
Sunny L. Munn

Abstract
The Problem.
Individuals, organizations, and government are the primary forces studied in a work–life scenario. Too often these forces are studied independently of one another when they should instead be examined as a system. The most frequently discussed piece of the work–life system is work–life balance. Understanding how concepts of work–life balance are intertwined with meaningful work is important to individual and organizational development in human resource development (HRD).

The Solution.
This article introduces the work–life system as a means to examine the three forces, individuals, organizations, and government, and the three work–life dimensions, balance, initiatives, and policy. The first force and the first dimension, individuals and work–life balance, are discussed to demonstrate connections between work–life balance, meaningful work, and organizational culture. Using data from the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce, a preliminary ordinary least squares regression analysis illustrates these relationships and provides insight for future research.

The Stakeholders.
Work–life balance is increasingly relevant to HRD researchers and practitioners. This discussion seeks to illuminate key facets of the work–life dialogue and their impact on meaningful work to encourage further integration of the work–life system within HRD research and practice in the United States.

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Introduction

There is a fairly robust discussion surrounding the work–life system, not only in scholarly research but also across various media outlets in the United States. This widespread attention is evidenced through the Work and Family Researchers Network’s daily roundup of all things related to work–life and work–family systems (www.workfamily.sas.upenn.edu). The variety of research and discussion that exists is informative yet polarizing. There is a frequent discussion about workplace flexibility, work–life/work–family balance, perceptions of gender, leave policies, telework, “having it all,” engagement, stress, children, eldercare, time and space allocation, and education to name some of the most discussed topics. The work–life system spans a broad spectrum and has a significant impact on the lives of today’s employees, employers, and society. The societal “work–life conundrum” is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. The integration and development of new implementable and usable initiatives aimed to engage employees, however, has the potential to foster a meaningful workplace that helps individuals achieve a work–life balance. This can be addressed by the “work–life conundrum” in human resource development (HRD) identified by Kahnweiler (2008) while also addressing the needs of organizations to improve performance.

In the United States, there is an approximate forty-year history of research on work–family/work–life in the social sciences, much of which has been applicable solely to the “second shift”—married working mothers needing to balance work with family responsibilities (Hochschild, 1989). As evidenced through mass media and popular culture, the spectrum of the work–life discussion has grown immensely and now includes the recognition of changing family formations, gender roles, organizational responsibility, and governmental influence over how individuals and organizations interact.

Too often, the study and discussion of the work–life system has occurred in the domain in which the issue occurs—work or family. This perpetuates the myth of separate spheres (Kanter, 1977) in which we identify these domains as having clearly identified borders (Clark, 2000) creating the idea that work and life conflict instead of complementing one another. This perception of conflict forces a discussion of how to keep them separate. The reality, however, is that work–life is really a system in which the components of work and life interact and depend on one another. The work–life discussion should attempt to be inclusive of all moving parts including governments, organizations, and the people within them (Munn, Rocco, Bowman, & van Loo, 2011).

The purpose of this article is to introduce the work–life system and its importance to the study of work–life issues. More specifically, this article will explore the individual
force and work-life balance dimension within the system and how it impacts one’s ability to find meaningful work. To do this, first, the work–life system is presented. Next, various perspectives of work–life balance are shared. Third, the impact of meaning and purpose on an employee’s opportunity for and achievement of work–life balance is discussed. Fourth, a preliminary analysis using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is used to demonstrate the relationship between meaningful work and constructs of work–life balance. Finally, implications for HRD are provided.

**The Work–Life System: Individuals, Organizations, and Government**

Work–life can be viewed as a system in which each part of work and life is interdependent with the other parts of the system (Munn et al., 2011). The work–life system includes three intersecting forces: individuals, organizations, and government, and three corresponding dimensions: work–life balance, work–life initiatives, and work–life policy (see Figure 1). Each dimension in the work–life system has implications for workers, organizations, and government. Work–life policy may impact organizational

![Figure 1. The work–life system.](image-url)
work–life initiatives, which in turn impact the work–life balance of employees. The needs of employees and organizations may also impact the availability of work–life initiatives within an organization and the development, design, and implementation of public work–life policy.


In Munn et al.’s (2011) words,

> Work-life balance is how individuals choose to prioritize their work, family, individual, and community responsibilities. How one chooses to prioritize her or his work, family, individual and community responsibilities is in part influenced by the availability and knowledge of work-life initiatives as well as the organizational culture where it may or may not be acceptable to use [such] benefits. (p. 1)

Work–life initiatives include the organizational programs, practices, and policies available to help employees achieve balance (Lobel, 1999; Pitt-Catsouphes, Matz-Costa, & MacDermid, 2007). Work–life initiatives encourage organizational effectiveness and offer support for employee well-being (Lobel, 1999; Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2007). They address both structural and cultural organizational challenges such as flexible work practices and supervisor support (Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010). Often, the presence, availability and use of work–life initiatives are tied to the culture of the organization and its performance (Ogbonna & Harris, 2002). In addition, the demands and requirements of work–life policy that refers to public policy in the United States related to work–life are also likely to influence the existence and use of work–life initiatives within organizations.

**Existing Research: The Work–Life System**

Work–life research was initiated as a means to understand how married, working women balance work and childcare responsibilities (Lewis, 2001; Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000). There has also been a significant focus on dual-earner couples (Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Barnett, 1999; Huang, Hammer, Neal, & Perrin, 2004; Moen & Yu, 2000). Fewer studies exist regarding the work–life experiences of single parents (DeBord, Fanning Canu, & Kerpelman, 2000), fathers (Roy, 2005), sexual minorities (Hornsby & Munn, 2009), employees without children (Hamilton, Gordon, & Whelan-Berry, 2006), or low-wage workers except welfare recipients (DeBord et al., 2000; Seefeldt, 2008).

Work–life initiatives available to the individual employee are important to the individual’s life at and outside of work (Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Morris, 2008). Accessible work–life initiatives encourage healthier and safer work environments by reducing employee fatigue and stress (Yasbek, 2004). Employees with less work-imposed stress are also more committed and productive on the job (Fornes, Rocco, & Wollard, 2008).
However, work–life initiatives such as flexible scheduling are typically only useful to upper tier salaried workers (Lambert, 2009; Lambert & Waxman, 2005) and often work against hourly employees (Lambert, 2009). Maternity leave is frequently available, while paternity leave is disproportionately offered and often culturally unacceptable to use within an organization (Kirby & Krone, 2002). When organizations do offer maternity or paternity leave, it is often unpaid because employers are not required to provide paid time off (Glass, 2009). While organizations are beginning to offer work–life initiatives to gay and lesbian employees, benefits continue to be disproportionately offered and/or applied in comparison with those available to married heterosexual couples (Hornsby & Munn, 2009).

There is far less research on the actual use of work–life benefits (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999), including how such benefits impact an individual’s ability to achieve work–life balance, who uses the benefits, or how employee use impacts organizational outcomes. Understanding the choices employees make about using or not using work–life benefits may be important to understand how individuals achieve work–life balance. Research is needed to understand how organizations design and implement benefits that better enable all workers to balance work and life while also improving organizational performance.

For organizations, improved employee outcomes could in turn positively influence organizational performance thus impacting the firm’s bottom line. Studies have demonstrated increases in organizational performance, profit, and productivity (Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000) as well as employee recruitment, retention, and commitment (Galinsky & Johnson, 1998) when work–life initiatives are present. Organizations are diverse in type, size, function, and industry, limiting the types and availability of work–life initiatives. While there are many advantages for organizations to provide work–life initiatives to employees, there are also costs, making it difficult to create a “one-size-fits-all” approach to the creation and application of work–life initiatives (Yasbek, 2004).

While “a one-size-fits-all” approach is unlikely, there is value in the collaborative efforts of individuals, organizations, and government as primary forces in promoting work–life policy development, implementation, and evaluation for the betterment of society as a whole (Munn, 2009). The development of work–life policy has the potential to promote positive outcomes for both the individual and the organization. Existing work–life policy mostly supports the needs of middle to upper class parents and traditional families (Galinsky, 2009; Kossek & Distelberg, 2009; Milkman, 2009; Williams, 2010). The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in the United States has been instrumental in assisting families with caretaking responsibilities allowing them to leave work temporarily. However, the FMLA is not applicable to organizations with fewer than 50 employees, nor does it offer paid time off, making it more likely to be used by employees who can afford not to work. For example, an hourly worker has an ailing parent who needs care, yet the worker is not eligible for work–life benefits, such as flexible scheduling or sick days. The employee’s company has more than 50 workers, but because this employee earns just above minimum wage with inconsistent hours, using the unpaid FMLA time is not an affordable option. The employee is torn
between working for sustainability and caring for a loved one. This will likely cause the employee to become disengaged at work, creating problems for himself or herself and the organization. The employee is less likely to find meaning in work, making it difficult to be happy both at work and outside of work. Therefore, achieving a work–life balance becomes much more challenging for a worker in this situation.

Work–Family and Work–Life Balance

Probably, the most frequently discussed piece of the work–life system is the first force and first dimension that represent the individual and work–life balance. It is not uncommon to find discussions of work–life balance in popular press items such as the *Huffington Post*, *The New York Times*, and on hundreds of personal blogs in addition to scholarly research in HRD, and a variety of other fields (Crooker, Smith, & Tabak, 2002; Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001; Guest, 2002). However, there is little agreement on a single definition of work–family and work–life balance (McMillan, Morris, & Atchley, 2011). Both are difficult to define due to ambiguity, multiple interpretations, and lack of a single measurable construct that could be used to assess the existence and use of beneficial practices that can positively impact the lives of employees within organizations (McMillan et al., 2011).

Use of the term work–family balance makes two assumptions. First, it assumes a dichotomous relationship between only two domains in an individual’s life—work and family. The concept of a work sphere and a family sphere each occupying its own space, along with the term “balance” implies a requirement to create equal spheres to achieve balance that is often misleading. While it might be possible to conceptualize work and family as occupying separate, bordered spheres, practically it is impossible for the two not to overlap (Kanter, 1977). Second, it assumes that only those with families require balance. While the definition of family can be interpreted widely (Powell, Bolzendahl, Geist, & Steelman, 2012) within the work–family literature, it is typically used to refer to married and dual-earner couples or those with children.

Voydanoff (2005) defines work–family balance as “a global assessment that work and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands such that participation is effective in both domains” (p. 825). Clark (2000), however, defines work–family balance as the absence of or “a minimum of role conflict” that contributes to the “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home” among the spheres of work and family (p. 751). Others state that it is the “accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains” (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007, p. 455). Alternatively, work–family balance is also defined in terms of equality as “the extent to which an individual is equally involved in—and equally satisfied with—his or her work role and family role” (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003, p. 513).

Conversely, work–life balance has the potential to be all encompassing by incorporating life outside of one’s family, such as community responsibilities and extracurricular activities (Barnett, 1999; Voydanoff, 2001). Guest (2002) stated that the term work–life balance does not imply an equality of domains but instead “serves simply as
a convenient shorthand for work and the rest of life” (p. 262). This is somewhat indicated by Crooker et al. (2002) who wrote that “work-life balance is the stability characterized by the balancing of an individual’s life complexity and dynamism with environmental and personal resources such as family, community, employer, profession, geography, information, economics, personality, or values” (p. 389). Recently, some have found that the term “balance” is misleading and instead use “work–life harmony,” that is, “an individually pleasing, congruent arrangement of work and life roles that is interwoven into a single narrative of life” (McMillan et al., 2011, p. 15).

However, I offer my own definition of work–life balance that does not imply equality for any previously assigned number of domains or a 50/50 split, as each individual will find balance in his or her own way. Work–life balance is simply “how individuals choose to prioritize their work, family, individual, and community responsibilities” (Munn et al., 2011, p. 1). This definition supports the notion that work–life balance is individualistic, meaning that each individual may achieve it differently by doing what is meaningful and works best in all aspects of his or her life. There are personal, organizational, and societal factors that contribute to each individual’s sense of balance. Achievement of this balance is influenced by individual choice, the existence and usability of work–life initiatives, organizational culture, and the meaning and purpose people find in their work, family, individual, and community roles. Whether one has achieved work–life balance in his or her life is dependent on the choices made and the meaning one finds within life at work and outside of work.

A Changing Workforce: Connecting Work–Life Balance and Meaningful Work

The American workforce is changing and individuals have

   a desire to be part of an organization that [will] take care of them and help them take care of their families, support their growth through skill and knowledge development, understand their need to have some work-life balance, and use their skills and abilities in a way that is meaningful. (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009, p. 194)

Given that organizations have such influence over our lives; it is understandable why these pieces cannot work without the other. The influence of organizations over individuals and individuals over organizations is clear thus further illuminating the need to recognize work–life as a system.

As one dimension in that system, work–life balance has become increasingly popular over the past 40 years (and even more so within HRD in the last 10) as organizations and policymakers continue to adjust to a changing workforce. Today nearly half of the U.S. workforce comprises women (U.S. Department of Labor & U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Changing family types such as single mothers and fathers, as well as rising numbers of acknowledged sexual minorities (Munn et al., 2011), are also increasingly prevalent within the workforce. At their inception, work–family initiatives benefited female employees with children (Lewis, 2001).
Today, organizational practices that better enable employees to capitalize on all aspects of life through policies that enable flexible work practices, knowledge growth, and career development are needed to fulfill the needs of workers with a variety of situations. There are now an assortment of work–family/work–life initiatives that are beginning to align with Kanter’s call for work–life policy in the 1970s to go beyond the worker.

These changes have contributed to a new and diverse workforce that has begun to transgress heteronormative standards of the ideal worker. The ideal worker is most accurately depicted as a traditional heterosexual male (Williams, 2010) who can “subordinate all other elements of life to the requirements of the job” (Bailyn, Drago, & Kochan, 2001, p. 2), thus maintaining this dichotomous bordered relationship between work and life. We can no longer assume a predominantly male and heterosexual workforce that exists without a need for work–life balance. The “myth of separate worlds” where work and life are kept as separate bordered entities no longer reigns true (Kanter, 1977) and only serves currently to perpetuate gender (Kossek et al., 2010), sexuality, family, and relationship stereotyping, further preventing one’s ability to find meaningful work, and decreasing the opportunity to achieve work–life balance.

**Meaningful Work and Work–Life Balance**

Meaningful work “gives essence to what we do and brings a sense of fulfillment to our lives” (Chalofsky, 2010, p. 19). Chalofsky’s (2010) meaningful work model (see Chalofsky’s and Cavallaro’s revised model in the introduction to this issue) contains three elements critical to achieving an “integrated wholeness” that include “sense of self,” “work itself,” and “sense of balance” (p. 20). First, one’s “sense of self” can be obtained from an awareness of health and spirituality; values, enjoyment, and helpfulness; self-actualization; self-efficacy; learning and change; and a curiosity and openness to difference. “Work itself” is achieved through an individual’s understanding of what is motivating and fulfilling, identification of skills and challenges, and the ability to undertake self-directed learning, maintain autonomy, and become empowered. One’s “sense of balance” will vary by individual. Work can either compete with one’s life or complement it. When work and life are treated as a dichotomy, the competition among these domains increase; however, when there is a complementary relationship among domains meaningful work has the power to encourage individual growth. Influential to meaningful work is the impact of one’s sense of balance on the ability to achieve a work–life balance (Chalofsky, 2010). Work–life balance is also likely to influence whether individuals perceive their work as meaningful.

Work–life balance and meaningful work are essential to all workers and impacted by personal circumstance. The work–life needs of employees cannot be assumed to be the same as there are many psychological, temporal, and physical factors that vary by individual and contribute uniquely to each individual’s work–life balance. Predictors of work–life balance include external combinations of family, work, and community responsibilities and support systems in addition to the internal management of
motivation, goals, and self-expectations. Also important to one’s sense of balance at work is skill, performance, personality, and job satisfaction.

Today workers want much more from their job than simply the exchange of labor for a paycheck. Finding meaning and purpose in our employment is often dependent on the enjoyment we find in performing daily tasks and the identification of the fruits of our labor. This enjoyment is influenced by job satisfaction and our sense of balance that leads to our ability to achieve a work–life balance. Individuals want to know that what they do for work has a purpose and is worthwhile (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). When one goes to work every day and finds that his or her work contributes to a greater good, it becomes much more meaningful.

A meaningful workplace includes elements of a values-based culture, how organizations care about employees, the organizational mission, and employee socialization within organizations (Chalofsky, 2010). These elements are communicated and perpetuated through the organizational culture and available work–life benefits as a means of assisting employees obtain a work–life balance. According to Munn et al. (2011), “A supportive and inclusive organizational culture enables employers to build loyalty and increase retention while allowing employees to perform at their highest capacity by providing comfort and confidence within their work environments” (p. 3).

Enjoyment of one’s job versus the duty of doing one’s job to obtain a paycheck is also likely to be influenced by the organizational culture in which the individual works and can show his or her true personality. For instance, do employees have the freedom to be themselves? Or must they hide their true identity because it doesn’t fit within the standards of their work environment? Are they free to discuss their families or activities outside of work? The freedom to be oneself within the environment we spend at least a quarter of our day significantly impacts our reactions not only to work but also to how we handle the world. What is the meaning that is taken away from this? And how does this impact our ability to achieve balance?

An employee’s ability to express themselves at work might be impacted by coworker and/or supervisor perceptions of personal characteristics such as sexual orientation, and marital, family, or parental status. For sexual minorities, achieving a work–life balance might be more difficult due to legitimate or perceived discrimination at work (Trau & Hartel, 2007). Gay and lesbian business school graduates who felt comfortable coming out in their heteronormative work environments and had heterosexual and homosexual allies within the workplace were both happier on the job and in their personal lives (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995) leading to more meaningful work and a better work–life balance. Similarly, single parents may experience real or perceived feelings of marginalization due to their nontraditional family status (DeBord et al., 2000; Williams, 2010). A single father may be silently discouraged from using available parental leave benefits because using them would not fit the mold of the ideal worker (Kirby & Krone, 2002) leading to diminished satisfaction with work and an inability to find work–life balance. To resolve issues perpetuated through organizational culture and address the work–life needs of employees, it is essential to consider what creates meaningful work for all employees and whether the obtainment of meaningful work is impacted by work–life balance.
A Preliminary Analysis of Work–Life Balance and Meaningful Work

To begin to better understand the relationship between meaningful work, workplaces, and work–life balance, a preliminary analysis using data from the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) was conducted to identify possible relationships. The NSCW is a nationally representative sample of 3,502 employed workers in the United States. It has been conducted approximately every 5 years since 1992 with the 2008 survey being the most recent (Families and Work Institute, 2010). Data from this survey were used to identify the relationship between employees’ agreement that the work they do is meaningful to them (meaningful work), a supportive work–life culture (work–life fit), and a measure of work–life balance (work–life conflict). As previously stated, there is no single measure in the literature for these constructs, especially work–life balance; therefore, we are limited to the constraints of the available data.

Description of the Sample

Measures similar to those identified in previous research evaluating work–life benefits (Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000) and organizational culture (Bond, 2004; Thompson et al., 1999) were identified in the NSCW for use in this analysis. Only individuals who are employed by others, are U.S. citizens, and answered all questions pertaining to the variables used are included. This resulted in a final sample of 687 employees. In this case, the sample is somewhat homogeneous with 75% married, 85% White, over 50% women, and 73% having children. On average, respondents have a college education and are 46 years old. They tend to work just under a 40-hr work week and have been employed at their current job for approximately 11 years (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

Description of Variables

The dependent variable in this analysis represents employees’ level of agreement that their work is meaningful. Responses are coded 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (somewhat disagree), 3 (somewhat agree), and 4 (strongly agree). On average, respondents “somewhat to strongly agreed” that they found their work meaningful.

There are two independent variables of interest that include work–life fit and work–life conflict. Work–life fit serves as a proxy for organizational culture and specifically measures schedule flexibility and coworker and supervisor support. It is coded 1 (low), 2 (moderate), and 3 (high). It has an average response of “moderate.” Because of the limitations within the data set, work–life conflict serves as a proxy for work–life balance in this context. It measures the amount of conflict between work and family and is coded 1 (not at all), 2 (not too much), 3 (somewhat), and 4 (a lot), where “not too much” is the average response.

A number of variables were included in the model as controls. These included individual characteristics such as marital status, education level, race, age, gender, parental
status, and work–family centricity, as well as the following work characteristics: work hours per week, years worked for employer, and earnings, benefits, job and schedule satisfaction (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

### Results and Discussion

A simple OLS regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of work–life fit and work–life conflict on meaningful work. The results demonstrate that the model overall is significant at $p < .01$. When respondents have a more positive work–life fit thus indicating a more supportive organizational culture, meaningful work increases by 20.8% ($p < .01$). This provides support for Chalofsky’s (2010) idea that finding meaning in work and a meaningful workplace stems from the organizational culture in which the employee exists. When supervisors and coworkers show that they care and create a more open and accessible environment, workers are likely to find more meaning in their work. Similarly, when the work–life conflict increases, employees tend to find 6% less meaning in their work ($p < .05$). When employees find that work and family/life are interfering with one another, they may feel that they are inadequately fulfilling one or both of their roles. Of the control variables, three positively and significantly impacted one’s perception of meaningful work. Women who are more job

| Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Means, Standard Deviations, and Score Ranges ($N = 687$). |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Dependent variable             |          |          |          |          |
| Meaningful work                | 3.67     | 0.59     | 1        | 4        |
| Independent variables of interest |         |          |          |          |
| Work–life fit                  | 2.03     | 0.70     | 1        | 3        |
| Work–life conflict             | 2.34     | 0.90     | 1        | 4        |
| Control variables: Individual characteristics |          |          |          |          |
| Married                        | 0.75     | 0.43     | 0        | 1        |
| Education level                | 4.16     | 1.44     | 1        | 6        |
| White                          | 0.85     | 0.36     | 0        | 1        |
| Age                            | 46.04    | 10.47    | 19       | 79       |
| Female                         | 0.51     | 0.50     | 0        | 1        |
| Parent                         | 0.73     | 0.44     | 0        | 1        |
| Work–family centered           | 1.98     | 0.77     | 1        | 3        |
| Control variables: Work characteristics |          |          |          |          |
| Hours per week                 | 38.72    | 6.21     | 2        | 90       |
| Years worked for employer      | 11.33    | 9.10     | 1        | 50       |
| Schedule satisfaction          | 0.95     | 0.21     | 0        | 1        |
| Earnings satisfaction          | 0.86     | 0.35     | 0        | 1        |
| Benefits satisfaction          | 0.91     | 0.28     | 0        | 1        |
| Job satisfaction               | 0.96     | 0.20     | 0        | 1        |
centric than family centric and who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to find more meaning in their work ($p < .01; p < .05; and p < .01$; see Table 2 for complete regression results).

**Implications for HRD**

This preliminary analysis assessing the impact of work–life fit and work–life conflict on meaningful work demonstrates that constructs of organizational culture and work–life balance impact perceptions of meaningful work within this sample of employees. Future research using the NSCW should examine the relationship between the existence of work–life benefits and work–life conflict in meaningful work within different types of organizational cultures. It is possible that the type of organizational culture in which employees exist differentially impacts how they achieve work–life balance and perceive meaning in their work. In addition, if a common metric could be identified to measure work–life balance, HRD practitioners might be more adequately prepared to assess the work–life balance of their employees (McMillan et al., 2011) and create

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**Table 2. Regression Results: Meaningful Work ($N = 687$).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables of interest</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work–life fit</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>[0.14, 0.28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work–life conflict</td>
<td>−0.06**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>[−0.11, −0.01]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control variables: Employee characteristics</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>[−0.05, 0.15]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>[−0.01, 0.04]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>[−0.00, 0.23]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>[−0.00, 0.01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>[0.03, 0.23]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>[−0.01, 0.18]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work–family centered</td>
<td>0.07**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>[0.01, 0.13]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control variables: Work characteristics</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hours per week</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>[−0.01, 0.01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years worked for employer</td>
<td>−0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>[−0.01, 0.01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule satisfaction</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>[−0.18, 0.24]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings satisfaction</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>[−0.08, 0.17]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits satisfaction</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>[−0.22, 0.07]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>0.47***</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>[0.25, 0.67]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p > F$ \[.00***\]

$R^2$ \[.1571\]

Adjusted $R^2$ \[.1383\]

*Note. CI = confidence interval. Dependent variable = Meaningful work.
**p < .05. ***p < .01.*
useful work–life initiatives. Tools that help to assess the work–life balance of employees may also lead to a better understanding of how meaning and purpose are found by employees with their work and within the workplace. If we can have a better understanding of these relationships, HRD practitioners will be better prepared to create impactful change within their organizations.

Achieving a balance between the competing demands of work, family, individual needs, community, and the rest of life is an important issue not only for individual employees, but also for human resource professionals and policymakers. It has become a prerequisite for organizations to accommodate changing employee needs by providing initiatives that support the work–life balance of their workers. The existence of work–life initiatives is intended to reflect a more supportive organizational culture (Kossek et al., 2010; Sloan Work and Family Network, n.d.). One view supports the notion that organizations who provide work–life benefits are actively promoting the work–life balance of their employees (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007) and this active promotion of work–life balance is intricately tied to finding meaningful work.

Hoffman and Cowan (2008) found something different, however, when they analyzed the work–life practices of Fortune Magazine’s “100 Best Companies to Work For.” They specifically sought to identify how organizations define work–life balance through work–life initiatives and employee interaction. What they discovered was a “corporate ideology of work-life” that implies that work is the most important piece of the “work-life” system (p. 233). They found that the “life” of the “work–life” system actually means “family,” and therefore negates the changes in the literature and practice that aimed to make the term more inclusive by using “work–life” instead of “work–family.” Findings also indicated that individuals are solely responsible for their work–life balance and not organizations, and organizations seek to control employees through the provision of work–life initiatives (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). Similarly, Kossek et al. (2010) stated that work–life initiatives actually act as restraints on employees to obtain a work–life balance because they are frequently ineffectively, disproportionately, or inequitably applied. For example, use of work–life initiatives may create perceptions of shirking on the job, thus perpetuating the ideal worker stereotype, or benefits may be differentially accessible to men and women or those with and without children. If organizations exercise this much control over the work–life practices of their employees, is it truly possible for employees to both find meaningful work and achieve a work–life balance?

Monitoring work–life balance is impacted by constantly changing and evolving but intricately tied social systems including both work and life (Kossek et al., 2010). While it would be beneficial for employees and organizations to move at the same pace, this is not always the case. HRD practitioners are intricately tied to how employees function in their work environment, find meaning and purpose in their work, and obtain work–life balance. Individuals, organizations, and governments must work together to alter the institutionalization of organizational practices and the cultural environment that perpetuates them—only then can the myth of separate spheres and the ideal worker be dismantled. Organizations can be prepared for such changes through the use of flexible practices that can be utilized as the flow of these systems
change. Instead of exercising control over employees, HRD could instead “[embrace work–life] balance as a leverage point for practice” that will in turn create a need for “professionals to make informed decisions about how they will monitor [work–life] balance in their organizations” (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007, p. 464).

The existence and promotion of work–life initiatives by HRD practitioners and organizational practices say “we care” or “we don’t care”—“we want you to be engaged and find meaning in your work” or “we don’t care if it is meaningful to you as long as the desired business goal is achieved.” Determining how best to support employee work–life balance is often a challenge. A lack of flexibility within organizational and societal level work–life policies toward the needs of all kinds of workers can affect a multitude of factors on the job including productivity, attendance, and ability to learn, all of which are likely to make work less meaningful if lowered. An organization can demonstrate how it cares for its employees by not only offering work–life initiatives that are supportive of the employee work–life balance but also embedding values and practices within the organizational culture that make it acceptable for all employees to use the benefits. To resolve issues of organizational culture and address the work–life needs of employees, it is essential to consider what creates meaningful work for individuals, how that meaningful work is impacted by one’s work–life balance, and how work–life balance might be impacted by meaningful work.

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Note
1. Work–life initiatives and work–life benefits are used interchangeably to refer to programs, practices, and policies within organizations that are intended to help individuals achieve work–life balance and/or promote organizational performance.

References


**Author Biography**

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