

The Rosabeth Moss  
*Kanter Award*  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN WORK-FAMILY RESEARCH

# THE 2013 ROSABETH MOSS KANTER AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN WORK-FAMILY RESEARCH

AWARDED BY THE CENTER FOR FAMILIES AT PURDUE UNIVERSITY  
AND THE BOSTON COLLEGE CENTER FOR WORK & FAMILY

Sponsored by the Corporate Partners of the Boston College Center for Work & Family Roundtable

## Announcing the winner:

*Is using work-life interface benefits a career-limiting move? An examination of women, men, lone parents, and parents with partners.* (2012)

Journal of Organizational Behavior 33, 1095-1119.

Authors: Alison Konrad and Yang Yang



## AUTHOR INTERVIEW

**Alison Konrad**

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## What were the major findings of your study?

- Women and men were equally likely to use flexibility options (i.e., reduced work hours, flexible scheduling, compressed scheduling, and working at home); women were slightly more likely than men to use dependent care options (child care, elder care, and an employee assistance program), but this gender difference was very small.
- People who used a work-life flexibility benefit were more likely to be promoted.
- Working at home was particularly valuable for enhancing promotion prospects for mothers of children age 6 or under.
- Using dependent care was particularly valuable for enhancing promotion of parents with children age 6 or under.
- Single parents of young children benefitted less than other employees from using work-life flexibility options.

## Were you surprised by the findings?

Somewhat. Given prior findings that managers rate users of work-life interface options as less promotable, we would not

have been surprised to find that using work-life flexibility or dependent care benefits reduced subsequent promotions. However, given the large body of work that shows work-life facilitation effects (where people with rich home lives perform better at work) and the large body of research showing that using work-life flexibility benefits enhances performance and motivation, we were hopeful that in the longer term, using the benefits would be positively related to promotion, and we found that was the case.

## What do you think are the most important implications of your findings for employees? For human resource practitioners?

The most important implication **for employees** is that using work-life interface benefits does not have to be a career-limiting move. At first, people might worry about your career if you ask to use a benefit, but in the longer term, if you show everyone that you are still working hard, committed and motivated, those initial fears will go away. Also, you'll show people that you are able to take initiative and manage yourself well, which is often a key factor for earning a promotion.

The most important implication for **HR practitioners** is that employees can perform well when they use work-life interface options, and often perform better than their colleagues, hence, becoming more promotable. Work-life interface benefits can be viewed as a positive factor from the employer's point of view – saving on office space for people who work at home, giving employees opportunities to demonstrate initiative and self-motivation, and providing managers with a way to reward high quality employees whom you wish to retain. In particular, if a high quality employee requests a work-life interface accommodation, it behooves the employer to try to fulfill the request rather than resist it. Often, people using accommodations work so well that they demonstrate higher promotability as a result.

# TOP 10 TAKEAWAYS FROM KANTER AWARD FINALISTS...

## 1. Are work-life benefits the key to career success?

- In the study by Konrad & Yang (2012), employees who used work-life benefits were more likely to have positive career outcomes than employees who did not. Employees who needed but did not use work-life benefits were more likely to face career penalties.
- If a manager perceives an employee's use of flexibility for business purposes, the employee is seen as more committed and is more likely to receive a promotion. Even when flexibility is used for family needs, the employee does not suffer negative career consequences (Leslie et al., 2012).
- Single parents benefit less from using work-life interface benefits than others, which suggests that the strain of multiple roles is more difficult for this group to overcome (Konrad & Yang, 2012).

## 2. How can organizations help more women “lean in”?

- In order to help retain women, organizations must provide meaningful and engaging work, where performance is evaluated equally and fairly, and hours are regular and predictable. Family responsibilities have less impact than job characteristics on preferences for work hours (Reynolds & Johnson, 2012).
- Further, even though research finds that workplace flexibility can lead to greater career performance and increased promotion, the stigma associated with flexibility can cause women to “lean out” (Konrad & Yang, 2012; Leslie, et al., 2012). Organizations can address stigma through unconscious bias training and performance management tools to fully leverage the benefits that workplace flexibility provides.
- Finally, organizations can help more women recognize that work enriches their family and can be beneficial to their children. Communicate the positive attributes of work-life integration (higher income, greater wellbeing, greater independence, positive child outcomes), to help women stay engaged (Kramer Holmes, et al., 2012).

## 3. Can breadwinners and caregivers achieve work-life fit?

- According to Crocker & Clawson (2012), breadwinners seek work opportunities that maximize earnings and caregivers seek work opportunities that maximize predictability.
- However, today's workforce is more complex than these categories suggest, as most employees blend breadwinning and caregiving responsibilities. Control over work hours and schedules is critical for work-life fit (Reynolds & Johnson, 2012), so that the organization can ensure that all employees are achieving their peak performance.

## 4. Is part-time work the Holy Grail for women?

- While nearly 50% of women would ideally want to work part-time, fewer than 8% are able to achieve that preferred work situation (Kramer Holmes et al., 2012).
- 45% of women who currently work full-time would prefer to work part-time (Reynolds & Johnson, 2012). More professional part-time options could help to keep women engaged in the workforce, and potentially make this option more attractive to men as well.
- The availability of part-time options helps keep women in the labor force, but may not always help them advance in their careers (Abendroth et al., 2012).

## 5. Does work-life fit impact mental health?

- Almost two-thirds of new mothers do not achieve their preferred work situation, which increases their risk for depression. Social support decreases the likelihood of depression (Kramer Holmes et al., 2012). By having conversations about work-life fit with female employees, managers could address preferred and actual hours, and provide needed support.
- Providing formal on/off ramping programs may improve mothers' wellbeing. Mothers who gradually increased their work hours after maternity leave experienced less parental stress (Reynolds & Johnson, 2012).

## 6. When are family-friendly workplace supports most beneficial?

- Formal supports such as child care assistance, family leave, and flexible work, combined with personal coping strategies result in decreased work-family conflict. Organizational supports are critical, especially for those employees who lack coping strategies (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2012).
- Employee Assistance Programs and training interventions can help individuals learn to develop and utilize coping strategies such as prioritizing, delegation, and negotiation.
- Mothers employed in an environment that offers a high level of workplace support (flexibility, parental leave) work 3 hours more per week on average compared to mothers with low levels of workplace support (Abendroth et al, 2012).

## 7. How do we optimize parental leave?

- In Europe, women who had shorter maternity leaves worked 5 hours less per week than those who took longer maternity leaves (on average 44 weeks) (Abendroth et al., 2012).
- Offering paternity leave, and strengthening father support for children, increases women's work hours by an average of 6 hours per week (Abendroth et al., 2012).
- Though the United States is the only developed nation that doesn't mandate paid parental leave to new parents, several US organizations, such as AstraZeneca, Deloitte, Google, and MetLife provide paid leave to new mothers and fathers with positive results for the business and their employees.

## 8. How can setting boundaries help to alleviate blurring of work and personal life?

- Job predictors of role blurring include jobs with more authority, excessive work pressures, heavy workload, schedule control, and decision-making latitude (Glavin & Schieman, 2012).
- Role blurring is associated with higher levels of work-to-family conflict (Glavin & Schieman, 2012), which can be mitigated by setting boundaries and parameters around work. Specific tactics include limiting after-hours emails, providing schedule flexibility, and enforcing work-free vacations.

## 9. How can “paying it forward” at work positively affect others and our work-life fit?

- Researchers have found something that we all know: doing good for others feels good (such as when a firefighter saves a life) (Sonnetag & Grant, 2012). But researchers also found 3 additional outcomes:
  - The good feeling may take some time to be realized.
  - The good feeling from work has a positive effect at home.
  - The good feeling from helping others also boosts feelings of competence
- Therefore, in order to “pay it forward” it is important to provide employees with some down time so that they can reflect on their achievements and accomplishments from the day. Finding ways to reflect at work, such as sharing stories in which an employee helped a customer, solved a problem, or overcame a barrier can reap positive effects for the individuals, their peers, and the organization.

## 10. Is our next generation ready to work? How can we better prepare them?

- Teenagers are increasingly reluctant to participate in housework. They are producing less and consuming more, placing additional burden on their working mothers (Miller, 2012).
- Workforce readiness initiatives, including early skills-based training, “Take your child to work days”, and internships or apprenticeships will be critical in preparing these young workers to assume productive roles in society.
- On-boarding initiatives will need to clearly outline work expectations and managers should be trained to provide “coaching” to help new entrants be successful in the workplace.

## KANTER 2013 NOMINATED ARTICLES

- Abendroth, A.K., van der Lippe, T., & Maas, I. (2012). Social support and the working hours of employed mothers in Europe: The relevance of the state, the workplace, and the family. *Social Science Research* 41, 581-597. a.k.abendroth@uu.nl **FINALIST**
- Crocker, J. & Clawson, D. (2012). Buying time: Gendered patterns in union contracts. *Social Problems* 59(4), 459-480. jillian.crocker@gmail.com **FINALIST**
- Glavin, P., & Schieman, S. (2012). Work-Family role blurring and work-family conflict: The moderating influence of job resources and job demands. *Work and Occupations* 39(1), 71-98. paul.glavin@utoronto.ca **FINALIST**
- Konrad, A.M., & Yang, Y. (2012). Is using work-life interface benefits a career-limiting move? An examination of women, men, lone parents, and parents with partners. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 33, 1095-1119. akonrad@ivey.uwo.ca **WINNER**
- Kramer Holmes, E., Jacob Erickson, J., & Hill, E.J. (2012). Doing what she thinks is best: Maternal psychological wellbeing and attaining desired work situations. *Human Relations* 65(4), 501-522. erin\_holmes@byu.edu **FINALIST**
- Leslie L.M., Flaherty Manchester C., Park T.Y., & Mehng, S.A. (2012). Flexible work practices: A source of career premiums or penalties? *Academy of Management Journal* 55(6), 1407-1428. lmllesie@umn.edu **FINALIST**
- Miller, P. (2012). Do Australian teenagers work? Why we should care. *Feminist Economics* 18(4), 1-24. pavla.miller@rmit.edu.au **FINALIST**
- Reynolds, J., & Johnson, D. (2012). Don't blame the babies: Work hour mismatches and the role of children. *Social Forces* 91(1), 131-155. jeremyr@uga.edu
- Somech, A., & Drach-Zahavy, A. (2012). Coping with work-family conflict: The reciprocal and additive contributions of personal coping and organizational family-friendly support. *Work & Stress: An International Journal of Work, Health & Organisations* 26(1), 68-90. anits@edu.haifa.ac.il
- Sonnentag, S., & Grant, A. (2012). Doing good at work feels good at home, but not right away: When and why perceived prosocial impact predicts positive affect. *Personnel Psychology* 65, 495-530. sonnentag@uni-mannheim.de

### THE KANTER AWARD

Named in honor of Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who has been identified as the most influential contributor to modern literature on work and family, the Kanter Award is given for the best research paper published during the year. The rigorous award process involves 60 scholarly reviewers from all over the world who decide on the Kanter winners from among over 2500 articles published in 77 scholarly journals. No applications or nominations are accepted. This award raises awareness of excellent work-family research, fosters debate about standards of excellence, identifies the "best of the best" studies on which to base future research and outlines specific implications of the research for work-life and human resource professionals. The Center for Families at Purdue University and the Boston College Center for Work & Family developed the Rosabeth Moss Kanter Award to raise the awareness of high quality work-family research among the scholar, consultant and practitioner communities. Through the generous sponsorship of the Corporate Partners of the Boston College Center for Work & Family Roundtable, the standards of quality for work-family research will continue to rise, and actionable findings from the best studies will become more commonplace in business communities to inform policy and best people practices.

For more information about the Rosabeth Moss Kanter Award and other work-life research, please visit  
[www.purdue.edu/kanteraward](http://www.purdue.edu/kanteraward) [www.bc.edu/cwf](http://www.bc.edu/cwf)



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