

The Relationship Between Work-Life Policies and Practices and Employee Loyalty: A Life Course Perspective

Patricia V. Roehling

Hope College and Cornell University

Mark V. Roehling

Michigan State University

Phyllis Moen

Cornell University

ABSTRACT: Using a representative sample of 3,381 American workers, this study investigates relationships among work/life policies, informal support, and employee

Patricia V. Roehling is Associate Professor at Hope College and a faculty affiliate of the Cornell Employment and Family Careers Institute. Her address is Psychology Department, Hope College, Holland, MI 49423; e-mail: roehling@hope.edu. She has two lines of research interests: one is in the work-family area and includes work-family spillover and employee loyalty. The other research area is in the clinical psychology field.

Mark V. Roehling is Assistant Professor at the Michigan State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Kedzie Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824. His research interests are in the area of employer-employee relations including psychological contracts and the changing nature of the employment relationship.

Phyllis Moen, the Ferris Family Professor of Life Course Studies, is Professor of Sociology and of Human Development at Cornell University, 259 Martha Van Rensselaer Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-4401; e-mail: pem3@cornell.edu. An underlying theme in her work concerns the implications of historically dramatic and interrelated social transformations: in longevity, gender roles, the workplace, and the family.

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loyalty over the life course (defined by age and parental status and age of youngest child). The central thesis is that our understanding of the impact of work/life policies on employee loyalty will be enriched by consideration of the non-work and work contexts that influence employee attitudes and behavior. The relationship between employee child care policies and loyalty varies for women and men at different stages of parenthood. Flexible-time policies have a consistent, positive association with employee loyalty with some variation based on life stage. Informal support (via supervisors and co-workers) has the greatest positive relationship with employee loyalty.

KEY WORDS: loyalty; support; benefits; life stage.

Employee loyalty has long been a concern of employers because of its link to behaviors such as attendance, turnover, and organizational citizenship (Schalk & Freese, 1997). Two recent developments, however, have dramatically increased the value of a loyal work force. First, increased competition for employee talent and greater investment in employee development have made turnover more costly, making the retention of employees an acute human resource concern (Cliffe, 1998). Second, the growing transition from the hierarchical organization of work to an empowerment model, thought to be necessary to successfully compete in many business environments (Pfeffer, 1994), involves a loss of employers' formal control structures over their employees. Loyalty becomes a central concern as employers seek assurance that empowered employees will exercise their discretion in the organization's interests (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Hite, 1995).

While the importance of employee loyalty has become increasingly salient, there has been a concurrent decrease in the availability of traditional approaches to promote it; long term job security, rapid advancement, and regular increases in compensation have become the exception rather than the rule. Employers are, consequently, searching for different approaches to promote loyalty (Hiltrop, 1995). Many human resource experts argue that the adoption of "work/life policies" will result in a more loyal, committed workforce (e.g., Finney, 1996; Lawlor, 1996). Work/life policies include flexible work scheduling, child care assistance, family-leave policies, and other policies aimed at ameliorating conflicting work and non-work (i.e., off-job) demands. Survey findings indicate that a primary motive for adopting work/life policies is the expectation that they will lead to higher loyalty (e.g., Hochgraf, 1995).

Thus far, however, there has been only modest empirical support for the broad claims that are being made about the link between family responsive policies and employee loyalty. For example, one study of working parents of preschool children found satisfaction with work/life benefits to be positively correlated with organizational commit-

ment (Goldberg et al., 1989), but a companion study using the same sample reported that level of use (number of family benefits actually used) was not a significant predictor of organizational commitment (Greenberger et al., 1989). Grover and Crooker (1995) directly assess the impact of both child care and flexibility policies on the organizational commitment of both parents and non-parents. They found that employees who had access to flexible hour policies had greater affective commitment, and that a policy of providing child care information had a significant impact on the commitment of employees eligible for that benefit. However, a policy of providing assistance with the cost of day care was not associated with higher levels of commitment among any group. Finally, using the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce, Bond, Galinsky and Swanberg (1998) found that fringe benefits, including dependent care benefits, explained very little of the variance employee loyalty, while a supportive work environment explained a great deal of variance.

Although these and other existing research studies (e.g., Aryee, Luk, & Stone, 1998) have contributed to the understanding of the policy-loyalty relationship, based on our review, at least two of the four following limitations apply to most relevant existing studies: (a) no attempt is made to assess the role of supportive or unsupportive environments (e.g., level of supervisor support; Goldberg et al., 1989; Grover & Crooker, 1995); (b) no attempt is made to assess more complex (three-way) theoretically supportable interactions involving policy, gender, *and* other relevant variables (e.g., age, parental status) (Aryee, Luk & Stone, 1998; Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998; Greenberger et al., 1989; Goldberg et al., 1989); (c) a limited sample is used (e.g., employees from single a organization, only employees with children; Aryee, Luk & Stone, 1998; Goldberg et al., 1989; Greenberger et al., 1989); or (d) a relatively small amount of variance is explained (Grover & Crooker, 1995). The Bond, Galinsky and Swanberg study addresses all but one of these limitations. They do not assess the interactions between gender and life stage variables as they relate to employee loyalty. We seek to extend their study by examining those complex interactions and by focusing specifically on benefits and workplace support which are specific to work-family issues.

Purpose

This study investigates the impact of family responsive policies on employee loyalty taking into account theoretically identified non-work

and work contextual variables thought to influence the policy-loyalty relationship. Similar to Grover and Crooker (1995), the impact of child care and flexible-time policies on the workplace loyalty of both parent and non-parent employees is assessed. More importantly, however, this study extends the important contribution of Grover and Crooker (1995) by: (a) investigating the interaction of policies with relevant life course variables (age, parental status, marital status); (b) assessing the role of informal support for work/life policies; and (c) investigating the ways in which gender is related to policies and life course variables as they influence employee loyalty.

Relationship Between Family Responsive Policies and Employee Loyalty

Several theories that provide complementary insights inform our understanding of the relationship between family responsive policies and employee loyalty: social exchange theory, role theory, and social justice theory. We begin by briefly discussing these theories. Next, the life course perspective is described and its contribution is linked to the theoretical perspectives. Gender differences in the nature of the life course experience and the likely impact of those differences on employee loyalty are also discussed. Finally, we address the likely connections among family responsive policies, informal workplace support, and employee loyalty.

Primary Theoretical Perspectives

Social exchange theory. According to social exchange models of the employment relationship, employees seek a balance in their exchange relationships with organizations by having attitudes and behaviors commensurate with the degree of employer commitment to them (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). When an employer acts in a manner that is beneficial to employees, and when those actions go beyond the demands of the social role, the generalized norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) creates feelings of obligation whereby the employees feel they are obligated to be committed to their employers (Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997). In general, research findings suggest that positive, beneficial actions directed at employees by an organization and/or its representatives create feelings of obligation for employees to reciprocate in positive, beneficial ways, including greater feelings of

loyalty/commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Hutchinson, 1997; Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997).

Theories of social justice. The social exchange perspective provides a theoretical basis for expecting that family responsive policies would lead to higher loyalty *among employees who benefit from the policies*. That perspective also predicts that employees who do *not* receive the benefits of a policy may view the receipt of benefits by others as violating equity and equality norms (Greenberg, 1981; Grover, 1991), which, it is argued, tend to govern the allocation of rewards in business and economic exchange situations (Rothhausen et al., 1998). Perceived violations of justice in organizations are expected to lead to lower loyalty and withdrawal for those employees who perceive the violation (Adams, 1963; Grover & Crooker, 1995; Rothhausen et al., 1998). In this study we examine whether child care policies result in a “backlash” (lower levels of loyalty) among employees who do not directly benefit from those policies. Since flexible time policies potentially benefit all employees, we do not anticipate that backlash will be associated with flexible-time policies.

Role theory. The belief that work and family loyalties involve trade-offs or require a “balancing” is frequently expressed in the literature (e.g., Bielby, 1992; Becker & Moen, 1999; Cannon, 1998). According to role theory (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Goode, 1960), expectations associated with work and family roles can lead to physical and psychological strain in at least two ways. First, expectations associated with the two roles may compete with each other for attention and energy, resulting in interrole conflict. Second, the dual role expectations can lead to an increase in overall workload and to feelings of overload within the work or family domain (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984). The feelings of strain resulting from interrole conflict and/or work overload, in turn, lead to a range of negative affective reactions, including lower job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and commitment to the organization (O’Driscoll, Ilgen, & Hildreth, 1992). This relationship is moderated by role quality. Greater role quality dampens the negative impact of interrole conflict on well-being (Helson, Elliot, & Leigh, 1990; Vandewater, Ostrove, & Stewart, 1997).

Research to date finds that work-family conflict can have a negative impact on employee attitudes, including commitment (Kossek, 1990; O’Driscoll, Ilgen, & Hildreth, 1992), and that loyalty in one domain may be negatively related to loyalty in the other (e.g., Jans,

1989). Thus, it might be expected that those with greater role demands will report lower loyalty to work. Further, to the extent that family responsive policies assist employees in managing work and family demands, reducing role strain, employee loyalty should be enhanced.

The Life Course Perspective and Its Contribution to the Primary Theoretical Perspectives

Overview of life course perspective. Researchers have recognized, at least to some degree, that depending on one's life stage, different factors or issues take on differing degrees of importance, and that these varying factors and issues may affect attitudes and behaviors (Giele & Elder, 1998). To date, most of these studies defined life stages by either age, parental status, or length of employment in an occupation or organization (occupational and organizational tenure) (e.g., Allen & Meyer, 1993; Morrow & McElroy, 1987; Ornstein, Cron, & Slocum, 1989). Generally researchers have found only a modest, positive relationship between career stage and loyalty. In this study we build on this research by adopting a broader life course perspective which takes into account both the age norm context of the individual and the connecting roles and relationships in a person's life.

We operationalize life stage as the intersection of biological age and family configuration, capturing the dynamic movement across both career and family trajectories. Respondents are located in one of six life stages based upon their age, parental status, and age of the youngest child. There are four non-parent stages: young non-parents (ages 18–29), mid-age non-parents (ages 30–39), older non-parents (ages 40–50), and shifting gears (ages 50+), and two parental stages: parents of preschool aged children (youngest child is 0–5) and parents of school-aged children (youngest child is 6–17). These life stages are a modification of the ten stage model developed by Moen and Yu (1999). This typology allows us to examine the potentially nonlinear relationship between employee age and loyalty, especially as we look at the interaction between age, gender and employer policies. We also distinguish between parents of preschool children and parents of school-aged children. The potential role strain and the use of flexible-time and child care policies changes as children age. By distinguishing between parents of preschool or school-aged range, we are able to examine whether these stages have a differential impact on the policy-loyalty relationship. Marital status is an element of one's family

configuration that provides another level of social context which spans the life course stages. Marriage may influence the extent of one's obligations to family and work, the support and/or role conflict one experiences, and the nature of the role(s) that assume prominence in one's life—important considerations from a life course perspective (Goldberg et al., 1989).

Gender differences in life course experiences. Research suggests that employment may take on a different meaning for women than for men. In contrast to men, women's work is more strongly influenced by experiences in other (nonwork) life domains, such as the timing and nature of family transitions (Krecker, 1994; Moen, Dempster-McClain, & Williams, 1992). Thus, women workers tend to confront more work-family role juggling than do their male counterparts (Cox & Harquail, 1991; Hochschild, 1989), and women are more apt to use family-related benefits (Greenberger et al., 1989). Differences in the way that women and men tend to experience and relate to work and nonwork, and the implications of those differences for employee loyalty, have only relatively recently received significant attention in the management literature. As researchers began to address gender differences, the pattern typically found among male samples was not consistently found among females. For example, Lynn, Cao, and Horn (1996) found that commitment to career varied across career stage for men, but not for women.

Hypotheses Involving Life Course Stages

According to social exchange theory, when an employer acts in a manner that benefits their employees the employees will reciprocate through increased levels of loyalty. The concerns, values, needs, and roles that assume prominence at different life course stages also have implications for the extent to which particular employer policies, such as providing child care benefits and flexible-time benefits, are likely to be viewed as beneficial. Recent employee surveys indicate that flexible-time policies are the most popular and most widely used work/life policies (e.g., Gregg, 1998). There appears to be widespread employee appreciation of the symbolism and/or potential practical advantages of being allowed some control over one's work hours. In contrast to child care assistance policies, flexible-hours are expected to be viewed as beneficial by employees across life stages, among both men and women. Therefore, the social exchange perspective would predict that

flexible-time will engender greater employee loyalty across all life course stages.

Hypothesis 1a: The presence of flexible-time policies will be positively related to employee loyalty.

While we expect flexible-time policies to be generally related to employee loyalty, across life stage and gender, we also expect that the positive relationship will be stronger among women and employees with children. Because these groups of employees tend to experience greater role strain than their respective counterparts (men, and employees without children), we expect that they will have a greater appreciation for flexible-time policies, and as a result, will be more likely to reciprocate with higher levels of loyalty. Thus, in addition to the general (main) effect predicted in Hypothesis 1a, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 1b: The positive relationship between flexible-time policies and loyalty will be stronger for women and employees with children (employees in the preschool or school-aged children stages).

Employees with children are expected to be more likely to view child care assistance as beneficial than employees without children. Further, because women typically assume primary responsibility for child care, among employees with children, women are expected to place a higher value on child care assistance provided by their employer, and as a result, feel greater obligation to reciprocate. These considerations, which reflect the social exchange perspective that family responsive policies lead to higher loyalty *among employees who benefit from the policies*, are the basis for following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between child care policies and employee loyalty will be moderated by life stage and gender. There will be a positive relationship for employees with children (employees in the preschool or school-aged children stages), and that positive relationship will be stronger among women.

We note that Hypothesis 2 does not incorporate the social justice theory argument that employees who do *not* receive the benefits of a policy may view the receipt of benefits by others as violating equity

and equality norms, leading to lower loyalty among employees who perceive a violation (Adams, 1963; Grover & Crooker, 1995; Rothausen et al., 1998). If this did occur, it would be evidence of backlash among those employees who do not benefit from child care policies. While this is a plausible argument, it has also been argued that child care policies may lead to a general perception that an employer treats its employees with fairness and concern, resulting in positive affective reactions among employees with and without children (Grover & Crooker, 1995). Because we have no rationale for favoring one of these arguments over the other, we chose to examine whether child care policies result in a “backlash” (lower levels of loyalty) among employees who do not directly benefit from such policies without making a specific prediction.

The Role of Informal Work Environments

Formal *policies* do not necessarily equate with corresponding *practices*. Policy use may be left to supervisor discretion and/or it may be counteracted by negative attitudes and nonsupportive informal work environments (Galinsky, Bond & Friedman, 1996; Raabe, 1990). Although informal support variables have been identified as important in the assessment of the impact of work/life policies (Galinsky, 1988, 1989; Grover & Crooker, 1995), based on our review of the literature, only one study has assessed the relative contribution of work/life policies and the informal work environment. Bond, Galinsky and Swanberg (1998) using the data from the National Study of the Changing Workforce found that a supportive work environment was a more powerful determinant of employee loyalty than fringe benefits. However, Bond et al. used a broad definition of workplace support (including flexible time policies, gender and race discrimination, and respect) and of fringe benefits (including earnings, medical coverage and other traditional benefits). We will examine the workplace-loyalty relationship focusing only on work-family related benefits and support.

In this study we investigate the relationship between employee loyalty and two variables that assess informal support for work/life policies in the workplace. “Supervisor support of work/life needs” (Support) assesses supervisors’ affirmative support of employees in their attempt to address work-off work conflicts. For example, allowing an employee to take time off during the day to care for personal or family business (e.g., medical appointments or meeting with a child’s parent) or allowing an employee to talk about personal or family issues that

affect their work. The second informal support variable, “workplace intolerance of family-to-work interference” (Intolerance), differs from the Support variable in two ways. First, Intolerance refers to the environment of one’s workplace (which may include co-workers, upper management and supervisors), while Support focuses on the behaviors of one’s supervisor. Second, Intolerance assesses hostile reactions to work-off work conflicts, while Support focuses exclusively on the extent to which the respondent’s immediate supervisor engages in affirmative reactions to such conflicts. Support and Intolerance are conceptualized as related variables that capture distinct aspects of the respondent’s work environment.

Supervisor support has been found to reduce work-family role conflict (Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990), and to increase loyalty (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998), which is consistent with the role theory perspective. The social exchange perspective would also predict that supervisor support involves the kind of social exchange that creates feelings of obligation to reciprocate with increased loyalty (Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997). In contrast, Intolerance is likely to increase role conflict and create a negative reaction to the work environment that undermines employee loyalty. Because Support and Intolerance are viewed as more proximal influences on employee behavior and attitudes than the organization’s policies, and consistent with claims regarding the critical role of work environment support of work-life policies (Grover & Crooker, 1995), we expect that Support and Intolerance will explain variance in employee loyalty above and beyond that accounted for by childcare policies and flexible-time policies.

Hypothesis 3: Informal support for employees with work-family conflict will be positively related to employee loyalty even after controlling for life stage and work/life policy variables.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Respondents for the study were drawn from the 1992 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW), a randomly selected, nationally representative survey of American workers between the ages of 18 and 64. The telephone survey took approximately an hour to complete. The sample included 3,381 respondents (53.2% male), with a mean age of 38.7 (ranging from 17 to 62). Seventy percent of the sample was married or living with a partner, and 42%

had a child living at home at the time of the survey. Seventy-nine percent of the sample was White, 11% Black, 8% Hispanic, 1% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American (for a further description of the sample see Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1996). Because the employee loyalty construct is not applicable to self-employed individuals, respondents that were self-employed were excluded from the analyses. This reduced the sample from 3,381 to 2,958 participants.

Measures

Life stage. We operationalize “life stage” based on age, marital status,¹ and parental status. We collapsed the ten life stages used by Moen and Yu (1999) into the following six life stages (preliminary analyses of variance demonstrated that the collapsed stages did not differ from each other on employee loyalty): *Young non-parents*²—29 years of age and younger with no children living in the home; *Preschool-aged children*—parents whose youngest child is five or younger; *Mid-age non-parents*—respondents aged 30 through 39 with no children living in the home; *School-aged children*—parents whose youngest child living in the home is between 6 and 17 (inclusive); *Older Non-parents*—respondents aged 40 through 49 with no children living in the home; *Shifting Gears*—respondents with no children living in the home, aged 50 and older, who are presumably preparing for retirement. We were unable to distinguish between respondents with grown children and childless respondents, so, by necessity, employees with grown children were included in one of the childless categories, the shifting gears category.

Employee loyalty. Employee loyalty was assessed using three items that asked respondents to report how loyal they felt to their employer, current position and supervisor. Each item was scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not loyal) to 5 (extremely). The alpha coefficient for the scale was .81.³

Child care policies. A child care policy index score was created by computing the mean of five items assessing whether the participant’s employer provided six child care related benefits (e.g., pay for child care expenses, on site or near site child care centers sponsored by the employer, child care reference and referral source).

Flexible-time policies. A summary score for policies regarding flexible-time was created by computing the mean response to five questions related to the ability of the employee to alter their work schedule to meet the demands of their personal life. The alpha coefficient for this scale was .58.

Supervisor support of work/life needs (Support). This measure assesses the supervisor’s affirmative support of employees in their attempt to address work-off work conflicts. Each of three items was scored on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The alpha coefficient for the scale was .83.

Workplace intolerance of family-to-work interference (Intolerance). Intolerance assesses the work environment's intolerance to interference of family needs in the workplace. Intolerance was assessed by three items, each scored on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The alpha coefficient for Intolerance was .77. A principal component factor analysis performed on the items from the Support and Intolerance scales indicated two distinct factors representing the above two variables, providing evidence of discriminant validity.

Results

Sample by Life-Stage

Table 1 provides a breakdown of number of respondents by life stage, gender and marital status and for mean loyalty scores. There were more respondents in the stage involving school-age children in the home than any other stage. Consistent with other evidence of women's continued role as primary child care providers, there were many more unmarried women in this stage than unmarried men.

TABLE 1

Mean Loyalty Scores for Life Stage, Occupation, and Race Broken Down by Gender and Marital Status

	Men				Women			
	Married ^a		Not married ^b		Married ^c		Not married ^d	
	N	M	N	M	N	M	N	M
Life Stages								
Young non-parents	83	3.8	181	3.6	80	3.8	173	3.7
Mid-age non-parents	59	3.6	126	3.6	67	3.9	93	3.8
Older non-parents	93	3.8	87	3.6	106	4.1	104	3.7
Preschool children	254	3.9	12	3.7	209	3.9	74	3.8
School-aged children	220	3.8	18	3.9	265	3.9	142	3.9
Shifting gears	139	4.0	40	3.7	130	4.1	124	3.9
Occupation								
Professional	386	3.9	178	3.7	394	4.0	290	3.9
Non-professional	463	3.8	286	3.5	465	3.9	423	3.8
Race								
White	665	3.9	316	3.6	684	4.0	479	3.9
Non-white	187	3.8	142	3.7	176	3.9	235	3.7

^an = 849 ^bn = 464 ^cn = 859 ^dn = 713.

Primary Analyses

To investigate the expected complex relationships among gender, marital status, policy, and life course variables on employee loyalty, we performed a hierarchical multiple regression equation, using list-wise deletion of missing data, in which we tested for the main effects, two-way interactions, and three-way interactions of the variables of interest. The significance (or non-significance) of all of the interactions that were tested will be noted in the text. However, because of the large number of possible interactions that were tested, the final regression equation did not include all of the interactions that were not significant.

There were a number of missing values for four of our key independent variables: workplace flexibility (240 missing), child care policies (315 missing), supervisor support (343 missing) and intolerance (141 missing). We did two things to correct for this problem. First, we created a dummy variable for each of the four independent variables identifying whether the data for that variable were either present (1) or missing (0). The dummy coded variables were entered into the regression equation on the same step as the corresponding independent variable, controlling for bias associated with those who chose not to answer the questions. Second, for each item used to construct the above four independent variables we substituted the mean score for the missing values, allowing us to retain these subjects for our analyses.

Control variables. To control for the effects of demographic and workplace variables, race (white vs. non-white), occupation (professional vs. non-professional), size of workplace, hours worked per week, and organizational tenure were entered into the regression equation first (see Table 2 for a correlation matrix of the criterion and predictor variables). The demographic variables explained a small but significant portion of the variance in employee loyalty (see Table 3). Specifically, a higher level of loyalty was associated with longer tenure with an organization, being a professional/manager, being white, working for a relatively small organization, and working relatively long hours per week.

Gender and marital status. Gender and marital status were entered into the second step of the multiple regression equation (see Table 3). These variables explained a significant amount of variance

TABLE 2
Correlations Between Dependent and Independent Variables

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Loyalty	.06**	-.07**	-.09**	.08**	-.06**	.10**	.19**	.39**	-.27**	-.08**	-.04*	.00	.03	.03	.06**
2. Job tenure	1.00	-.04*	-.10**	.10**	.20**	.05*	-.04	-.01	.02	-.28**	-.07**	.12**	-.14**	.03	.36**
3. Race		1.00	.09**	-.02	.04	.00	-.07**	-.07**	.07**	.02	.02	-.02	.01	.00	-.03
4. Occupation			1.00	-.20**	-.16**	-.18**	-.19**	-.06**	.12**	.06**	-.05**	.00	.00	.00	.00
5. Hours per week				1.00	.10**	.02	.04	-.05*	.02	-.09*	.06**	.07**	.01	-.02	-.01
6. Size of org					1.00	.23**	-.04	-.04	.05**	-.06**	.01	.02	.01	.00	.02
7. Policies—child care						1.00	.27**	.20**	-.20**	.01	.04*	-.01	.01	.01	-.06**
8. Policies—flexibility							1.00	.28**	-.28**	.06**	.03	.00	-.01	-.04	-.05*
9. Support								1.00	-.46**	.10	-.03	-.01	.02	.00	.00
10. Intolerance									1.00	-.05**	.01	.03	.01	.01	.02
11. Young non-parents										1.00	-.17**	-.19**	-.23**	-.25**	-.20**
12. Midage non-parents											1.00	-.15**	-.18**	-.20**	-.16**
13. Older non-parents												1.00	-.19**	-.21**	-.17**
14. Preschoolers													1.00	-.26**	-.20**
16. School-aged														1.00	-.23**
17. Shifting gears															1.00

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; $N = 2894$.

in the equation, raising the multiple R from .16 to .21. Women and married respondents reported higher levels of loyalty than did men and unmarried employees. The marital \times gender interaction was not significant. Nor were any other marital status interactions significant (marital status \times life stage, marital status \times gender \times life stage). Therefore, the marital status interactions were dropped from the model, and are not reported here.

Life stage. Dummy coded variables representing five of the six life stages (the shifting gears stage was selected as the omitted category against which the other stages would be compared) were entered in the third step of the multiple regression equation. Entering these variables as a separate group allows for the examination of the potential main effect of life stage on employee loyalty. This step explained a small amount of additional variance ($F = 1.96$, $p = .08$) in the loyalty scores (see Table 3). In general, employee loyalty tends to increase across life stage (even when controlling for organizational tenure), and parenthood is associated with higher levels of employee loyalty among men, but not women (see Figure 1).

Work-life policies: Main effects. Flexible-time policies and child care policies were entered as step 4. These policies explained a significant amount of variance, raising the multiple R from .22 to .29, almost doubling the amount of variance explained (from 4.6% to 8.4%; see Table 3). The presence of both flexible-time policies and child care policies were related to higher levels of employee loyalty. The significant beta coefficient for flexible-time policies supports Hypotheses 1a. However, the significant beta coefficient for child care policies was not predicted. The flexible policy dummy code for the missing data was significant at the .07 level. Respondents who did not answer questions regarding flexible-time policies had lower loyalty scores.

Work-life policies: Moderating influences of gender and life stage. To test the predictions that the relationship between flexible-time policies and child care policies are moderated by life stage and gender (Hypotheses 1b and 2), we entered three sets of interaction terms for flexible-time policies and also for child care policies. The first set of interactions entered were the policy \times life stage interaction terms. Next we entered the policy \times gender interaction term. Finally, we entered the three way policy \times gender \times life stage interaction terms. The results of each set of interaction analyses will be reported

Policy Interactions										
Flexible-time policies × Life stage interactions	2.22*									
Flex-time × Young non-parents		<i>.12</i>	<i>.13*</i>	<i>.12</i>	<i>.11</i>	<i>.07</i>				
Flex-time × Mid non-parents		<i>.00–</i>	<i>.07</i>	<i>.05</i>	<i>.04</i>	<i>.01</i>				
Flex-time × Older non-parents		<i>.08</i>	<i>.07</i>	<i>.06</i>	<i>.08</i>	<i>.06</i>				
Flex-time × Preschoolers		<i>.12*</i>	<i>.13*</i>	<i>.12</i>	<i>.05</i>	<i>–.01</i>				
Flex-time × School-aged		<i>.19**</i>	<i>.19**</i>	<i>.18**</i>	<i>.23**</i>	<i>.19**</i>				
Flexible-time × Gender × Life stage interactions ²	0.88		—	—	—	—				
Child policies × Life stage interactions ²	0.21			—	—	—				
Three-way Child care interactions	1.89									
Gender × Child care × Young non-parents							–.03	–.05		
Gender × Child care × Mid non-parents							–.07	–.07		
Gender × Child care × Older non-parents							.01	–.01		
Gender × Child care × Preschoolers							–.13*	–.14**		
Gender × Child care × School-aged							.08	.07		
Informal support/Intolerance	106.67**									
Supervisor support									.33**	
Intolerance of spillover									–.09**	
Support missing dummy code									.00	
Intolerance missing dummy code									.01	
Multiple R		.155	.207	.215	.290	.296	.299	.300	.305	.469
Adjusted R ²		.022	.040	.042	.078	.081	.080	.079	.081	.208

$N = 2652$.

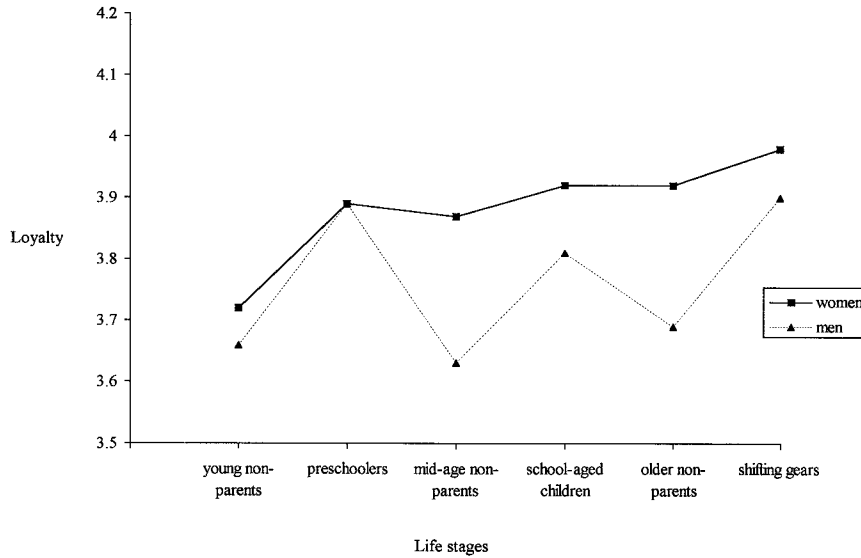
¹ F value for the change in R^2 that occurs when the variables are first entered in the equation.

²Step was not significant, therefore individual beta coefficients were not included in the table.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; italics $p < .10$.

FIGURE 1

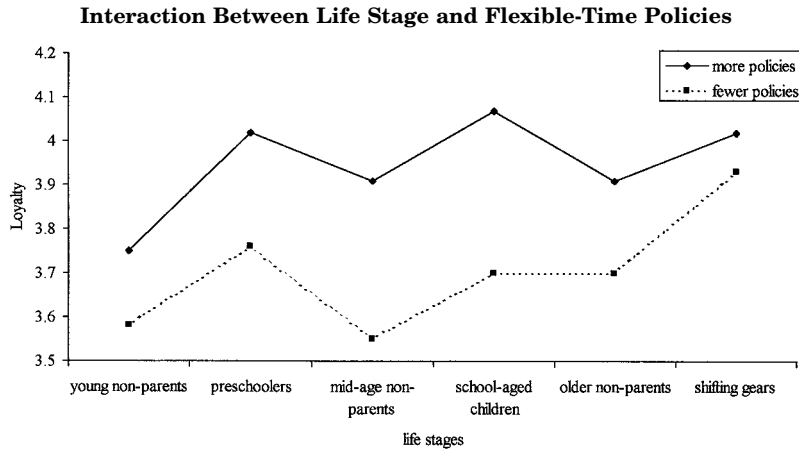
Employee Loyalty as a Function of Gender, Life Stage, and Marital Status



separately for flexible-time and for child care policies. The policy \times gender interaction terms did not explain a significant amount of variance for either flexible-time policies or child care policies, so they were excluded from the present analyses. We also tested the two- and three-way interaction terms involving marital status with gender, policies and life stage. None of the interactions were significant, and therefore were not included in the final regression equation.

The flexible-time policy \times life stage interaction terms were entered as step 5 in the model. These interaction explained a significant amount of variance. (see Table 3). To illustrate this interaction, mean loyalty scores across life stages were plotted separately for those with high levels of flexible-time policies and those with low levels of flexible-time (a median split was used to assign values of high and low levels of flexible-time). As Figure 2 reveals, flexible-time policies are related to higher levels of employee loyalty across all life stages. However, the relationship is greatest among employees who are of the traditional childbearing ages and particularly among parents of school-aged children. The relationship is the lowest among young non-parents, and employees who are over 50 with no children in the home.

FIGURE 2



The flexible-time \times gender \times life stage three way interactions were entered as step 6 in our model. This step did not explain any additional variance (see Table 3). Thus, hypothesis 1b received only limited support. The relationship between flexible-time policies and employee loyalty is moderated by life stage but not by gender.

The child care policy \times life stage interaction terms were entered as step 7. This step did not add any significant information to our model (see Table 3).

On step 8 we entered the policy \times life stage \times gender three-way interaction terms. There was a trend toward these variables adding significantly to the regression equation (see Table 3). The only three-way interaction term found to have a significant beta coefficient was the one involving preschool-age children stage. To investigate the specific nature of the gender \times child care \times school aged interaction we plotted mean loyalty scores for each life stage, dividing subjects into groups with a relatively high or low number of child care policies (a median split was used to assign to high or low child care groups). Separate plots were created for women and men (Figures 3 and 4). The significant three-way interaction suggests that the relationship between child care policy and life stage differs for men and women. As Figure 3 demonstrates, for women, child care policies are related to higher levels of loyalty among mothers of school-aged children. However, contrary to our prediction, the presence of child care policies was not related to higher levels of loyalty among mothers of pre-

FIGURE 3

Interaction Between Life Stage and Child-Friendly Policies on Employee Loyalty for Women

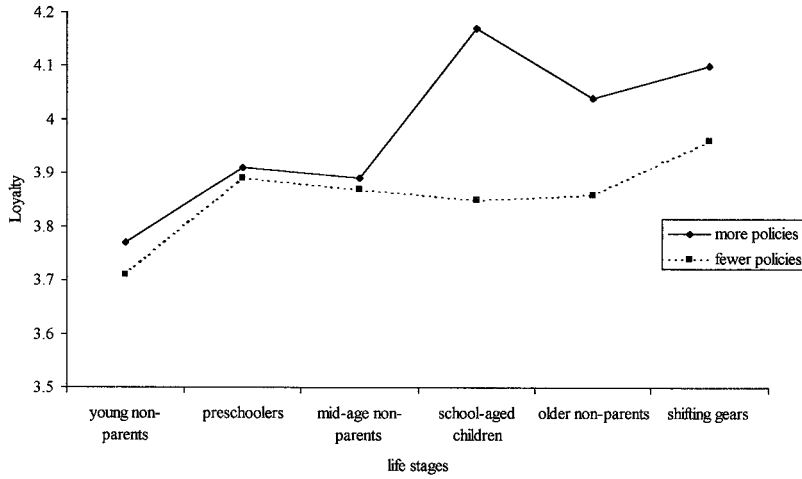
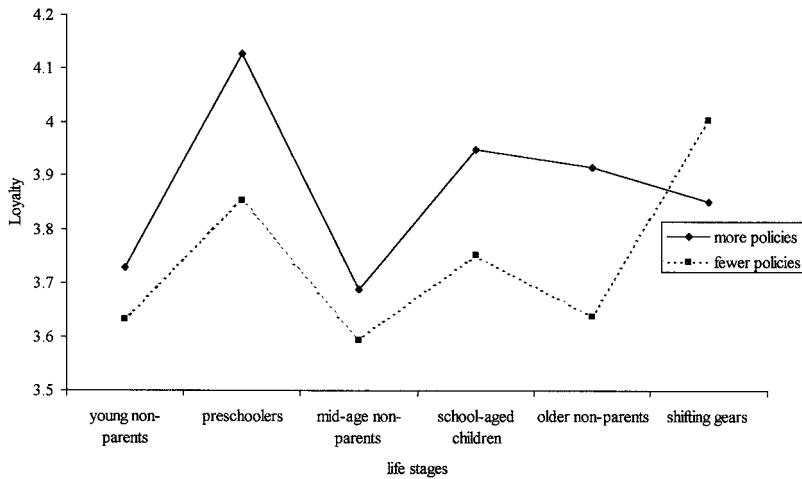


FIGURE 4

Interaction Between Life Stage and Child-Friendly Policies on Employee Loyalty for Men



school-aged children. A closer examination of the individual child care policies examined in our child care policy scale, revealed that most of the increase in loyalty scores among mothers of school-aged children can be attributed to the availability of a child care resource and referral service.

Among men, there was a general positive effect of child care policies on employee loyalty, which, contrary to our hypothesis did not appear to be greater for those with school-aged children or preschool-aged children (see Figure 4). In partial support of our hypothesis, the policy loyalty relationship was greater among women with school-aged children than it was for men with school-aged children. However, we did not find this to also be true of parents with preschool-aged children. We were surprised to find that child care policies had a generally overall positive relationship with loyalty among men (except in the shifting gears stage) but had more stage-specific positive effects for women.

As Figure 4 also illustrates, for men over 50, with no children in the home, the presence of child care policies is related to lower levels of employee loyalty, which may indicate a backlash against child care policies. To test whether this difference was significant we recomputed the regression equation using young non-parents as the omitted category, rather than the shifting gears stage. This allowed us to test the significance of the shifting gears \times child care policy interaction. This interaction term was not significant. Therefore we did not find support for a backlash against child care policies by older men with no children in the home.

Unique contribution of informal support/intolerance. In the final step we tested hypothesis 3, that informal support/intolerance would explain a significant amount of variance in employee loyalty after controlling for life stage and work-life policies. Our hypothesis was supported. Informal workplace support variables added significant predictive power for each group of respondents, explaining 13% of the variance beyond that explained by family-responsive policies and the other life course and demographic variables (see Table 3). As expected, higher levels of supervisor support and lower levels of intolerance were both associated with higher levels of loyalty.

Discussion

This study draws on survey data from a 1992 national sample of over 3,000 employed respondents to investigate the impact of work/

life policies and practices on employee loyalty taking into account theoretically identified potential moderators of the policy-loyalty relationship. Using a model that combines gender, life course variables, formal policies, informal practices, and relevant interactions, we are able to account for a little less than one quarter of the variance in employee loyalty (compared to the 2%–13% of the variance in organizational commitment that was explained by Grover and Crooker, 1995). We extend previous research by: (1) providing evidence that, although work/life policies tend to be related to higher levels of loyalty for most employees, the strength of the work/life policy-loyalty relationship varies somewhat as a function of employee gender and life stage; (2) highlighting the differential relationships between two distinct types of policies and employee loyalty, policies that benefit employees with children and “employee-responsive” policies which benefit employees in general (i.e., flexible-time) and; (3) demonstrating that workplace tolerance and support for work-family conflict is more strongly related to employee loyalty than actual work-family policies.

*Relationship Between Life-Stage and Loyalty
(Independent of Work-Life Policies)*

While this study focuses on the predicted interaction of life stage and work-life policies in their relationship to employee loyalty, the findings indicate that, independent of work-life policy, life stage is related to employee loyalty (see Figure 1). This independent or “main” relationship between life stage and loyalty varies somewhat by gender. Among the men in our sample, loyalty was lowest when there were no children in the home. Arguably, this finding is counter to role theory’s suggestion that the fewer roles that one occupies, the more commitment one can give to each role. Rather, it appears that for men the additional role of parenthood is related to greater job commitment. When men become a parent their role as a provider may take on increased salience, thereby increasing their loyalty to their employer.

In contrast, the loyalty scores of married women (who have the highest levels of employee loyalty) are relatively unrelated to the role of parenthood. This also runs counter to what role theory would predict. The additional role of care taker that women traditionally assume with motherhood does not appear to adversely affect employee loyalty among women who remained in the workforce. For these

women, rather than producing role strain, parenthood appears to result in role expansion. According to Marks (1977), a proponent of role expansion theory, the addition of a new role need not siphon energy and commitment from preexisting roles. Rather, Marks proposes, commitment can expand to meet the demands of additional roles as long as both roles are valued. Our findings suggest that for most employees, commitment and energy expand to encompass both parental and work roles. In some instances, particularly among men, parenthood may be associated with greater employee loyalty.

Flexible-Time Policies

The findings indicate that flexible-time benefits are associated with increased loyalty for men and women at all life stages, providing strong support for Hypothesis 1a. In contrast, there was little support for the prediction that the positive relationship between flexible-time benefits and loyalty found among employees in general would be stronger among employees expected to have the highest levels of role strain—women and particularly women with children (Hypothesis 1b). Although women typically bear the brunt of care taking responsibilities and household chores (Presser, 1994), and report higher levels of role strain, flexible-time policies, which are widely believed to assist in the management of work-family conflict, are not more likely to be rewarded by women with increased loyalty than they are by men.

There was some evidence that the relationship between flexible-time policies and loyalty varied by life stage. However, the pattern of that relationship was not as expected. We predicted that employees with children (presumably those with the highest levels of role strain) would show the greatest relationship between flexibility and loyalty. While parents did display a strong relationship between flexible-time policies and loyalty, an equally strong relationship was also displayed by middle-aged employees without children.

In summary, using a highly generalizable sample and a multiple item measure of flexible-time benefits, the present findings suggest that flexible-time benefits have wide ranging positive loyalty consequences, with only slight variations associated with life stage. Work-life conflicts are ubiquitous, and it appears that even employees with relatively few role demands value flexible-time benefits and reciprocate with increased loyalty. Of course, these findings are only suggestive. A limitation of this study is that the extent to which employees

appreciate or value flexible-time benefits is not directly assessed, and as a result, the role of employee appreciation in mediating the relationship between flexible-time benefits and employee loyalty is not specifically tested.

Child Care Policies

The relationship between child care policies, life stage and loyalty differed for men and women, but, again, not exactly as we hypothesized. We predicted that, consistent with social exchange theory, those who benefited the most from the child care policies would reciprocate with higher levels of loyalty. The expected relationship was found among women with school-aged children. For these women, the presence of child care policies was related to higher levels of loyalty to their employer. However, this was not true of women with preschool-age children, who presumably also have significant day care needs. For these women and for women without children, child care policies are not related to employee loyalty. There was no evidence of backlash associated with child care policies for women without children.

We propose two possible explanations for the relative lack of a relationship between child care policies and loyalty among mothers of preschool-aged children. First, child care policies may have a delayed positive effect on working mothers with young children. Women, compared to men, are typically more stretched by the dual roles of parenthood and work. For women, loyalty may be a finite resource during the taxing preschool years. Child care benefits, while appreciated, may not transmute into higher loyalty until these women are in a position to invest more of their psychological resources into their career, when their children are school-aged.

A second explanation for the relative lack of relationship between child care policies and loyalty among mothers of preschool-aged children may lie in the differing day care needs of preschool versus school-aged children. The day care needs of preschool-aged children are relatively invariant from week-to-week. In contrast, day care needs for school-aged children are variable. Summer vacations, school holidays, teacher conference days, and inclement weather days all require a shift in day care needs. It is difficult to find day care which will accommodate these weekly schedule changes. The availability of a child care resource and referral service was the child care policy that explained most of the increase in the loyalty scores of women with school-aged children. This resource may be particularly helpful to women who are coping with the fluctuating day care needs of school-aged children.

We were surprised to find a strong relationship between child care policies and loyalty among older women with no children in the home. Many of these women may have grown children who no longer live with them. If so, these women may have benefited from child care policies in the past.

We also only found partial support for our hypothesis regarding the relationship between child care policies and life stage among men. We predicted that the child care policy-loyalty relationship would be stronger for women than for men. This was true for men and women with school-aged children but not for those with preschool-aged children. Overall, for men life stage appeared to have little impact on the relationship between child care policies and employee loyalty. Social exchange theory would predict that the relationship between policies and loyalty would have been strongest for men who personally benefit from the policy. Rather, for most men (with the exception of men over the age of 50 with no children in the home) child care policies were related to higher levels of loyalty. It may be that these men expect to have children, and therefore eventually benefit from child care policies. It may also be that the positive child care policy-loyalty relationship reflects a more general relationship between workplace climate and employee loyalty. Lambert (1995) found that many workers, particularly low income workers, are appreciative of workplace supports, even if they do not plan to use them. The availability of child care benefits may reflect the overall climate of the organization. Employers who offer generous child care benefits may be more supportive of employees in general.

The differences in how flexible-time and child care assistance policies relate to employee loyalty suggest the theoretical importance of distinguishing between policies that benefit employees in general versus those that benefit a narrower subset of employees. It may be a misnomer to call flexible-time policies "family-friendly." Regardless of family configuration these "employee-friendly" policies are associated with higher employee loyalty. In contrast, child care policies, are generally associated with higher employee loyalty but their positive impact is not as broad or predictable.

Informal Support / Intolerance

As hypothesized, supervisor support and intolerance of family-to-work interference are strong predictors of employee loyalty. Workplace environment variables doubled the amount of variance explained by policy and life course variables. Supervisor support was

positively related to employee loyalty and an atmosphere of intolerance of family-to-work interference was negatively related to loyalty. This finding suggests that it is not enough to merely espouse employee-friendly policies. Employee loyalty is more strongly tied to the perceived flexibility and tolerance of the work environment than to workplace policies. Thus, the implementation of those policies is crucial to whether they will translate into a loyal workforce.

Limitations and Future Research

Our findings should be appropriately qualified by limitations intrinsic to the design. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data constrain our ability to make causal inferences. Second, the data for both criterion and predictor variables were collected with a survey and may suffer common method variance. This threat primarily applies to the assessment of the relationship between informal support/intolerance variables and loyalty. The other predictors involve factual questions (e.g., existence of specific employer policy, age, gender, etc.) which research has shown are less susceptible to individual perceptual bias as a source of common method variance (Wagner & Crampton, 1994). Third, the study provides a relative lack of data concerning the exact processes by which child care and flexible-time policies affect employee loyalty. Future research should assess the existence of micro-level processes that, according to the various applicable theories, mediate the relationship between policy and employee loyalty. For example, do beneficial policies lead to employee feelings of obligation, as predicted by social exchange theories?

Finally, the finding of a positive relationship between child care policies and employee loyalty among women with school-aged children in the home, but not among women with preschool-aged children, suggests the need for future research to give greater consideration to the potential differential impact of work-life policies over meaningfully distinct stages of parenthood. Much of the existing research focuses on a single stage of parenthood, most commonly on the parenting of young, preschool children (e.g., Greenberger et al., 1989; Goldberg et al., 1989; Grover & Crooker, 1995). Our results suggest that studies focusing on a single stage of parenting may have limited generalizability. For example, Grover and Crooker (1995) focused on the parents of children under the age of six, comparing those parents with all other employees in the sample (parents of children over six and non-parents). Their finding that providing assistance with the cost of day care for children was not associated with higher levels of

commitment among parents of young children (nor among employees in general) is consistent with the lack of a positive relationship between child care policies and employee loyalty among women with *preschool-aged* children in the present study. However, the present study's finding that child care benefits were positively related to employee loyalty among women with *school-aged* children clearly suggest that it would be inappropriate to generalize Grover and Crookers' finding to all parents.

Implications for Employers

Several recommendations can be made to employers who are genuinely concerned about promoting or maintaining the level of loyalty in their work force. First, where feasible, employers should consider adopting flexible-time policies. Such policies appear to have an almost universal "employee loyalty pay-off." Second, child care policies, for the most part, are associated with increased employee loyalty, with little evidence of "backlash" among those who do not benefit from them, and should therefore be encouraged. Third, even more important than the presence of employee-friendly policies is the implementation of those policies. Supervisors should be trained to provide an environment in which employees feel that they will not be penalized for work-family conflicts, and that they will receive reasonable, affirmative support in their attempts to address work-nonwork life issues. To promote these practices, supervisor support for work/life issues should be assessed in the performance appraisal process and linked to the reward structure for supervisors.

Notes

1. Includes both married and those partnered who are living together.
2. For the purposes of this study, those without children living in their home are considered non-parents.
3. The 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce has a one-item measure of employee loyalty. We use the 1992 version because of the greater reliability of the three-item measure of loyalty.

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