic Perspective on Work–Family Articulation

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As a work–life scholar at a Grande Ecole in France and a former project leader, entrepreneur and Accenture manager, I agree with Kossek, Baltes, and Matthews (2011) that work–family research seems to be making less of an impact on practice than it should. Making an impact on practice is a challenge in many areas of social sciences research, not only for work–family research (Rynes & Shapiro, 2005). Yet work–family research is a particularly complex area of research because of its intrinsic cross-disciplinary nature and of the many layers of context it has to embrace. Each one of us reads and designs research through a set of lenses: the gender lens, the ethnicity lens, the disciplinary lens, and the country of origin lens, to name only a few. The Kossek et al.'s article is no exception: it is rooted in industrial–organizational (I–O) psychology and proposes typical U.S. centric views. This commentary provides a different perspective that, combined with their perspective and other scholars', may help moving the field toward making a greater impact. Specifically, I argue that to make an impact, work–life research needs to embrace a systemic perspective encompassing invisible stakeholders as well as workers, and civil society and government as well as individuals and organizations. In short, work–life research needs to build a ''citizenship argument'' on top of the business case argument.

The research agenda presented by Kossek et al. puts most of the onus on individuals (Paths 1 and 2) and on organizations (Path 3) rather than on government and civil society. This is in line with the precepts of I–O psychology and with the fundamental attachment of Americans to individual freedom over regulated solidarity (Googins, 1994). Kossek et al. do encourage scholars to engage in public policy advocacy (Path 4), yet their recommendations for international research are to measure culture, apparently omitting the socio institutional context that is another crucial component of national context (i.e., laws and public provisions, labor market system, education system, health system, tax system). Although it is indeed very valuable to train individuals in coping with multiple roles and using technology to their advantage and very valuable to help organizations address the implementation gap, I will explain why, in my opinion, improving work–life balance requires encompassing the micro (individuals), meso (organizations), and macro (national context) levels in a systemic perspective.

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I concur with Kossek et al. on the importance of the language we use. I use the broader definition of work–life balance emerging from Greenhaus and Allen (2011)'s analysis and thus define work–life balance as a combination of low work–life conflict, high work–life enrichment, and alignment of one's effectiveness in work and family roles with one's life values at a given point in time. I choose the ''work–life articulation'' language because it avoids the pitfalls of balance: One articulates multiple roles with no implication that equal amounts of time and energy should be devoted to each of the spheres by everyone. The articulation language also avoids the individualist perspective of the ''conciliation'' language, which implies that individuals choose how they reconcile roles—although in fact social norms and other layers of context such as public provisions, workplace policies, and supervisor attitudes toward work–life strongly constrain individual decisions.

A systemic perspective is required for work–family research to make an impact in practice because the business case argument, taken alone, simply is not powerful enough to foster deep-seated change at the workplace and in society. Work–life scholars need to develop a citizenship argument as well as a business argument. One reason for the failure of the business case argument, taken alone, to make an impact is the centrality of work in our societies. Work is currently the most valued sphere of life in most industrialized countries, including in the United States, as noted by Kossek et al. Employees in developed countries have internalized hard work as a moral imperative and a valuable life goal and so have their managers and executives at their workplace. Care, by contrast with work, seems to remain an undervalued life goal. Care is easily subcontracted and little status conferred to care workers (Hochschild, 2004). Another reason why the business case argument, taken alone, triggers limited organizational change is practical: It is easier in the short run to manage a small number of trusted and dedicated employees working overtime than to juggle flexible work schedules and telecommuting, as these require additional effort, experience, and communication skills on the part of the manager (Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008). Practitioners are familiar with this ''trusted lieutenants'' effect that scholars also call the ''in-group.'' Therefore, a divide is often observed within teams and workplaces, and also within countries, between an over worked population on the one hand and an under worked population on the other hand. All in all, employees and managers' knowledge of the business benefits of work–life balance is often countervailed by the fact that work is so highly valued, especially in the United States, and that convenience and short-term imperatives lead managers to rely mostly on a small number of high performers.

Yet business outcomes are not the only outcomes of work–life articulation. The long hours, the stress, and the overload come at the expenses of the over worked themselves, and, most importantly, at the expenses of those in society who need to be cared for and protected: children, the elderly, the handicapped, and all those who are psychologically or physically vulnerable. These persons are the ''invisible stakeholders'' whom Kanter (1977) called to take into consideration for more than 30 years ago. To really make work–family work for everyone in our societies, we need to depart from our narrow focus on the business case and return on investment because this focus ignores invisible stakeholders.

What we, as work–family scholars wanting to have greater impact, need to do, is twofold: (a) Convince citizens of our countries of the societal value of work–life balance and (b) advocate for public policy to ensure a floor of rights regarding work–life balance, such as the one that is being provided in most European countries. If we are able to convince citizens of our countries of the value of work–life balance for themselves and for the whole community of citizens, we will change attitudes and behaviors of employees,

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managers, and policy makers. I believe, and this may be because of my own European bias, that we need to combine the business case argument with a citizenship argument and focus on invisible stakeholders and the long run. This focus is not organizations' primary focus as we know. Therefore, it is not organizations only that we need to convince but rather citizens directly.

The vision we must share is the vision of a balanced society where most individuals would be able to choose how they articulate their multiple life roles and where the needs of invisible stakeholders would be met. For instance, and notwithstanding the limitations pertaining to the Dutch and the French models, it is commonly accepted in the Netherlands that an individual, man or woman, can make a very valuable work contribution and still work part time (Rex Flexibility, 2011). In France, a recent proposal published by a governmental think tank suggests that "active grandparenthood" should be recognized and valued as such because grandparents serve not only to their children and grandchildren but also to society as a whole (Wisnia-Weill, 2010). In these examples, it appears that the focus is not on work solely or the short-term business case solely but on time and energy spent caring for others and on long-term benefits for the community of citizens and future citizens.

What does this mean in terms of research agenda? I agree with Kossek et al. that a systemic perspective calls for interdisciplinary collaborations so as to broaden our scope and encompass the micro, the meso, and the macro levels. Cross-national collaborations are also needed so as to build comparative theoretical frameworks combining both culture and institutions, going beyond mere inclusion of cultural measures. A useful framework in this regard is societal analysis (Maurice & Sellier, 1979). Societal analysis studies the intrinsic coherence created by interactions between the macro, meso, and micro levels in each country. An example of societal analysis applied to work–family research would be my qualitative research comparing adoption of work–life initiatives in the United States, the UK, and France (Ollier-Malaterre, 2009).

Beyond frameworks and methods, we need to engage in research that demonstrates the social value of work–life balance, thus focusing on long-term outcomes of work–family balance for individuals and their invisible stakeholders: the children, the elderly, the handicapped, the ill, and vulnerable for whom they care. Relevant research questions might be as follows: In what ways do low work–life conflict, high work–life enrichment, and alignment of one's work–life effectiveness with one's life goals contribute to the well-being of invisible stakeholders? What are the hidden costs of focusing on the business case for work–life policies and practices? To what extent do care roles contribute to work roles? How do the long-term benefits of work–life balance translate into the short-term agenda of the workplace? And we need to make the findings of this research visible to citizens so as to convince current and future employees, managers, executives, and policy makers.

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