Responding to the New Backlash: The Continuing Case for Work-Life Research and Policies

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Toward Meaningful Relations in Space and Time
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Terms in our world

- Work – Family
- Work / Life
- Work / Non-work
- Life
  - Balance
  - Integration
  - Blending
  - Blurring
  - Conflict

Policies / Initiatives:
- Flexible scheduling
- Family Leave
- Dependent care

What is meant:

Recognition that:
- paid work (work)
- unpaid work (home)
- family care (home)
- relationships (community)
- community involvement (community)
- recreation (self)
- self-care, health, sleep (self)

coexist.

"The extent to which individuals are equally involved in-and equally satisfied with-their work role and their family role." (Greenhaus & Singh, Collins & Shaw).

"… low levels of interrole conflict and high levels of interrole facilitation represent work-family balance" (p. 145). (Frone, 2003).

"The notion that simultaneously engaging in multiple work and family roles is beneficial for the physical, mental, and relationship health of individuals." (Greenhaus & Singh)

Glossary Source:


http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/work-life-balance
people reacting negatively to their perceived disadvantage compared to colleagues who do take advantage of work-family benefits (Young 1999; Parker and Allen 2001).

- felt by the users of such policies

"Work-family backlash' is the popular term describing childless employees' claim that they are penalized in the workplace in the following ways. They are expected to work additional hours and to fill in for parents whose child care responsibilities require them to leave work. They subsidize parental benefits such as dependent health care, insurance, and, at some companies, child care. While they may have equal access to elder care benefits, they may not qualify for other worklife programs such as flexible work arrangements or unpaid leaves" (Young, 1999, pp. 35-36).

"Although these types of benefits appear popular, anecdotal reports have indicated that some employees believe that work/family benefits are inequitable and even discriminatory. This resentment among some employees has been referred to as 'family-friendly backlash'" (Parker & Allen, 2001, pp. 453-454).

Glossary Source:


The original:
people reacting negatively to their perceived disadvantage compared to colleagues who do take advantage of work-family benefits (Young 1999; Parker and Allen 2001).
• Felt by the users of such policies

New:
• public opinion voices,
• policy makers,
• political figures, and
• business leaders
target the policies, critique their existence.
• Felt by everyone:
reaches popular press,
Work – Life concepts are twisted out of context.
Recent books and blogs

WORK LIFE BULL SHIT

THOMAS VAŠEK

62,833 in the Amazon bestseller list
Rieman Verlag, München. 2013.

Work-Life Balance is Bullshit

I spat out the words with an anger that surprised me: “Work-Life balance is bullshit.”

Ann Mehl and I were on a call with a reporter looking into doing a piece about the workshop we’re doing in a few weeks. I’d connected the two of them in a conference call while I was at LaGuardia, waiting to board a flight to Denver, for a board meeting in Boulder. The morning had been rushed. Lately, it feels, like everything is rushed.

Radio boss: We provide condoms to stop staff having babies (and work-life balance is bullshit)

Australia’s largest radio company Southern Cross Austereo gives condoms to its staff in Perth to discourage them from having babies, an executive has revealed.

Speaking at the Mumbrella Perth conference, Linda Wayman, who is boss of SCA’s two Perth stations Mix 94.9 and Hit 929, told the debate on recruitment and culture that of her 100 staff, a third are either on maternity leave or covering a position for someone who is. She said: “Thirty five per cent of my staff at the moment are on a maternity leave contract or maternity leave and that’s significant.”

And she revealed: “We do have a big jar of condoms at work. I’m not lying, I’m not exaggerating. I do encourage people regularly, to have sex with condoms. That is a big area of focus for me, encouraging people to have sex with condoms.”

Wayman told the audience she tried to support staff who were new mothers but was opposed to any legislation entitling them to come back in part time roles. She warned: “I don’t agree with the union push at the moment that women coming back to work, automatically should be allowed to come back part time. I’d love to, but I’d be lying if I said that was wonderful. It’s an idealistic and anti-commercial stance.”

Wayman: 'Angela Jolie Award' for staffer who benefitted from colleague being on maternity leave
Recent books and blogs


Work Life Balance is Bullshit.

32 responses.

When my son was little, my wife got a call from his teacher. She was “very concerned” and wanted to schedule a parent-teacher conference right away.

Of course we were very concerned too and rushed to the school, terrified of what we’d find out. Finally, after what seemed like hours of agonizing pleasantry, Danny’s teacher got to the point:

“Last week we did a Father’s Day project and I asked the kids what their dads did for a living. Your son said ‘my dad travels. He’s never home.’”

While it’s true that I do travel for business, it’s not true that I was never home. Still, that’s the way my six-year-old saw it – and perception is reality.

Bruce: I regularly discuss the work/life balance issue in my time management seminars. I start by saying that “work/life balance” is a euphemism for not working as much, which is fine. There are careers that allow that, with a commensurate reduction in salary and opportunity.

I generally speak to professional audiences, so once I have their attention, I explain that what we do as professionals is (a) hard and (b) requires more time, for which we receive the attendant salaries and opportunities.
Countering the New Backlash: 
3 reasons it exists

(1) the wrong definition of work-life balance,
(2) a too-narrow definition of the work-life situation, and
(3) misunderstandings around the meaning of work in various national, cultural, or gender contexts.
Assumption:
We’re trying to get people away from “evil” work.

Logical consequence:
(a) if work is pleasurable, we shouldn’t need to get away from it, and
(b) if work is evil, we should work on improving work quality, not avoiding work.

Counter:
Our goal: to address the total person, not just the commodified worker (Friedman 2008).
All agree with the goal of improving the quality of work.
Sometimes quality can be best improved by setting boundaries on work.
Work – Family initiatives are about allowing people to bring their best selves to all areas of their lives, not about avoiding work for the sake of avoiding work.
Countering the New Backlash: (2) a too-narrow definition of work-life

Assumption:
Paid work is the only work.

Fact:
Paid work alone cannot provide all that we individually or collectively need in life. Unpaid, caregiving, kin-keeping, volunteer service need attention, too.

Explanation for the narrow definition:
archetypes of “Ideal Worker” and “Marginalized Caregiver” grew out of a unique historical situation (Williams 2000).
Controversies and confusions:
• whether work and "life" should be separated within the family unit (gendered).
• whether work and "life" should be separated or integrated within an individual person's life.
(These are mutually influencing)

Problems:
1) Makes "life" invisible.
2) Allows policy makers to create status-based programs and turn blind eyes to "private" issues
3) Allows workplaces to dictate whether work and “life” are allowed in an individuals’ life by
   - assuming there is someone else for “life” work.
   - penalizing the worker if not
4) Allows blindness to the codependency of the archetypes
5) weakens the individual’s system if one is missing.

Countering the New Backlash: (2) a too-narrow definition of work-life
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Counterargument:
The archetypes are impossible and diametrically opposed. Everyone benefits from more realistic management of multiple life spheres and departure from archetype expectations. Sharing paid work better across more people:

• Less youth unemployment, chronic unemployment, underemployment
• Better health for more workers
• More access to the labor market after caregiving for all.
• More sharing unpaid work: raising the next generation, caring for elderly and those with limitations, caring for our homes, animals, gardens, neighborhoods, communities.

Summary:
With the coexistence of responsibilities within a life and within a family and society, we are all enriched.
Countering the New Backlash: (3) misunderstandings around the meaning of work in various national, cultural, or gender contexts

**Thesis:** only specific people are attracted to the idea that work-life is nonsense:

1. **Those who love their work:**
   likely experience control, mastery, autonomy, self-fulfillment.

2. **Those in power at work,**
   caught between the pressures of the organization and the real needs of the people they manage.
Countering the New Backlash: (3) misunderstandings around the meaning of work in various national, cultural, or gender contexts

Solution:
Arguments for setting or recognizing limits to individual performance at work:

- Even “good” work is not always good or healthy.
- Limits give perspective, allow for epiphanies away from paid work.
- Some cannot set their own limits.
- Allows for cycles in life and paid work.
- Allows for alternative identities, mutually enriching skills.
- Allows for authenticity.
Conclusions and take-home messages

1. Multiple types of work (paid, unpaid, voluntary) must be recognized for all.

2. The quality of work is important, but too much of anything isn’t good.

3. The publics who argue against work-life balance carry assumptions about the universalism of the “Ideal Worker” and blend out the role of the “Marginalized Caregiver” despite the interdependencies of these two archetypes (Williams 2000).

4. Health and long-term productivity and sustainability perspectives go missing in the “celebration of work” arguments.
Works cited


Additional sources regarding the topic of Work-Life Backlash


Additional Links:

http://4managers.de/wellness/literatur/work-life-bullshit/
http://karrierebibel.de/work-life-blending-arbeits-und-privatleben-verschmelzen/
http://motif.institute/work-life-balance-oder-work-life-bullshit/
http://t3n.de/news/evernote-work-life-balance-cebit-534429/
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