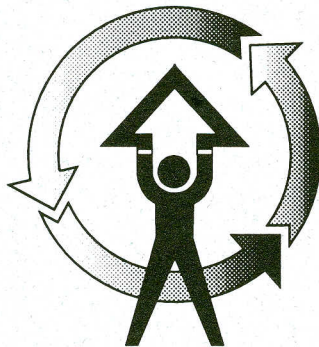


The Center for
Work & Family
BOSTON COLLEGE

Participation in Change:

Work-Family Groups
in Corporations



BOSTON COLLEGE
WALLACE E. CARROLL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

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1997

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CENTER BRIEF

The Center for Work & Family at Boston College is a research organization devoted to the study of work and home-life issues. Through research, demonstration projects, corporate partnerships, and policy analysis, the Center works to promote corporate and community responsiveness to families.

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

I. INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	2
PROBLEM SOLVING WITH GROUPS	2
FORMATION OF COMPANY-WIDE GROUPS	3
PARALLEL ORGANIZATIONS.....	3
LABOR-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES.....	4
GRASSROOTS ACTIVITIES	4
AREAS OF STUDY.....	5
1. ORIGINS	5
2. STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION	5
3. LINKAGE TO THE ORGANIZATION	5
4. LEADERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP	6
5. ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.....	6
6. ACCOMPLISHMENTS	6
7. ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT.....	6
II. METHODOLOGY	7
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	7
SAMPLE	7
ANALYSIS	8
LIMITATIONS	9
III. FINDINGS	11
ORIGINS	11
TOP MANAGEMENT	11
MIDDLE MANAGEMENT	12
GRASSROOTS	12
MIXED/OTHER ORIGINS	13
ORIGINS SUMMARY	13
STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION	13
TASK FORCES.....	14
ADVISORY COMMITTEES.....	14
GOVERNING COUNCILS.....	15
GRASSROOTS GROUPS	15
NEGOTIATING GROUPS	16
STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION SUMMARY	16

LINKAGE TO THE ORGANIZATION	16
MODEL A: RELATIONSHIPS WITH TOP DECISION MAKERS	17
MODEL B: LINKAGES WITH THE HUMAN RESOURCE DEPARTMENT	18
MODEL C: CONNECTIONS VIA EXPERTS	19
MODEL D: BONDS THROUGH AFFINITY GROUPS	20
LINKAGE TO THE ORGANIZATION SUMMARY	21
LEADERS AND MEMBERS	21
LEADERS	22
MEMBERS	23
LEADERS AND MEMBERS SUMMARY	23
ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	23
ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES SUMMARY	25
ACCOMPLISHMENTS	26
ACCOMPLISHMENTS SUMMARY	26
ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT	26
ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT SUMMARY	27
Senior management	27
Supervisors and middle managers	28
Line employees	28
IV. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	29
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS	29
IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE INQUIRY	32
1. Impact	32
2. Effectiveness	32
3. Life Cycle	32
4. Work-Family Infrastructure	32
5. Group Members	32
6. Corporate Culture	32
REFERENCES	33

I . I N T R O D U C T I O N

Faced with complex challenges that require well-informed and coordinated responses, companies have increasingly turned to employee involvement through task forces or committees. Corporations convene groups of employees to study problems or situations, recommend actions, or mobilize support for new initiatives. Often comprised of representatives from multiple layers of the hierarchy and across business functions, employee groups provide a forum for broad-based participation in organization change.

Company-wide task forces and committees have been described as structures for involving employees as well as a means for coordinating work across levels and functions (Gersick and Davis-Sacks, 1989). Task forces are typically viewed as temporary groups that work on specific activities or problems, such as product development, change management, or post-merger integration (c.f., Berg, 1977; Kanter, 1983; Mirvis and Marks, 1992). However, some employee groups become institutionalized and continue to exist over time as advisory committees. These groups review strategies and policies, taking into account industry trends, competitive dynamics, and impending legislation.

During the past twenty years, the use of task forces and committees has increased as a primary means of implementing change throughout organizations. In the 1970s, efforts to promote Employee Involvement (EI) resulted in: 1) organization-wide steering committees comprised of top company officials; and 2) sub-

committees of managers and workers at plants and worksites. These committees were further expanded in the 1980s through the development of Total Quality Management (TQM) programs. More recently, they have been extended into other aspects of human resource management, including training and development, business-community partnering, efforts to value workforce diversity, and work-family activities.

The use of employee groups to develop and improve work-family programs has become a common practice among American firms. These work-family groups (which have a number of different designations such as task forces, committees, advisory groups, networks, support groups, councils, and oversight committees)¹ are used both as catalysts to launch programs and as ongoing structures to manage work-family agendas. The Laborforce 2000 study of over 400 Conference Board member companies found that nearly half (48%) of the firms sampled had created a task force or committee to assess how work-family issues were affecting their employees (Parker and Hall, 1993). Furthermore, these groups were found in over two-thirds of a subset of companies rated as leaders in human resource innovation (Mirvis, 1993).

In a study of nearly 100 recognized work-family leaders conducted by the Center for Work & Family, 35% of companies indicated that they had created work-family groups to plan, make decisions, or communicate information about work-family programs and

¹ Note: "work-family group" will be used as a generic term throughout this paper to describe employee groups that focus on work-family issues.

policies (Pitt-Catsoupes et al., 1995). These committees seemed to make a difference: firms that had used these groups were more likely to have assessed work-family needs in their companies, offered training on relevant topics to managers and employees, and evaluated the impact of their work-family programs.

Despite the widespread use of employee groups, little information exists about their origin, structure, life cycles, or about the characteristics and roles of their leaders and members. Anecdotal data suggest that some work-family groups are used as short-term committees to assess needs and/or launch programs, while others evolve into ongoing oversight bodies. Likewise, their activities vary widely with groups developing high-level policies, adopting a "hands-on" role in programs, or offering advice and feedback.

This paper describes the variation in work-family groups based on findings from interviews with eighteen U.S. corporations that have used committees to plan, implement, administer, and/or evaluate aspects of their work-family agendas.² It begins with a review of the relevant literature on task forces, followed by a description of the research model, methods, and sample. Findings from the study are presented, along with a discussion of their implications for practice and ideas for future research in this area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout history, there have been many examples of employee participation in industry. For example, workers have usually been included in the tradition of collective bargaining whereby labor and management

negotiate employment policies and work rules. The broader practice of participatory management began with the Hawthorne studies (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939) and has continued to the present-day. This type of management encompasses everything from informal consultation to the use of formal structures as a way of soliciting employees' views on the policies and decisions that affect them.

Not long ago the adage, "A camel is a horse designed by committee" summed up the prevailing sentiment about the work of employee groups. Today the use of representative groups is considered to be a "best practice" means of addressing company-wide issues. The following information about the development and use of this approach will help to explain this apparent transformation.

PROBLEM SOLVING WITH GROUPS: Following the Hawthorne studies, Kurt Lewin conducted pioneering research on group dynamics (1948, 1952). Subsequent research has documented the benefits of using groups rather than individuals to generate ideas and solve complex problems. These studies have found that when employees participate in group decisions, they develop more "ownership" over a certain course of action. As a result of these investigations, the use of participatory management in industry gained more credibility.

Research has also identified factors that appear to enhance the problem solving capability of work groups. For example, groups that had minimal division of authority and responsibility engaged in more open and free-flowing communication than groups that functioned in a more bureaucratic and hierarchical

² The term "work-family" is used to describe the interface between two important aspects of people's lives: their work and home experiences. Increasing numbers of practitioners have substituted the words "work/life" in an effort to recognize the diversity of employees' work and home lives. In using the term "work-family," the authors recognize and respect the variety of employees' work and home lives.

fashion (Bavelas, 1950; Leavitt, 1951). Other studies showed that groups composed of people from different specialties or from various backgrounds conducted more thorough analyses of problems and proposed more innovative solutions than homogenous groups (see reviews by Hoffman, 1979; Jackson et al., 1995).

Leading organizational theorists imported ideas about group dynamics into their models of "group-based" management in the 1960s. Likert's (1961) treatise on "new patterns of management" envisioned workers organized into teams with supervisors serving as "linking pins" to other teams and to upper-level managers. At different points in time, various terms have been used to describe employee work teams, including "semi-autonomous" (1970s), "self-managing" (Trist, 1981), and more recently, "high performance."

FORMATION OF COMPANY-WIDE GROUPS: At times, a corporation may encounter problems that are beyond the scope of functional work teams and that have an impact on the whole organization. In order to respond to these company-wide problems, companies began to think about creating work groups that would represent the entire organization in microcosm. Ideally, these groups would contain a representative sample of all employees, opening up new channels of communication and stimulating new ways of viewing current problems. These groups could also serve as liaisons to the organization as a whole (Alderfer, 1977; Berg, 1977).

When task forces or committees were first developed, they were limited to select military operations, public policy deliberations, and a few industrial innovations. However, in a widely cited *Harvard Business Review*

article and subsequent book, Bennis and Slater (1968) proposed that companies create "temporary systems" to assess and respond to changes affecting entire organizations. Following these publications, a series of pilot studies were conducted using cross-functional task forces or "diagonal slices" drawn from different levels and positions. This research supported the idea that temporary teams could be an important source of organizational innovation (c.f., Miles, 1964; French and Bell, 1973). In many cases, the liberation of task force members from more parochial, functional or hierarchical perspectives resulted in creative ideas and pragmatic advice about the best ways to implement changes in the workplace.

PARALLEL ORGANIZATIONS: As the use of employee groups increased, one of their great strengths — being set up as a temporary structure — began to be viewed as a weakness. Generally, it was common for groups to disband after they had made their recommendations, with the actual implementation of suggested changes handled by the formal organization. Over time, however, researchers studying organizational change noted that organizations often resisted new practices — particularly when they challenged the prevailing power structure or threatened traditional ways of doing business (Watson, 1966). To counter this, Zand (1974) proposed the use of "collateral" forms of organization, groups co-existing with formal organizations that introduce changes.

This approach gained considerable visibility when used by General Motors to implement its organization-wide EI effort (Miller, 1978). Several tiers of committees, assisted by internal and external consultants,

studied the strengths and weaknesses of GM's formal organization and reorganized operations to promote a greater degree of employee participation in decision-making. Juran (1989) later adapted this framework to introduce TQM throughout enterprises. Practitioners came to refer to this as "parallel organizations" — a name more commonly used today. Parallel organizations lend credibility to proposed changes and give participants the necessary time and motivation to master the language and methods used in TQM.

Nonetheless, many EI and TQM efforts foundered. Reasons cited include a lack of top management support, resistance by middle managers and staff bureaucrats, as well as the ineffectiveness of steering committees, task forces, consultants, and others associated with the change effort (Nadler, 1979; Mirvis, 1984; Lawler and Mohrman, 1985). These problems raised questions about the best way to empower committees in order to produce real changes in organizations. Towards this end, the experiences of labor-management committees have been instructive.

LABOR-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES: Joint labor-management committees were initiated by General Motors and the United Auto Workers in the 1970s. In the typical situation, a top level committee with union and management representatives oversees change. At the same time, joint committees are formed in divisions and facilities throughout the company to solicit feedback and to integrate these changes at different employee levels. This formal structure has enabled labor and management to cooperate amidst their otherwise antagonistic relationship (c.f., Heckscher, 1988; Herick, 1990).

While the changes introduced by joint committees have been similar to those initiated by parallel groups in non-unionized firms, several factors related to the origins and operations of labor-management committees are distinctive. First, joint committees have usually been launched with high visibility and the full authorization of the highest levels of management and labor. Second, since the labor members of joint committees are elected representatives of the broader base of employees, the value of being represented on committees has been reinforced. Finally, many of the labor-management bodies are standing committees, with rotating chairs and membership. As a result, they are often considered to be part of the corporate power structure.

Stein and Kanter (1980) argue that parallel structures empower workers by increasing their responsibility, influence, and visible contribution to corporate goals. Viewed in this way, the use of employee groups, whether focused on quality, employee involvement, or work-family issues, can be seen as representing a new form of corporate governance.

GRASSROOTS ACTIVITY: Besides the use of formal structures in organizations, there is also the tradition of "grassroots" organizing. While informal groups may focus on common technical concerns or developing fields of knowledge, the grassroots groups that are most relevant for this paper are interest groups formed to discuss social issues at the workplace.

Examples of these types of groups are women's support groups that began to emerge in the late 1970s, as well as corporate networks of African-American and Hispanic employees. In general, these groups have been formed to provide mentoring and career develop-

ment. However, some diversity consultants have advocated for the creation of formal task forces to work on multi-cultural issues, and the Laborforce 2000 survey found that 30% of the companies surveyed had these types of groups (Parker and Hall, 1993). While there is some evidence of grassroots activity and networking in the work-family arena, the impact of this on the creation of work-family committees is unclear.

AREAS OF STUDY

As the result of reviewing the literature on task forces and organization change, seven research areas were identified:

1. ORIGINS: One important topic related to work-family groups in companies is the origin of these groups. In many instances, particularly EI and TQM programs, work-family groups are formed at the behest of top leaders. This type of group development supports the theory that organization-wide change begins at the "top" and flows down into the organization (Bennis, 1966). In the present study, it was anticipated that the majority of groups would have been initiated by top management.

There are also instances where change begins in the middle ranks of a company, or in a particular division or plant, and then spreads to other parts of the corporation (Nonaka, 1988). In these cases, there is typically a "champion" leading change both upward and downward in the company. Finally, there are the aforementioned examples where change begins from the "bottom up" via grassroots activity.

This study explored the many forces behind the creation of work-family groups and their specific origins in the sampled firms. Data were also collected about the relationship between group origins and the emergence of work-family as a workplace issue.

2. STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION: A second factor to consider is the form and function of work-family groups. For example, the Laborforce 2000 study found that while companies generally used work-family groups to assess needs and develop recommendations, program management was often handled by the formal organization. This study gathered descriptive information about how work-family groups are organized to accomplish their goals and objectives.

It was also expected that some of the companies under study would have multiple groups or even parallel work-family structures to implement programs and provide ongoing advice and assistance. In these cases, the research examined how the functions of work-family groups influence their structures and what contributes to their institutionalization in organizations.

3. LINKAGE TO THE ORGANIZATION: A third area concerns the connection of work-family groups to formal organizations. This research examined how organizational connections offer opportunities for support and leverage. It was expected that the origin and membership of employee groups would affect the linkage between these groups and the formal organizational structure. For example, it was anticipated that work-family groups commissioned by senior management would report back to one or more individuals at a higher level than those groups which had been created by human resource administrators.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP: The research team anticipated that the factors discussed above (origins, structure/function, and linkages with the organization) would influence the leadership and membership of work-family groups. Case studies on the effectiveness of groups stress the importance of the status of leaders, their political connections, and their group management skills (Gersick and Sacks, 1990). Other authors emphasize the need for members to commit substantial amounts of time in order to achieve credibility among co-workers (Stein and Kanter, 1980). The informants in this study were asked for their opinions about important characteristics of leaders and members which could bring about organizational change.

5. ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: Studies of innovation in organizations have concluded that recently-organized task forces operate best if they have a relatively loose structure and agenda; however, they need more form and discipline when making recommendations and implementing changes (Zaltman et al., 1973; Rogers, 1995). To assess this general trend, the research identified key activities and responsibilities assumed by work-family groups during their evolutionary stages. We anticipated that the activities of groups would vary depending on the issues being addressed and the relative "stage" of work-family activity within a company.

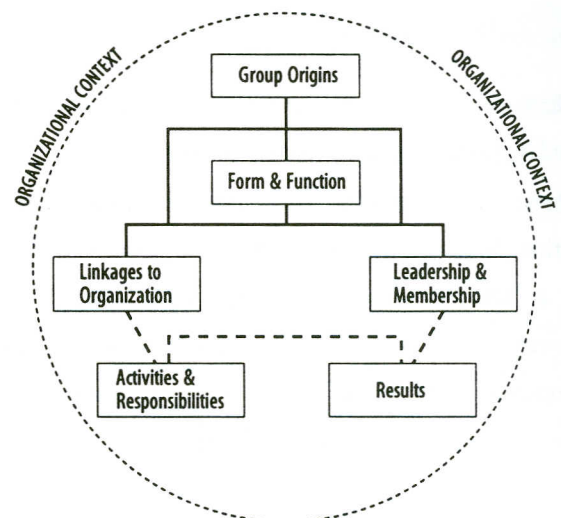
6. ACCOMPLISHMENTS: This study gathered preliminary information about the results and outcomes associated with the activities of work-family employee groups. The study asked the interviewees to comment on the extent to which these accomplishments

helped to push the work-family agenda forward in their companies.

7. ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT: The changes proposed by work-family groups all occur within an organizational context. The study of corporate culture and family friendliness by the Center for Work & Family demonstrates how organizational and cultural factors can be both a bane and a boon to work-family activity in companies (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 1995). The current research examines the impact of workplace factors on the initiation and functioning of work-family groups.

Through the literature review, seven sets of factors were identified that could be important in examining work-family groups. These factors are depicted in Figure 1 below. The solid lines indicate hypothesized relationships, while the dotted lines refer to possible connections. The study was not intended to formally test these relationships, but rather to comment on the inter-relationships between these areas.

Figure 1. Areas of Study



III. METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to collect descriptive information about different types of work-family groups in organizations. Most of the data were obtained from key informants in companies (typically the work-family or work/life manager) via telephone interviews that lasted approximately 30 minutes. At two of the companies, more than one person was involved in the interview. The research team assured each of the respondents that all information would be kept confidential and that the summary report would not contain descriptions that might lead to the identification of either the respondent or the companies which they represented. With the permission of the respondents, all of the interviews were audio taped.

In order to supplement the telephone interviews, the researchers also conducted a focus group with the fifteen members of a work-family group established at an equipment manufacturing and servicing firm. This session allowed the researchers to understand the perspectives of group members and the participants to respond to the comments of other employees.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Interview protocols were used in a flexible manner to guide the conversations. Respondents were asked to reflect on the following questions:

- What is the name of your work-family group? How long has it been in existence? Do you have (or have you had) other groups addressing work/life issues?
- How did this group get started? What was the initial impetus? Who supported the establishment of the group? Was anybody opposed to it?
- What are the group's goals/purpose? How were its objectives defined?
- How is the group organized? How often do you meet? What do you do at meetings?
- Who are the members of your group? How were they selected?
- What characteristics do you think are most important for group members?
- Who assumes leadership roles? What makes for an effective leader?
- How does the group "fit" into the organization? Does it report to someone? What happens to its recommendations?
- Who in the organization supports the group's existence? How does the group fit with the corporate culture?
- What has the group accomplished? What barriers have you encountered along the way?
- What is the status of the group today? (If appropriate) How long do you think it will continue to operate?

SAMPLE

A convenience, criterion-based sample was used to identify potential study participants (c.f., Miles and Huberman, 1994). The 36 members of the Work and

Family Roundtable and 21 members of the New England Work and Family Association (NEWFA) were contacted about the possibility of participating in the study.³

A total of 18 companies which currently have (or recently had) work-family groups agreed to be interviewed for this study.⁴ These companies represented a variety of industries (manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, communications, etc.). The following list highlights some of the characteristics of the work-family groups at the participant companies:

- Sixteen had work-family groups (one or more) which were in existence at the time of the interviews. With the exception of employee networks, the size of these groups ranged from 6 to 18 members.
- The companies were evenly divided between using the words "work and family" (n=5) and the term "work/life" (n=5). The groups with the "work/life" designation used the name to indicate that the purpose of the group was inclusive of a broad range of experiences. However, the work-family vs. work/life name did not appear to reflect significant differences in the focus of the different groups.
- Three companies reported that their groups were subsets of diversity initiatives. One company, which had multiple employee network groups that focused on different aspects of workforce diversity, identified three networks that addressed work/life

issues: a women's group, a working parents group, and a gay/lesbian group. Two companies indicated that their groups concentrated on child care concerns and that their names reflected this priority.

- One company discussed past experiences with work-family groups, although there were no work-family groups functioning at the time of the interview. Another was in the process of planning/organizing a work-family group.
- Seven companies reported that they had multiple groups which contributed to work-family issues at the workplace. At five of these firms, the work-family groups were associated with structural components of the organizations (e.g., specific divisions or worksites). Companies with multiple groups addressing work-family issues reported that the various employee groups (e.g., women's network, child care council, gay/lesbian groups) focused on different aspects of work-family concern.

ANALYSIS

A content analysis of the interviews was conducted which included the identification of key topics, coding, and examination of code patterns. Categories of sensitizing concepts were constructed and typologies were inductively developed (c.f. Patton, 1990; Strauss, 1988).

The interviews were examined using the seven areas that had emerged from the literature review: origins; structure and function; linkage to the organization;

³ The Work and Family Roundtable is a national corporate membership group comprised of companies that have made significant commitments to work-family issues and have been recognized for leadership in the work-family field. The corporate members of the Roundtable are predominantly large companies. The membership of NEWFA includes companies based in the New England region that are interested in a range of work/life issues. Some of these members have developed extensive work-family policies and programs, whereas others are just beginning to explore some of the options for workplace responses.

⁴ The following reasons were given for not participating in the research:

- The company had never had an employee group that focused on work-family issues.
- Although the company had an employee group in the past, the person(s) involved were not readily available for interviewing.
- The members were new and did not feel able to contribute to the study.
- Company representatives were not available during the data collection period.

leadership and membership; activities and responsibilities; accomplishments; and organizational context. These areas and sub-areas were modified to reflect the comments of the interviewees.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study were primarily associated with the sampling design:

1. All of the respondents providing information about work-family were employed in organizations that have a moderate to strong commitment to addressing work/life issues.
2. Without exception, the respondents who agreed to participate perceived their groups as having been "successful" — at least to some degree.

III. FINDINGS

The findings will be presented according to the seven topic areas addressed in the literature and discussed during the interviews.

ORIGINS

Interviewees were asked to describe how their groups were initially established, what factors precipitated their formation, and who had supported their creation. The intent of this line of inquiry was to understand how the start-up and initial purpose of groups might have affected their status and agenda. Four different patterns of origin were noted in the participant companies: 1) top management; 2) middle management; 3) grassroots; and 4) mixed/other origins.



TOP MANAGEMENT: Eight companies reported that their groups had been established by a request (or mandate) from a top level decision maker who understood work-family issues and advocated for the creation of an employee group. The leadership for all of the work-family groups established in this "top down" pattern was assumed by a senior (or "near" senior) level manager. It was common for the vice-president of human resources or, in some cases, the work-family manager to act as the chair of these groups.

What led senior management to launch a work-family group? At two companies, CEOs had developed an interest in work-family issues as a result of personal

issues involving their spouses or aging parents. In the other six cases, senior managers had used the results of company surveys or informal communications to convince the CEOs or their peers of the need for a work-family group. One of the interviewees reported that a vice-president had urged the company president to form a group after multiple work-family issues had "bubbled up".

In all of the companies where groups were initiated by senior management, the creation of work-family groups was characterized as a *strategy to respond* to work-family issues. While committees are often formed to *study* issues or assess needs, these top level work-family groups were formed to take action around work-family issues, not simply to gather information. For example, when an annual TQM Fitness Review indicated that work-family balance was a concern for employees, senior management in one company immediately assigned a chair and asked that a representative committee be assembled to address these issues.

Not unexpectedly, the commitment of company leaders to work-family groups added to their perceived importance and visibility. Employee groups felt that top management support helped to stimulate more widespread interest in work-family issues among employees throughout the company and served to sanction the group's activities.

It should be noted that while senior level support may be useful in the formation of groups, it does not always guarantee that they will be sustained. Several committee chairs of groups begun by top management reported working very hard to keep the "issues" in front of senior management with ongoing data on employee concerns, program assessments, and recommendations for action.



MIDDLE MANAGEMENT: Three of the companies in this study reported that a mid-level manager who was very passionate about particular work-family issues provided the impetus for developing a work-family group. For example, in one company a line manager who had been able to articulate the "business case" for work-family issues used this as a basis for eliciting support for the formation of an employee group.

In all of the companies where work-family groups were established in the middle ranks, the champion organized the group to examine the issues and raise consciousness in the organization. It was a priority for these groups to get the attention of top managers as well as to establish legitimacy for their efforts among their colleagues. Members of these groups were seen as unofficial spokespersons for work-family interests and worked diligently to keep the issues on the corporate agenda.

The interviewees emphasized that mid-level champions needed group members to assist with political connections in the company. Each of the respondents in these groups used the term "guerrilla warfare" to

describe the way they handled resistance to new policies and programs. One manager in a communications company reported that in spite of top level interest, it had been difficult to sustain support for the work-family recommendations made by her committee. Drawing on her well-established corporate network, the chair relied on an "opinion leader" respected by the CEO to present recommendations and obtain commitment for specific initiatives.



GRASSROOTS: Three companies traced the origins of their work-family groups to line employees. At each of these companies, two or more employees who shared an interest in some work-family issue had created an *ad hoc* work-family group. As these groups developed, they provided a vehicle for other employees to voice their common concerns.

Interestingly, while these groups initially began as informal "support groups" for working parents, all became advocacy groups for work-family activities and were officially sanctioned by their companies. One interviewee speculated that line employees joined together in the belief that they could have more of an impact on work-family activities as a group than as single individuals.

The relative success of the grassroots groups seems to depend on the skills and determination of the members. One interviewee commented that, not having active high level support and official status, the legitimacy of her group was a result of its accomplishments.



MIXED/OTHER ORIGINS: In three companies, an existing employee committee gave birth to a new work-family group. In one situation, a temporary work-family task force had recommended the creation of a more permanent work-family advisory committee. At a second company, a corporate committee with oversight for human resource matters created a working subcommittee to focus specifically on work-family issues. In this case, the larger group continued to be a primary stakeholder group for recommendations made by the work-family subcommittee.

At the third company, a diversity committee found that work-family issues required more attention than the committee could devote. Thus, a subgroup was established to examine work-family issues and to report its recommendations to the diversity committee. This arrangement made it possible for the larger committee to continue exploring diversity issues while the subgroup was able to create new momentum for a work-family agenda.

In addition to these three companies, there were also two examples of work-family groups that were established as a result of the combined efforts of employees at different levels. In both companies, grassroots activity and senior management interest in work-family issues resulted in the creation of work-family groups.

ORIGINS SUMMARY: The hypothesis that organization-wide employee groups typically begin as the result of senior management directives was only partially confirmed. Interestingly, a majority (58%) of the companies in the study were begun as a result of the efforts of middle management, grassroots activities, as spin-offs from other committees, or from mixed sources. This suggests that champions and constituencies are motivated by work-family issues at many corporate levels.

There did appear to be a substantive difference between groups that were begun as a result of top management directives and the other work-family groups. Specifically, groups created by top management seemed to have more legitimacy from the beginning, and were more apt to respond to issues than to merely study them. In contrast, other groups spent more time and energy during the early stages gaining top level support and establishing legitimacy with the rest of the workforce.

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION

Information was next gathered about the primary purposes of the work-family groups. Three types of work-family groups were most common: employee task forces, advisory committees, and grassroots groups.⁵ A couple of firms reported the existence of governing councils or oversight committees. Finally, a few interviewees noted the existence of a "negotiating group" that dealt with organized labor on work-family matters (although none of the companies currently had this type of group).

⁵ Companies used many different names for their work-family groups such as: task forces, committees, advisory groups, networks, support groups, councils, and oversight committees. There was only a vague connection between the group names and their structures. For example, while one company may use the term "task force," another firm might call their group an "advisory committee." One manufacturing firm mentioned that the name of its group changed from a "task force" to a "council." Although the responsibilities remained the same, the "feel" of the group was transformed because it had evolved from being temporary to having a more permanent organizational role.

In this paper, these five types of work-family groups will be discussed as if they were distinct types. In practice, however, differences between the types were more blurred; for example, one employee group might function like a task force at one point in time and like an advisory committee at another point in time.

TASK FORCES: Typically, task forces are temporary groups established for a specific purpose that disband upon completion of the project. Eight of the interviewees reported that their work-family groups had initially functioned as task forces, and had operated in this manner for 1-2 years. Several reported that their companies used task forces as a "first step" into the work-family arena. Consequently, they were often charged with gathering information that could help the company decide whether or not to establish work-family policies and programs. Two firms indicated that the life cycle of their task force extended beyond this initial stage as the group continued to identify/explore work-family issues and develop new programs.

Task forces focused on three types of activities:

- gathering information about specific types of work-family issues (e.g., assessing employee needs, benchmarking);
- making policy and program recommendations (e.g., presentations and written);
- preparing reports (typically submitted to senior management for endorsement and approval);
- recommending a permanent work-family infrastructure (e.g., an advisory committee and/or work-family coordinator).

At four of the eight companies, task forces either evolved into permanent group structures or the task force members requested that this type of group be established. In addition, four interviewees mentioned that their task forces had recommended the creation of permanent work-family manager positions. When created, these positions were usually filled by seasoned middle managers with strong intra-organizational networks and familiarity with the company's culture.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES: Advisory committees (or advisory councils) are permanent groups set up to facilitate communication and strengthen understanding about work-family issues. Ten of the participant firms had established advisory committees at their companies. There was no single pattern of origin associated with these types of committees; while some were created by top decision makers, others had been established by middle managers or by another group.

In addition to launching work-family assessments and programs, advisory committees helped to link top decision makers with middle managers and line employees. A number of firms indicated that members of their advisory committees served as work-family advocates who helped to create broad-based support for action within the organization. It was also reported that these committees enhanced understanding of work-family issues, expanded awareness of programs and policies, and promoted positive attitudes about work-family benefits.

These committees were positioned to make recommendations to senior management about refinements,

changes, or additions to programs already established at the workplace. Several interviewees said that their organization relied on its advisory committees to ensure that the company was responding to the work-family needs of its employees as well as to the business priorities of the organization. A few commented that their advisory committees also kept track of what competitors were doing relative to work-family issues. One stated, "I have to know what the competition is doing. I see that as part of my job as the group leader."

As noted, several advisory committees were formed after recommendations had been made by prior task forces. Furthermore, in a couple of firms, more than one advisory committee was created; for example, in one pharmaceutical company, work-family advisory committees were established in all of its major divisions.

GOVERNING COUNCILS: Governing councils (sometimes referred to as "oversight committees") are responsible for making decisions about and managing companies' work-family policies, programs, and practices. These councils have specific decision making authority, but may also make recommendations to senior management about a firm's work-family initiatives.

Of the companies in the study, two had established governing councils. In the first company, the council was charged with developing and then overseeing an on-site child care center. It operated somewhat like the board of directors of a small, non-profit corpora-

tion, developing new policies (e.g., curriculum, service hours, health and safety procedures, etc.) and making budgetary decisions. At another company, the governing council was comprised of senior executives who functioned as the chairs of work-family advisory committees in different divisions.

GRASSROOTS GROUPS: In contrast to task forces, advisory committees, and governing councils that are launched with official organizational recognition, grassroots groups (sometimes called networks or support groups) form as the result of the common interests of employees. The origins of these types of work-family groups follow the "bottom-up" pattern described earlier.

Five companies reported having grassroots groups that formed around their work-family agenda. In three cases, there had been a long tradition of grassroots organizing, some of which dated back to the early 1950s.⁶

Several interviewees noted that their companies viewed grassroots groups as an informal source of ideas and suggestions (rather than a body established specifically for that purpose). For example, a women's advocacy group was formed at one workplace to develop recommendations for management related to work-family balance. It was also noted that although top managers were not obligated to respond to recommendations from these groups, they often did so.

There was a wide variation in the formality of grassroots groups. At three firms, they seemed to have

⁶ According to one of the interviewees, the existence of employee groups in that firm had dated back to the post World War II era when they were seen as a way for managers to better understand employee needs in non-union organizations. Their experience with these groups set the stage for it to become commonplace for employee groups to coalesce around topics of interest on work-family concerns became more of a workplace priority, it was natural to form employee groups as one way to examine these issues.

emerged in the absence of more formal structures to address employees' work-family concerns. In contrast, two of the companies reported that grassroots groups spawned the formation of more formal groups to address work-family issues. One grassroots group was formally recognized by the company and had a mission statement, subcommittees, and elected leaders. In other cases, members of the grassroots groups met "on their own time" to discuss issues.

At several companies, multiple groups were formed, with each group focusing on different aspects of work/life issues. In one case, different grassroots groups worked collaboratively to assess the feasibility of flexible work arrangements. The CEO and vice presidents participated in a forum addressing flexibility issues which was co-sponsored by these groups.

NEGOTIATING GROUPS: Interviewees noted that groups at other firms had become involved in quasi-negotiations with management about specific work-family benefits. Due to legal restrictions, these groups are usually affiliated with bargaining units. None of the participant firms reported that their own work-family groups had been involved in negotiations regarding benefits. However, two interviewees mentioned that their companies had monitored the activities and recommendations of grassroots groups in light of possible labor law violations.

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION SUMMARY: Discussions with the interviewees suggested that there were close connections between the origins and structures for at least two types of work/family groups; both of the governing councils were begun with top management

support, and all of the grassroots groups were started by line employees. Although the origins of the task forces in the study varied, when they evolved into permanent groups their origin could be traced to senior management. In these companies, it appears that senior managers first used a task force to "test the waters" regarding needs and risks before "taking the plunge" and appointing a permanent group.

Interestingly, there were no discernible patterns in the origins of advisory committees. It is understandable that those committees with top level support might achieve more legitimacy and a greater set of responsibilities. However, further study is needed to understand the extent to which corporate culture, personal leadership, and other factors create support for advisory groups begun through middle management or spun off from other groups.

LINKAGE TO THE ORGANIZATION

Data collected in this study identified four basic patterns of linkages between work-family groups and formal organizational structures:

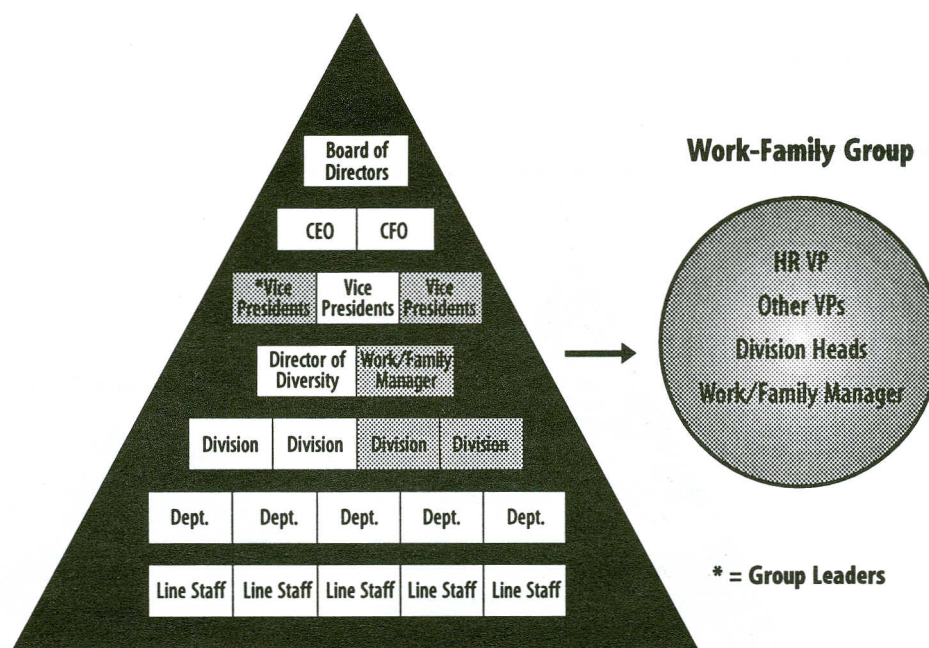
- Model A: Relationships with Top Decision Makers
- Model B: Linkages through the Human Resource Department
- Model C: Connections via Experts
- Model D: Bonds through Affinity Groups

MODEL A - RELATIONSHIPS WITH TOP DECISION

MAKERS: The linkage between task forces or committees and top level decision makers is common in EI and TQM programs. However, only one of the firms in this study reported that its work-family group fit this model. This group was initiated by top decision makers and functioned as a governing council. Members of this group had the authority to set the work-family agenda and the power to ensure that work-family initiatives were consistent with key business objectives.

The obvious advantage of this type of linkage is that the involvement of senior management sends a clear message to the company about the importance of work-family issues. On the downside, it seems logical that a work-family group made up solely of top decision makers might have difficulty staying connected to the priorities of line employees. Unfortunately, given that there was just one example of this linkage, we could not document its strengths and weaknesses. In this case, however, the connection was made via an employee advisory committee that reported to the governing council.

Figure 2: Model A - Top Decision Makers Group



MODEL B - LINKAGES WITH THE HUMAN RESOURCE

DEPARTMENT: For the majority of companies, the linkage between the work-family group and the formal organization was established through the human resource department. In these cases, most or all of the committee members were human resource staff who had responsibilities for work-family initiatives assigned to them. Typically the leader was a work-family manager who reported to a top HR official. This model was found in the case of both task forces and advisory committees.

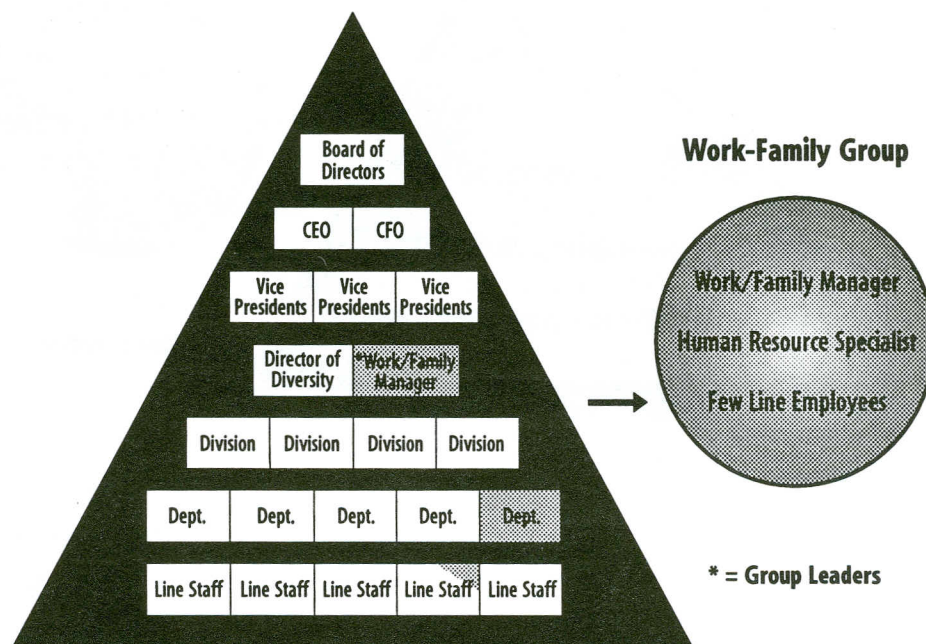
The data suggest that firms often use this model when human resource administrators have formal roles associated with work-family activity. However, it was also found in a couple of cases where companies felt that human resource administrators

were in a good position to understand employees' priority needs and could best monitor the impact of existing programs.

At the same time, interviewees reported some problems with this linkage:

1. The activities of the human resource department are often viewed as being peripheral to the primary business tasks. As a consequence, some HR departments had a difficult time gaining acceptance of work-family issues throughout their organizations.
2. Since it was an assigned responsibility, some human resource officials did not exhibit "passion" around the issues and acted more as "nay-sayers" than sponsors with respect to work-family recommendations.

Figure 3: Model B - Human Resource Group



MODEL C - CONNECTIONS VIA EXPERTS: Expert groups were described as being comprised of people who brought particular skills, perspectives, relationships, and knowledge to the group. The participation of these individuals is usually sought because of their potential to contribute to group effectiveness. In some cases, the expertise was in an area other than work-family (e.g., MIS systems, communications). It is important to note that these groups included employees at different levels of the organization. Oftentimes, members had been selected because they were willing to act as "adjunct" work-family staff and serve as liaisons to their department or other stakeholder groups.

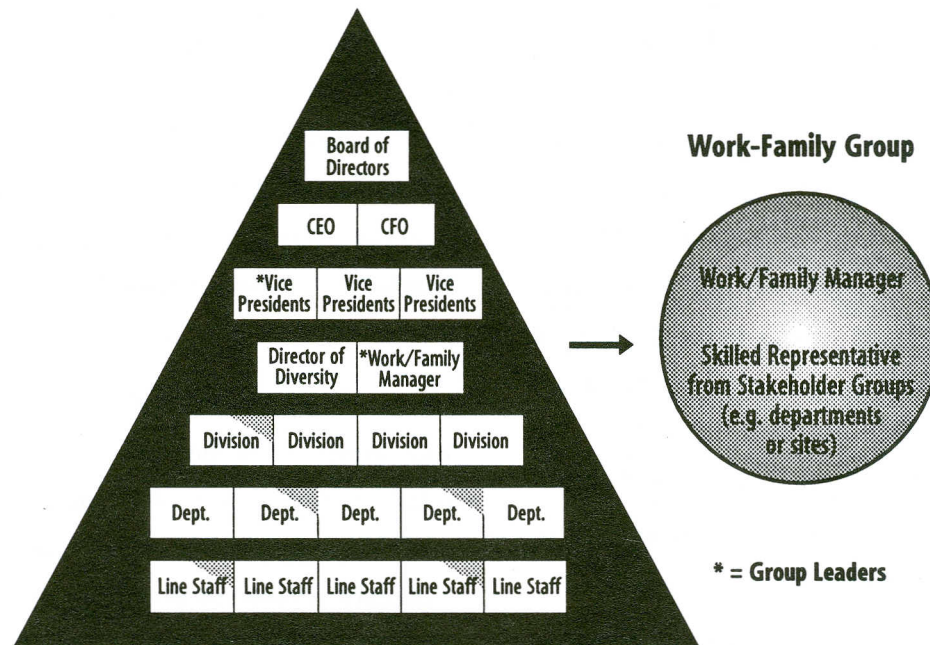
Nearly two-thirds of the companies had work-family groups comprised of different kinds of experts. This model was most often used for groups that were created by top management or by middle managers. In contrast to human resource groups, where members joined (at least in part) because they had some formal responsibilities for work-family issues, the participation of members in expert groups was more or less "voluntary." As a consequence, members often felt the tug of other work commitments that were perceived as being higher priorities. Interviewees indicated that this was the primary challenge confronted by these types of groups.

Similar to the other models, there were advantages and disadvantages regarding this type of linkage to the formal organization. On the one hand, the skills and interests of employees add to the quality of work completed by work-family committees. For example, when an HR Vice President in one company

wanted to explore how work-family concerns were affecting employees, those with relevant skills and perspectives were invited to join a task force. With the support of the CEO, this work-family group launched a rigorous employee needs assessment and collected detailed survey information from employees. The findings of the task force and their recommendations were then reviewed and approved by the President.

On the other hand, interviewees had mixed views with respect to how these committees functioned as representatives of employees and champions of a work-family agenda. In several cases, they gained credibility through the work-family manager's linkage to a human resource head and other senior managers. Without that connection, however, other groups made up of experts were not seen as having much clout nor as being particularly strong advocates of employees' viewpoints.

Figure 4: Model C - Expert Group



MODEL D - BONDS THROUGH AFFINITY GROUPS:

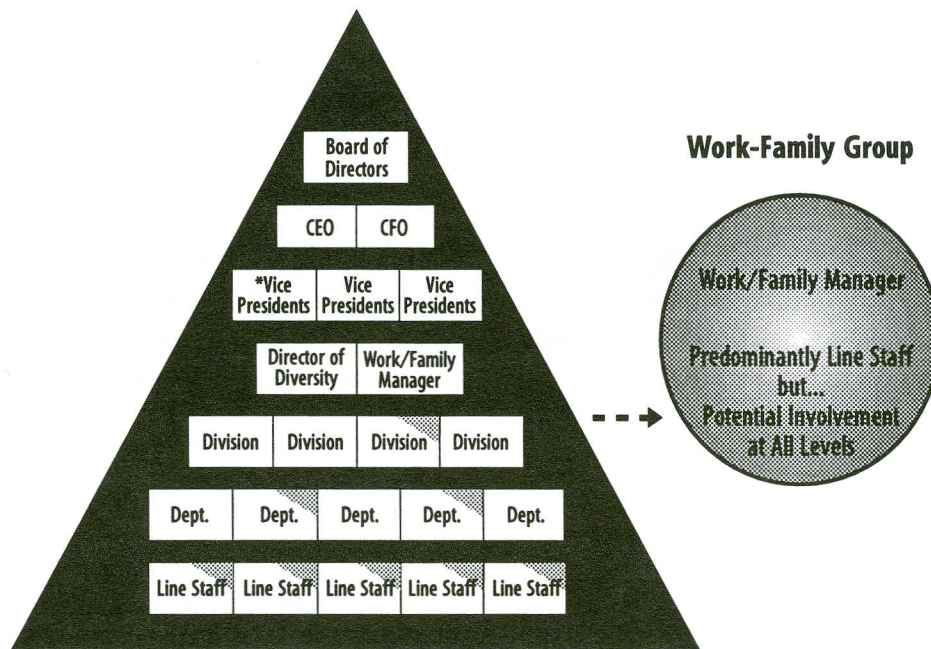
Members of affinity groups are typically seen as having a "stake" in an issue and come together based on common issues (Van Aken et. al, 1994). In this study, although a couple of the advisory committees and one of the governing councils were described as affinity groups, most were grassroots groups that developed as a result of the efforts of line employees. Members came from all parts of the firm and volunteered to help make it more responsive to employees' work-family needs.

Leadership of these groups was typically assumed by a recognized opinion leader. Although the affinity groups had no formal linkage to top level decision makers or human resource officials, they nevertheless appeared to have a populist mandate from co-workers and in several cases gained legitimacy on these

grounds. The primary challenge facing these types of groups was their status as quasi-activist bodies. As a result, some of the participant firms found that their affinity groups were less likely to be knowledgeable about the business links with work-family issues. On the other hand, members were often identified as being among the most vocal and most committed work-family champions.

Interestingly, while a few of these groups operated informally, most were highly organized. One firm reported that elected representatives from different affinity groups established at the workplace held regular meetings to share information and ideas with each other.

Figure 5: Model D - Affinity Group



LINKAGE TO THE ORGANIZATION SUMMARY: The study found that in the majority of cases, work-family groups are comprised of experts with relevant skills and an interest in work-family issues. In these cases, however, groups are very much dependent on the connections and savvy of a work-family manager who must forward their ideas to senior management. The second most common connection to the organization was through the human resource department, with committees made up of HR members and linkage through the human resource function. While committees in firms that have a forward looking human resource philosophy may have a strong influence (c.f., Mirvis, 1993), HR dominated committees in other companies may be limited with respect to what they can accomplish.

In this study, it was not possible to determine the relative influence of grassroots groups nor to generalize from a single example of a group dominated by top executives. However, it should be noted that many groups launched by a mandate from senior executives do not have members from the top ranks nor a secure linkage to top decision makers. In contrast, grassroots groups may have bottom-up legitimacy but seem to lack the means to make a compelling business case to top decision makers for work-family activities.

LEADERS AND MEMBERS

Not surprisingly, there was a relationship between the origin of the groups and their leader's position within the company. For instance, leaders of groups initiated at the top were typically either senior work-family managers or top officials in the human resource orga-

nization. Leaders of groups developed in the middle of companies or those which were spun off from other groups tended to be middle managers, while the leaders of grassroots groups emerged at all different levels of the organization. Thus, most leaders were from the

same approximate level of the organization that initially sponsored the work-family group.

Interviewees all reported that several characteristics of leaders and members made an important difference in the effectiveness of their work-family groups.

Table 1: Key Characteristics of Leaders & Members Promoting Employee Group Effectiveness

Leadership Characteristics	Membership Characteristics
• Communication Skills • Group Management Skills • Linkages/Access to Top Decision Makers • Ability to be a Spokesperson for Work-Family Issues and for the Employee Groups	• Commitment to Work-Family Issues • Time and Willingness to Contribute • Skills and Expertise Related to the Activities Assumed by the Group • Ability to Articulate the Perspectives of a Key Stakeholder Group

Interviewees discussed skills that helped the group to establish and maintain both *internal* and *external* relationships.

LEADERS: The informants participating in this study indicated that it was particularly important for the group leaders to possess communication and group management skills. Interviewees felt that leaders should be able to:

- articulate the mission and scope of their committee,
- interpret signals from the organization regarding receptivity and resistance,
- develop arguments for and against specific initiatives, and
- position the work of the committee in the context of the business.

In addition, they felt that it was important for leaders to develop plans, set meeting agendas, motivate participation, and mediate conflicts within their groups. In some respects, these management skills were deemed to be nearly as important as leader's expertise in and commitment to work-family issues.

Regarding external relations, leaders' links and access to top decision makers were viewed as being crucial to transforming recommendations into action. This was especially true in the case of expert groups that often had no high level managers or senior human resource officials. In addition, the interviewees felt that it was essential for leaders to act as spokespersons for work-family issues, both as well-informed advocates and sensible business leaders. Leaders of grassroots groups were often at a deficit in this regard because although

they were knowledgeable and passionate about work-family issues, they did not always align their proposals with the business context.

MEMBERS: There was virtual consensus that members provided significant resources for the work of their groups. Regarding their internal contributions, member's commitment to work-family issues and technical knowledge/skills were identified as important. Several "breakthroughs" in committee work were attributed to the passion, commitment, and persistence of individual members. In turn, high quality analysis and careful planning was linked to the expertise of the members. In the area of external relations, the credibility of the members as representatives of constituencies and their time and motivation to contribute were both noted as significant. Human resource groups were most apt to encounter credibility gaps — with both management and line employees.

In nearly every case interviewees reported that competing demands on the time and energy of members constrained the effectiveness of their work-family groups.

LEADERS AND MEMBERS SUMMARY: As expected, this study found some relationships between the origins of work-family groups, their linkage to the formal organization, and the people who assumed leadership for the group. Leadership seemed to parallel the group's positioning in the corporation. The study was not designed to document either effective or ineffective behaviors of leaders or members, nor was it intended to identify the relative importance of leader or member characteristics. However, interviewees did identi-

fy specific internal and external tasks required of leaders and members where their relative levels of knowledge, skill, and passion made the group more or less effective and credible to the organization. The key finding in this area was that having an interest in work-family issues and technical skills was not sufficient to make work-family committees effective. Interviewees stressed the importance of managerial, group process, communication, and influencing skills for leaders and members of work-family groups. At the same time, they recognized that interest and passion are very important to motivate work commitment and to represent the interests and perspectives of other employees.

ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The work-family managers who participated in this study identified several sets of activities and responsibilities related to their work-family groups. These activities included: defining the group's role in the organization, data collection, communication, planning, and influencing decision makers and other work-family stakeholders. There were no discernible relationships between the group's origins, purpose, structure, and leadership/membership and either their activities or responsibilities.

Two general findings about group activities and responsibilities emerged in this study:

1. Although most work-family groups engage in nearly all of the activities listed above at different points in time, some of these responsibilities were higher priorities for certain types of groups than for others. For instance, while task forces and employee networks tended to focus more on gathering resources

and building activities, governing councils placed a higher priority on change management and decision making.

2. Several of these activities were more or less prominent at different points during the "life course" of a company's work-family initiatives. Although the characteristics of this life course concept were not described in detail by the interviewees, they sug-

gested that the activities of the work-family groups reflected the challenges associated with the following four phases of the development of work-family initiatives: launching, early implementation, institutionalization, and assessment/refinement. While the activities of the individual groups varied, in general they tended to focus their activities on the following issues outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: The Life Course of Work-Family Initiatives and Group Activities

Life Course of Work/Life Initiatives	Key Characteristics	Focus of Work-Family Groups' Activities
Launching	Recognition of the emergence of work-family issues (in general) or specific types of work-family experiences. Creating opportunities for input.	Identification of priorities, gathering resources, building awareness, making and developing strategies to influence decision makers.
Early Implementation	Design of policies, programs and practices.	Developing proposals, testing of ideas, initiating change, and creating workplace-based supports.
Institutionalization	Management of policies, programs and practices. Creating opportunities for feedback.	Creating systems and structures that support the goals and objectives for policies and programs.
Assessment & Refinement	Development of innovations.	Monitoring progress and managing change on an ongoing basis, and creating partnerships (internal and external).

ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES SUMMARY:

Conversations with the interviewees confirmed that the specific types of activities undertaken by the work-family groups varied from company to company. For example, whereas the work-family group at one company attempted to promote awareness by spon-

soring discussion groups, at another workplace the group helped to strengthen workplace understanding about these issues by preparing printed materials and reports. Table 3 provides examples of variations in the types of activities during the different stages of work-family initiatives.

Table 3: Examples of Work-Family Group Activities and the Developmental Phase of Work-Family Initiatives

	Launching Phase	Early Implementation Phase	Institutionalization Phase	Assessment & Refinement Phase
Type of Activity	Example:	Example:	Example:	Example:
Data Collecting	Conducting formal or informal needs assessment (e.g., focus groups, surveys, etc.).	Benchmarking with best practices in other companies.	Monitoring administration and utilization of policies, programs and practices.	Supporting the participation of the group leaders or members in training related to work-family issues.
Communicating	Raising consciousness about work-family issues.	Implementing strategies for internal PR about work-family priorities.	Providing advice/counsel to the administrators of policies, programs and practices.	Establishing external linkages (e.g., with work-family groups in other companies).
Planning	Creating a viable structure for the work-family group.	Developing a mission statement and goals/objectives for different aspects of work-family initiatives.	Designing systems for using data about work-family issues to inform decision making.	Establishing assessment processes that build "continuous learning" into the evaluation of work-family initiatives.
Influencing Decision Makers & Organizational Stakeholders	Gaining the sanction and legitimacy for group.	Extending buy-in from key stakeholders.	Involving key stakeholders to maintain feelings of ownership for work-family issues.	Encouraging key stakeholders to become spokespersons for work-family issues.
Establishing and Maintaining Relationships with Employee Stakeholder Groups	Gaining legitimacy for the group.	Expressing the voices of employee stakeholder groups.	Seeking feedback from employees.	Ensuring dynamic interactions with employee stakeholder groups.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

With one exception, all of the interviewees indicated that their groups had played a key role in the success of their companies' work-family initiatives. A number of interviewees described specific accomplishments (such as achieving goals and objectives, fulfilling workplans, and meeting timetables) as indicators of the contributions made by work-family groups. For example:

- Several of the groups authored written *products*, including:
 - Meeting summaries
 - Reports on research findings related to work-family issues and best practices
 - Articles for company magazines and newsletters
 - Brochures on programs and services
 - Presentations at employee and management meetings
- Most groups made *decisions/recommendations* about work-family issues.
 - A majority of the groups had helped to define and prioritize work-family needs in their companies and many had recommended specific policies, programs or practices.
- A couple of work-family groups sponsored *specific activities or events*.
 - One group helped plan work-family fairs where information about programs and services was distributed, while another sponsored a speaker series.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS SUMMARY: Most of the interviewees stated that it was difficult to measure more intangible group contributions such as members' input into sections of an employee handbook, advice and counsel on priorities, how to position programs, or ways to ease resistance. While these were mentioned as valuable contributions, it did not appear that the work-family groups had assessed their impact, internal effectiveness, or overall contribution to the organization.

Furthermore, many of the recommendations, policies, and programs shaped by work-family groups were presented to their companies by senior management, the human resource function, or the work-family manager. In these areas, task forces and advisory committees operated more or less "behind the scenes" and their contributions were not as visible to managers and employees. The contribution of governing councils was more transparent as were communications and gatherings hosted by grassroots groups.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

Interviewees suggested that organizational, cultural, and situational factors served to both help and hinder the effectiveness of their work-family groups. The factors most often mentioned as influencing work-family groups were:

- changes in the composition of a firm's workforce;
- level of respect accorded the human resources function;
- whether or not a "team orientation" existed in the company;

- corporate culture (e.g., values and priorities perceived as being related to work-family issues);
- workplace practices (e.g., the flexibility of different work tasks); and
- overall support for work-family issues in the workplace.

Previous research studies have documented the relationship between these factors and corporate work-family activity. For example, several studies using large samples have identified relationships between the number of women employed by a company (especially in managerial and professional ranks) and the prevalence of work-family programs (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram and Simons, 1995). Mirvis (1993) also found a correlation between a strong human resource orientation and work-family activity. Research conducted by the Center for Work & Family found that corporations with some "teaming" experience were more apt to have formed work-family task forces. In addition, this study found a correlation between a caring corporate culture/overall support for work-family issues and the presence of work-family infrastructure, including a manager and task force or committee (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 1995).

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT SUMMARY: It was no surprise that contextual factors were seen as influencing nearly every dimension of work-family groups (particularly origin, structure and function, activities, and accomplishments). Interviewees' comments suggest that workplace support for work-family groups can vary along at least two dimensions: extent of support and depth of support.

Extent of Support

AWARENESS ⇒ UNDERSTANDING ⇒ COMMITMENT

The extent of support appears to encompass several components including: extent of the awareness of work-family issues; extent of the understanding of their impact on the employees, employees' families, and on the organization; and the extent of the commitment to respond.

In this study, the extent of support present in an organization appeared to influence (at least to some degree) the activities and achievements of work-family groups. Task forces and, in their early stages, advisory committees often attempted to increase awareness and understanding of work-family issues. Thus, advisory groups that build on the work of task forces might take for granted a higher level of awareness and understanding and focus on developing and refining programs.

Depth of Support



SENIOR LEVEL

MIDDLE LEVEL

LINE EMPLOYEES

The interviewees reported that the activities of work-family groups could be supported (or hindered) by people at all levels of the organization.

Senior management. There was consensus among interviewees that support from a CEO and/or other top managers was a significant benefit. Not surprisingly, this was especially true for groups started at the top of companies or begun at the middle and by groups in

need of higher level support. Grassroots groups were less apt to report this as either a help or a hindrance.

Supervisors and middle managers. This type of support was mentioned as being important in cases where members felt the most conflict over their time commitments to a work-family group and/or the most resistance to implementing their recommendations.

Line employees. Gaining the support of line employees (seen as the primary work-family "customers") was most pronounced in firms whose work-family group functioned as a communications liaison between the work-family manager and line employees. Grassroots groups also viewed line employees as a prime constituency.

Nearly all of the task forces and committees under study had objectives (formal or informal) to increase the extent of support for work-family activity in their companies. In attempting to reach these objectives, they sought to influence the thinking and attitudes of top managers, middle managers, and line employees through their communications, personal contact, and program recommendations.

IV. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

*T*his study was designed to gather information about the origins, organization, and impact of work-family groups established at the workplace. The following list highlights some of the key findings and their implications for practice:⁷

1. The origins of most work-family groups were similar to those of other participatory structures in organizations, with the majority of groups being initiated either at the top or middle of organizations. However, the fact that many work-family groups had their origins at the bottom of organizations or as spin-offs from other groups distinguished them from other workplace groups (e.g., those relating to quality, productivity, or employee involvement).

In their formative stage, work-family groups with different origins have various sources of support, types of legitimacy, and stakeholders. Group origins also influence whether members have to make their case for action from the top down, from the bottom up, or from the middle (both up and down) in an organization.

Understanding the origins of groups can help work-family leaders to gauge their initial base of support and identify primary targets for building awareness and influence.

2. The five variations in structure and function of work-family groups suggest that firms have established work-family groups for different purposes.

These purposes include:

- 1) initial fact-finding and needs assessment (most often conducted by task forces);
- 2) development of programs and policies (typically by advisory groups); and
- 3) work-family program management (by two governance groups).

Interviewees also mentioned other purposes such as: providing employee support, increasing overall awareness of work-family issues (grassroots groups), and working with unions (negotiator groups).

Work-family leaders would be well advised to assess the "fit" between their group's purpose and structure. Members may expect too much from a group charged only with fact-finding and not be prepared to offer enough to a group that needs to develop and monitor programs. In the same way, employees may expect too much from a work-family group designed to study issues and managers may get more than they would like when groups advocate for change. It behooves work-family groups to periodically re-consider and re-affirm their primary functions and to evaluate whether their existing structure is the best way to fulfill these functions.

⁷ Note: implications for practice are listed in bold.

.....
Many work-family groups are established to fulfill more than a single function. The effectiveness of these groups could be enhanced by conducting a stakeholder analysis and comparing the findings with the group's stated goals and objectives.
.....

3. Two sets of factors affected how work-family groups were linked to their formal organizations: a) the position (and organizational level) of the majority of group members; and b) the extent to which members served on the committee because it was one of their assigned job responsibilities.

For the work-family groups in this study, there were advantages and disadvantages to the different types of linkage to the organization. For example, the "Human Resource" model ensured a better interface between work-family and other employee oriented initiatives. At the same time, some work-family groups affiliated with HR departments lacked credibility with line managers and employees.

.....
Work-family leaders need to understand their group's base of power and expertise. Groups based in human resources, for example, may need to reach out more to line employees and get more support from line managers. In contrast, affinity groups may need to bring their agenda more in alignment with the business priorities and culture of their organization.
.....

4. Effective leaders and members were almost universally characterized as having "passion" around work-family issues. At the same time, leaders needed to be effective group managers and spokespersons. Finally, all of the interviewees

reported that the members committed considerable time and energy to their groups in the face of competing work and family priorities.

.....
Selection is the key to effective leadership and membership in work-family groups. Groups need people who have the requisite skills, motivation, and credibility. Line managers will not necessarily want these people to commit themselves fully to work-family groups. A combination of senior management persuasion and personal insistence are often required.
.....

Participation in work-family groups can create an "approach-avoidance" situation for members because, on the one hand, they want to contribute to the group, but they also recognize that the time required makes it more difficult for them to achieve work/life balance in their own lives. Group leaders can help by providing members with a "realistic preview" of time demands and by ensuring that supervisors "sign off" on the time commitment required.
.....

Maintaining member motivation is a key challenge for work-family leaders. One interviewee explained that he shared news clippings and other materials with members between meetings so that they were kept up-to-date about events happening within the work-family field. This firm also sponsored annual "field trips" for the members of its work-family group, making it possible for them to visit work-family programs established at other companies.
.....

5. Work-family groups were engaged in activities that were similar to those of other organizational task forces and committees. Accordingly, they might benefit from taking steps to monitor and improve their effectiveness.

In order to get the most out of their groups' efforts, activities need to be carefully selected. Groups may want to ask the following questions in considering whether to conduct an activity:

- If conducted, will the activity help the group achieve a priority objective?
- If conducted, will the activity add more value than an alternative activity?
- If conducted, is the anticipated impact worth the effort?

Work-family groups should be encouraged to periodically assess their interpersonal dynamics and group processes. The company's organizational development department may be able to help improve the group's functioning.

Work-family groups can benefit from assessing and benchmarking their progress and accomplishments. Assessment information provides group members with tangible feedback about their performance.

Work-family managers frequently share information with one another at conferences and other gatherings. This enables the field to learn from the different types of experiences encountered at various work-sites. However, none of the interviewees mentioned that they had ever talked to their colleagues about ways to enhance the performance of their work-family groups.

6. There was considerable evidence that work-family groups made contributions to their company's work-family agendas, and furthermore that groups which worked effectively seemed to endure. For example, one firm reported that its work-family manager conducted focus groups at different company sites as a way to better understand employees' perspectives of different work-family experiences. At one of the focus group sessions, the enthusiasm of the group led to a decision that they would continue to meet as an informal employee network. Several years later, when the work-family manager was establishing advisory groups at the company's principal sites, the informal employee network at that site served as the advisory group.

Companies might benefit from using their work-family groups as "standing committees" to oversee and improve work-family activities. This would serve to institutionalize work-family programs in a broader governance structure.

7. As a final point, many firms recognize that the appointment of a work-family manager constitutes an important step in making work-family activity a legitimate and ongoing activity in the enterprise. However, companies that do not maximize the use of work-family groups as participatory structures fail to leverage the potential contributions of employees to advance, assess, and improve work-family activities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE INQUIRY

As an exploratory study, many of the research questions addressed in this study have not been answered in any definitive way. Furthermore, the study has raised a number of additional questions that could be addressed by subsequent studies.

1. Impact

- Is the strategy of creating work-family groups the "best" investment of time and resources?
- Can firms accomplish just as much by naming a work-family manager and giving that manager appropriate support and resources?

2. Effectiveness

- What specific interventions enhance the internal and external effectiveness of work-family groups?
- Under what conditions do they really "make a difference?"
- How can work-family groups be used in a more strategic fashion so that their work is more closely connected to business priorities?

3. Life Cycle

- How do the responsibilities and activities of work-family groups change over time?
- Are there patterns in work-family groups with respect to:
 - changes in group structure?
 - primary functions?
 - the most important characteristics of group leaders or members?
 - the relationship between the group and the formal organization?

4. Work-Family Infrastructure

- How are key activities (e.g., awareness building, influencing, educating, etc.) addressed by companies that do not establish work-family groups?
- What are the "tradeoffs" between having tasks accomplished by a work-family manager versus a work-family group?

5. Group Members

- How do the members of work-family groups perceive their experiences and contributions?
- Are group members more or less favorably disposed to their companies than other employees?
- Are group members more or less favorably disposed to the work-family movement?

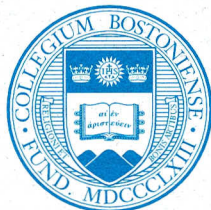
6. Corporate Culture

- To what extent does corporate culture influence work-family groups?
- How much do work-family groups impact corporate culture?

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