

18

Institutionalizing Family-Friendly Policies

Mary C. Still and David Strang

Are companies that appear to be family-friendly places where more people take advantage of programs designed to help balance work and family? What is the relationship between an organization's construction of formal work-life programs, employee awareness of program availability, and employee use? This chapter describes the work-life policies and programs established by the seven organizations participating in *The Cornell Couples and Career Study* and discusses how these programs relate to the larger work-life movement as well as to the industrial and organizational environments of the specific companies. We then focus on what benefits the respondents in the study believe are available, an analysis that underscores the disjuncture between formal programs and employee perceptions. Finally, we address the impact of personal characteristics, work roles, and organizational context on work-life program use.

Students of organizations have long observed the gap between an organization's formal structure and the informal but structured patterns of behavior that arise within its walls.¹ What an organization claims it does and its day-to-day activities can diverge substantially. Special caution must be observed when considering new or innovative management practices because these are particularly susceptible to rhetorical excess and faddish adoption.² For example, George Easton and Sherry Jarrell find that only 59 of 274 firms that formally embraced Total Quality Management (TQM; the leading management change program of the early 1990s) went on to actually develop a systematic program. The authors

note that "Many firms claim to be implementing TQM when, in fact, they have made essentially no changes (other than in their public rhetoric)."³

What sort of relationship exists between an employer's official adoption of work-life policies and employee perceptions and use? Although little research has asked this question directly, close observers of the field suggest the two are loosely coupled at best. "To many companies," writes Sue Shellenbarger, a *Wall Street Journal* columnist, "fashioning a family-friendly image is nothing more than that—an issue of image, not substance."⁴ Genevieve Capowski claims that companies report offering family-friendly programs when only one or two employees in the organization work flextime or use some other form of alternative scheduling.⁵ Many family-friendly policies may not be officially available to all employees, and those that are formally available may be informally discouraged, making work-life programs virtually useless to employees.⁶ This disconnect has been acknowledged by work-life scholars, but we have just begun to explore its causes and consequences. Here, we respond to calls by scholars such as Shelley MacDermid, Leon Litchfield, and Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes for new research examining both employer and employee perceptions.⁷

The Origins of Work-Life Programs

Discussions began in the business press in the 1980s about how organizations help employees manage work and home as a response to the rising number of women of childbearing age in the workforce. Many companies with sufficient resources set up on-site or near-site day care⁸; firms that could not afford the expense or that wished to signal their responsiveness without spending too much money contracted for child-care referral services.⁹ Reported success stories offered decreased absenteeism among users of child care as proof of efficacy.¹⁰

Increasing attention to work-family issues, along with institutional pressures, prompted a broader discussion of the social responsibility of companies. In the 1980s, government efforts to privatize human services led to tax incentives for corporations to provide child-care assistance, and federal agencies and business consultants pressed corporations to adopt child-care initiatives.¹¹ Media publicity facilitated the mimicry of exemplary programs, with human resource professionals playing the joint role of internal advocates and issue interpreters.¹² Later, elder care emerged as a related set of problems and solutions.

During the 1990s, discussions of family-friendly programs broadened into a more general discourse on how companies could facilitate their employees' abilities to meet work and family demands on their own time. As attention shifted to time management, a variety of strategies—part-time work, flextime, compressed workweeks, job-sharing, and time off for volunteer work—emerged as a new set of solutions. Although much about these programs continued to be motivated by

the needs of families, the programs were available to all sorts of employees and not only those concerned with child care.

The shift from work-family to work-life¹³ in the 1990s and 2000s has been facilitated by links to a more widespread and influential managerial movement, the quality movement.¹⁴ As quality programs moved from Japan to the United States, they shifted from an emphasis on the cultivation of managerial and technical knowledge to a greater focus on employee participation and human relations.¹⁵ Employee participation meant that employees had a voice in the way work was designed and executed, would be held responsible for group output, and, above all, were invested in the company's performance and well-being. Such investment and commitment are evidenced by volunteerism, in which workers are willing to go beyond the job requirements, to initiate change, and to actively solve organizational problems. Quality approaches define employees as internal customers whose needs must be met and argue that continuous improvement requires employee development and empowerment.

Flextime and other family-friendly benefits can also be seen as vehicles for inspiring commitment.¹⁶ In many companies, active quality programs have helped put work-life issues on the table. In a multinational bank we are studying, a corporate quality program helped give rise to greater attention to the relationship between corporate culture and business performance, which in turn led to an effort to construct a work-life agenda.¹⁷ At Corning, linking the work-life agenda to TQM was what made family-friendly policies "stick," according to a director of Quality Management.¹⁸ In other companies, such as Dow and Steelcase, quality and work-life programs have developed in tandem and are hard to separate (e.g., Dow uses TQM tools like Pareto bar charts and opportunity mapping to show the impact of work-life programs).¹⁹ Most generally, as a 1993 report for corporate executives written by leaders in work-life innovation argued, "The growth of the quality movement offers an opportunity to expand work/family awareness since many of the tenets and principles of total quality management coincide with the organization change objectives of the work/family agenda."²⁰

Given the diversity in approaches to work-life, we follow the qualitative typology offered by Dana Friedman and Arlene Johnson and the quantitative typology offered by Jael Cutcher-Gershenfeld, Ellen Kossek, and Heidi Sandling²¹ to distinguish different sorts of programs. We differentiate (1) child-care innovations, which alleviate employees' concerns with child care and aim at allowing employees to follow conventional schedules or to provide care during unusual work hours, such as evening shift; (2) time-control innovations, which focus on alternative scheduling and allow employees more discretion over their time;²² and (3) symbolic innovations, which require little or no financial capital to undertake or continue and require no significant changes in employees' work practices. Table 18.1 identifies specific policies and programs in these categories, noting the sorts of arguments most strongly associated with each type.²³

Table 18.1 Work-Life Programs by Type

Program	Category	Benefits of Adoption ^a
Flextime ^b	Time-control	Helps employees manage work and home demands Attracts best and brightest to firm
Job-share		
Telecommute ^b		
Compressed workweek		
Part-time work		
Phaseback for mothers		
Job guaranteed time off for childbirth		
Time off for volunteering ^b		
On-site or near-site childcare center ^b		
In-home daycare provider network		
Pay (beyond FMLA) for mothers/paid parental leave	Child care	Fills gap in local day-care availability, allowing employees to work Reliable child care over which company has control reduces absenteeism due to child-care problems Increases employee loyalty to organization
Dependent care fund		
Before- and after-school care ^b		
Day-care subsidies		
Backup child care		
Sick-child care ^b		
Summer program for kids ^b		
Elder-care, day-care- and disabled-care referral service ^b		
Day-care consortium contributor		
Company task force		
Pretax set-asides	Symbolic	Fills gap in availability of information Helps employees deal with role conflict, making them better workers
Adoption aid		
Support groups ^b		
Seminars on family ^b		

^a Arguments for adoption as discussed in the press and by experts (i.e., *Working Mother* magazine; Conference Board 1991).
^b Benefits also used to compute the dependent variable in regression analyses.

Work-Life Programs at Participating Organizations

An organization's needs, resources, industrial location, and characteristics (such as size) shape important elements of its approach to work-life issues. For example, the work-life policies of Vantech are conditioned by the fact that it is a major Fortune 500 firm with great international visibility and a real need to signal its progressiveness to a wide audience. In the academic world, much the same could be said of Lake-University. Utilco, by contrast, is a regional utility whose policies are negotiated with the union that represents the majority of its employees. Citizens' Health and Valley View are much smaller organizations operating in local markets.

Industrial and organizational context also affects the demand for work-life programs. The manufacturing firms in our survey, like manufacturers nationwide, are experiencing considerable downsizing (Vantech in particular). Their employees thus tend to be preoccupied with job security and may be correspondingly less likely to strongly demand new benefits.²⁴ The two medical facilities, like the rest of the health-care industry, experienced much concern about job stability and radical restructuring in the early 1990s due to attempts at health-care reform. Respondents working for the two institutions of higher education have probably experienced less of an external threat to job security.

Table 18.2 summarizes some features of family-friendly programs across the seven organizations in *The Cornell Couples and Careers Study*. To develop a stronger sense of the genuinely substantial differences among these programs, we provide here a brief description of how each organization came to address work-life issues. These descriptions are primarily drawn from interviews with the human resource managers most closely involved in administering family-friendly policies.

Vantech

Vantech's work-life program follows on the heels of a long-standing tradition of concern for the welfare of employees and their families, and in fact the company has been described as an exemplar of "welfare capitalism." In the 1980s, changing demographics of the workforce and competition for the best employees led senior management to establish a work-life task force.²⁵ Nevertheless, executives at Vantech felt uneasy about becoming too involved in employees' family lives. According to a Vantech senior manager, pressure to expand work-life programs grew when company recruiters noticed an increase in questions about such benefits.²⁶ Vantech's extensive raft of formal policies are characteristic of large, successful organizations in tune with contemporary discussions of

Table 18.2 Formal Work-Life Programs, Participating Corporations^a

Company	Type	Origin of Work-Life Program	Responsibility for Work-Life Program	Total Number of Benefits
Vantech	Manufacturing	Began in 1980s; company is nationally recognized for work-life program	Director of Diversity and Work-Life, HR ^b	16
Transco	Manufacturing	Company adopted template program from parent company in late-1990s; parent company has been recognized for work-life program	Work-Life Manager, HR	12
Utilco	Utility	Program adopted in late 1990s, has emphasis on employee wellness	Labor Relations Manager, HR	7
Citizens' Health	Health care	No formal program exists; employee needs are negotiated individually	No specific designee; HR	4
Valley View	Health care	No formal program exists; employee needs are negotiated individually	No specific designee; HR	3
Upstate University	Higher education	Company began using flextime in 1970s as a way of voluntarily reducing labor costs; responds now to individual employee needs	No specific designee; HR	9
Lake University	Higher education	Company conducted formal process to find best practices	Director of Work-Life	12

^aFrom the *Cornell Couples and Careers Study*, 1998-99.

^bHR, human resources.

corporate responsibility and performance. We suspect that Vantech's continuing efforts are not only the source of, but also a product of, its national reputation for family-friendliness (an important predictor of adoption).²⁷

Utilco

Utilco's work-life program began in a very different way. "I got called into my boss's office and he said, 'Congratulations. You've just been made the wellness coordinator for the company,'" recalls a human resources (HR) manager. "And work/life got hitched on. [My boss] said, 'You don't have much of a budget.'" When asked to describe what wellness/work-life is at Utilco, she said: "Monthly meetings of an established committee. Yearly health fairs, brown bag seminars with a raffle. Lots of balloons." She calls the company's motivation for work-life policies "p.r.," and says that getting financial support has been difficult.

Because the union opposes benefits such as part-time work and flextime at Utilco (reasoning that such work replaces full-time jobs), meeting the needs of workers with families has been difficult, according to the HR manager. Although in the past salaried employees were allowed flextime, that situation changed due to the case of a union employee who came to work one-half hour early and left early to meet her disabled child at the bus. When the union found out about the case, it fought Utilco on the grounds that such benefits erode the standard eight-hour workday. "We ended up yanking flextime for everyone," the HR manager said. But she suspects informal flex time arrangements are still being made between some supervisors and employees.

Citizens' Health

Citizens' Health has no formal program and offers few work-family benefits. "We lump it in EAP [the Employee Assistance Program]," a HR manager explains. She describes the EAP: "It's a toll-free number, where [employees] can talk to a Masters degree social worker about all kinds of problems—home, work, marital." The company has few formal policies and responds to individual problems in informal ways.

Valley View

Like Citizens' Health, Valley View's work-life program, as such, is largely informal, although a formal child-care center is located on-site. Although there is no formal policy on flextime, the vice president of HR said both that it is difficult for employees in the business of patient care to work flexible hours and that flexible hours are privately negotiated with managers. He was unsure of the exact beginning of the hospital's on-site day-care center, but said it has existed since

at least the early 1990s. Despite the appearance of a relatively comprehensive set of initiatives aimed at caregiving—on-site day care and sick care, as well as respite care for the elderly—the HR vice president qualified both the on-site day care and the elder care. The day-care center, which is locally contracted by another association, is used only by a handful of families because its hours (6 A.M. to 6 P.M.) are not adequate for many health-care workers, and the respite care is not a company initiative but a community service.

Transco

Transco, also a Fortune 500 manufacturer, had twin motives for developing work-life programs. Its parent company previously adopted numerous work-life policies and was publicly recognized by being awarded a spot on *Working Mothers'* "Best Companies for Working Mothers" list. Transco's development of work-life programs was thus encouraged by corporate headquarters. In addition, the company manager we interviewed noted that flextime was in demand well before a formal policy was put in place. Employees voiced their opinions through the company ombudsman, employee satisfaction surveys, and suggestion boxes around the plant. Transco's work-life program is now formalized as an official responsibility of a HR manager in the diversity office (as at Vantech).

Upstate University

Upstate University's work-life program is informal and inconsistent across the organization. Flextime and alternative scheduling were originally promoted within the university as a way of saving money. Employees banked hours and could take time off or were allowed to work fewer hours without pay. In large part, these policies were established to avoid layoffs. Work-life has become an employee-initiated program and is used primarily by clerical and administrative staff, according to a HR manager.

Lake University

Lake University's program resembles the planned approaches of the large manufacturers in our study, Vantech and Transco. It began when an internal advisory council investigated the needs of women on campus and determined that work-family balance was an issue of concern. As a result, the university developed policies for alternative scheduling, created a summer camp for employees' children (which supplemented preexisting on-site day care) and began a seminar on work-family issues. As at Vantech and at Transco's parent company, the process of developing a work-life program involved a systematic evaluation of

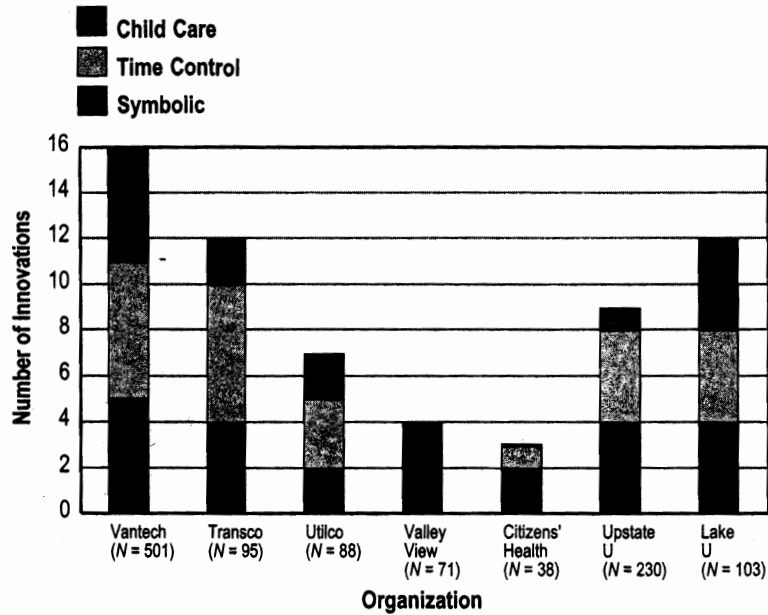


Figure 18.1 Number and type of work-life innovations, by participating organization. Source: Cornell Couples and Careers Study, 1998-99.

practices that other organizations had undertaken—a scanning of the environment for successful models to emulate.

Figure 18.1 shows the composition of work-life programs (as depicted by HR reports) across the seven organizations. Vantech, Transco, and Lake University show the largest breadth of initiatives; Valley View and Citizens' Health have few policies or programs formally in place. Valley View's and Lake University's benefits are nearly equally distributed among child-care, time-control, and symbolic initiatives. Transco's program offers few child-care benefits but as many time-control benefits as Vantech. Both Citizens' Health and Upstate University offer few child-care benefits, and both programs center on symbolic initiatives (nearly one-half of all initiatives at Upstate University and two-thirds at Citizens' Health). Formal work-life programs at Valley View consist of child-care and symbolic innovations (a configuration that makes sense in terms of the work that employees do—direct patient care requires the employees' physical presence, making time-control programs difficult at best).

Awareness of Work-Life Programs

Table 18.3 examines the relationship between the formal provision of benefits by organizations and employees' awareness of whether benefits are available to

Table 18.3 Employee Awareness and Use of Work-Life Policies, by Company and Benefit*

Company	Formally Available?	Respondents Wrong about Formal Availability (%)	Respondents Using Program That Does Not Formally Exist (%)
VANTECH			
Flextime	Yes	25.6	—
Child care	No	15.9	2
Telecommuting	Yes	57.9	—
Referral (child and elder care)	Yes	27.2	—
Parental support	Yes	26.0	—
TRANSCO			
Flextime	Yes	39.3	—
Child care	No	34.6	6.3
Telecommuting	Yes	51.8	—
Referral (child and elder care)	Yes	40.5	—
Parental support	Yes	53.0	—
UTILCO			
Flextime	No	52.5	39.8
Child care	No	13.3	1.1
Telecommuting	No	34.1	6.2
Referral (child and elder care)	Yes	65.4	—
Parental support	Yes	56.0	—
VALLEY VIEW			
Flextime	No	66.6	49.3
Child care	Yes	57.9	—
Telecommuting	No	33.2	3.8
Referral (child and elder care)	No	40.0	2.5
Parental support	Yes	49.0	—
CITIZENS' HEALTH			
Flextime	No	65.9	31.6
Child care	No	72.2	15.8
Telecommuting	No	52.8	4.1
Referral (child and elder care)	No	38.0	3.4
Parental support	No	61.0	15.8
UPSTATE UNIVERSITY			
Flextime	Yes	39.5	—
Child care	Yes	49.5	—
Telecommuting	No	44.6	20.7
Referral (child and elder care)	No	26.0	7.6
Parental support	Yes	37.0	—
LAKE UNIVERSITY			
Flextime	Yes	24.2	—
Child care	Yes	64.6	—
Telecommuting	Yes	35.8	—
Referral (child and elder care)	Yes	36.0	—
Parental support	Yes	18.0	—

* Comparison of five initiatives in which both human resource and employee accounts are available. Source: Cornell Couples and Careers Study, 1998-99.

them. Although the overlap between the two sources of data is not perfect, employees were asked much the same questions about work-life benefits as the HR professionals. We focus here on comparable information for five major programs: flextime, telecommuting, day care, parental support (support groups and seminars) and child/elder-care referral.²⁸ Note that in this chapter we cannot focus on couples because we use company-level data in our analyses and comparable data are not available for most of the spouses, who work in a variety of firms other than the companies where we solicited respondents and interviewed HR administrators. Moreover, some of the spouses are self-employed or work in small businesses with no HR departments. Our sample size, thus, consists of the 1,082 respondents employed by one of the seven participating organizations in *The Cornell Couples and Careers Study* (462 women and 620 men).

Seventy-one percent of this sample of employees is unaware of or mistaken about at least one work-life policy or practice. That is, more than two-thirds claim that a policy is in operation that is not or that a policy that does formally exist does not. The frequency of errors varies substantially by organization. Ninety-two percent of Valley View employees are wrong about at least one of the five benefits about which we asked their HR department. Utilco (89%), Citizens' Health (87%), and Upstate University (87%) have similarly high numbers of misinformed employees. Employees at Vantech (57%) and Lake University (67%) appear to be better informed.

One in five employees is mistaken about the existence of the average policy or program, with telecommuting producing the most "wrong" answers and child care the most "right" answers. Percentages of misinformed employees range from 13 percent of Utilco respondents, who wrongly believe that child care is available to them, to the 72 percent of Citizens' Health respondents, who labor under the same misconception about their employer.

No particular policy shows systematically few or many errors across organizations, and in fact each of the five has the highest error rate in at least one of the seven companies. For example, employees at Vantech are particularly likely to think that telecommuting is not available, whereas employees at Lake University are more likely to be wrong about child care. The rate at which employees report that formally established programs are unavailable is somewhat greater than the rate at which they report that nonexistent programs are in operation, but the difference is not large. In other words, employees are almost as likely to claim the organization offers a benefit that in reality is not available as they are to say that it does not offer a benefit that is actually available. Error rates at Citizens' Health, where none of the five programs is formally established, are very high.

Employee perceptions of program availability might diverge from the organization's formal policies for a number of reasons, some of which come under the heading of perceptual errors or miscommunication. Some employees might define programs in idiosyncratic ways, mistaking telecommuting for occasional work

from home. Organizations might not do a good job communicating about possible benefits; for example, the HR manager at Lake University notes that its flextime policy has not been widely advertised. Or employees might guess about the existence of a program based on their personal experience and that of coworkers.²⁹ Childless employees might not know that their organization offers child-care referrals or near-site child care. And as other scholars have pointed out, policies are only as good as the company's culture.³⁰ Organizations with corporate cultures that encourage overwork and heroic acts of overtime either blatantly or subtly discourage the use of many family-friendly programs. Some companies leaders view the programs as frivolous. In our sample of organizations, one work-life director recalls senior management's review of her \$10,000 budget request for contracted child-care referral services: "You would've thought that I was taking their First Communion money. I'm sitting there in a meeting with a guy with four kids whose wife stays home, who says, 'What the hell is *this*?'"

But how do we account for employees who not only think a benefit is available when it is not, but actually say they use it? As table 18.3 shows, a large number of employees say that they use programs that do not formally exist. For example, almost one-half of the surveyed employees at Valley View say they are on flextime, although Valley View officially claims it has no flextime program. Approximately 20 percent of those surveyed at Upstate University say they telecommute and 15 percent at Citizens' Health say they receive on- or near-site child care, again in the absence of a formal program.³¹ So many respondents cannot be deluded about their own situation. For example, although Utilco is very clear that it does not formally provide for flextime (recall our earlier discussion of union opposition), the HR manager we interviewed said, "Managers work it out with employees and I don't want to know about it."

We make no effort to judge whether, on balance, employees or HR administrators are better positioned to know what benefits are actually available. It is clear, however, that formal programs and employee perceptions of them are not well aligned. This suggests that researchers should not use employee perceptions as proxies for formal organizational policies or use formal policies as proxies for use.

Use of Work-Life Programs

Overview by Company and Type

Figure 18.2 examines use of work-life programs by company and program type; we again distinguish between child-care, time-control, and symbolic innovations. No organization offers widely subscribed on-site or near-site child care, and child-care referral is also little used on the whole. Of course, such programs

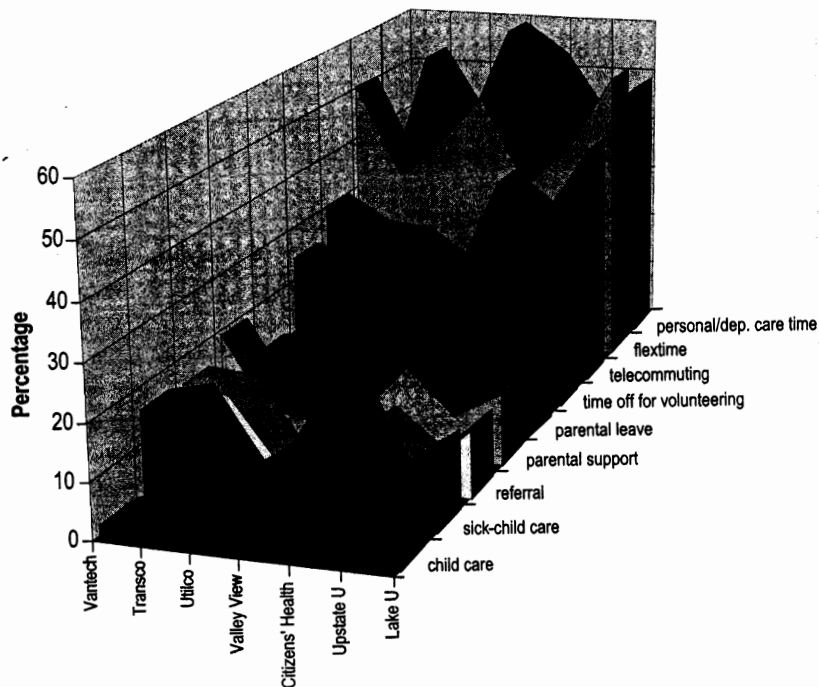


Figure 18.2 Percentage using at least one work-life initiative, by participating company and type. Source: *Cornell Couples and Careers Study*, 1998–99.

are largely restricted to employees with small children (about one-quarter of our sample). Citizens' Health shows the most active child-care and sick-child-care programs, consistent with the general popularity of these initiatives in the health-care sector.³² Employees at Vantech, Transco, and Lake University are also relatively high users of child-care benefits.

Initiatives related to control over time involve more employees. Personal/dependent-care time and flextime are the most commonly used programs across all organizations and are especially widely subscribed to at Vantech and Valley View. Valley View's case is particularly interesting because the HR office indicates that the organization does not offer flextime. Telecommuting is popular at Lake University, where professors as well as research and teaching assistants may be more likely to work at home because teaching loads (requiring physical presence) tend to be lower than at Upstate. Telecommuting is also widely used at Citizens' Health, a medical facility with, in our sample, 90 percent professional employees. The other two time-control initiatives, parental leave and time off for volunteering, are more rarely used.

Table 18.4 shows the weak relationship between the formal availability of work-life benefits and use. In the overall sample, only the use of referral services

Table 18.4 Simple Correlations between Program Availability and Use, by Gender^a

	Flextime	Child Care	Telecommuting	Referral Service	Parental Support
Women N = 462	-0.014	0.022	0.009	0.028	-0.125***
Men N = 620	0.097**	-0.020	0.043	0.134**	0.057 [†]
Entire sample N = 1,082	0.039	0.018	0.029	0.073**	-0.038

^a† Indicates $p < 0.1$; ** Indicates $p < 0.01$; *** Indicates $p < 0.001$. Source: *Cornell Couples and Careers Study*, 1998–99.

(child care or elder care) is significantly correlated with formal availability. Among women, the use of parental assistance or support initiatives is significantly but negatively correlated with formal availability, so female employees are less likely to use parental support programs when they are formally available and organized by their employer. Men's use of initiatives is more closely tied to formal availability, although not overwhelmingly so—the strongest correlation is a modest relationship ($r = .13$) between formal availability and use of referral services.

Who Uses Work-Life Programs?

Dependent and Explanatory Variables To model work-life program use by employees in *The Cornell Couples and Careers Study*, we construct a summary score across multiple programs.³³ For each respondent we count how many of the following eight programs are used: child-care referral, on- or near-site child-care, sick-child care, personal/dependent-care leave, parental leave with pay, flextime, telecommuting, and time off for volunteering. We exclude pretax set-asides and other symbolic initiatives, (although some researchers do include these benefits in global measures of work-life programming).³⁴ Our concern is with programs that explicitly or implicitly involve an organizational cost, whether through a financial outlay or the opportunity cost of an employee's time.

Individual Characteristics

Demand for family-friendly benefits. Program use should be greater among those who have a greater need for program benefits. We examine differences between women and men because in most families women are primarily responsible for child care, elder care, and the home. We also examine the impact of parenting a child under the age of six in the home because this should increase demand for child-care and for time-control programs.

Employee bargaining power. Workers with more skills and training should be in a stronger position to negotiate for benefits than are employees whose skills are less scarce or less critical to the organization. Past researchers have argued that skilled women in particular are more likely to receive family-friendly benefits.³⁵ We examine the effects of education, salary, and professional status on benefit use.

Awareness of work-life programs. We examine the impact of awareness of program availability by counting the number of programs in which the respondent correctly identifies whether a formal program exists. (This count is thus incremented when the respondent describes a formally adopted program as available and when the respondent describes a program that has not been adopted by the organization as unavailable.)

Control over work. Workers with a great amount of control over their work should be better positioned to use flexible benefits, especially those that allow them to work at home or during off-hours. We measure control via a scale developed by Linda Thiede Thomas and Daniel Ganster that combines respondents' perceptions of control over (1) the start and end times of each workday, (2) the number of hours worked each week, (3) working at home instead of at the workplace, (4) work that must be done at home to meet job demands, (5) when to take vacations or days off, (6) when to take a few hours off, (7) making or receiving personal phone calls, and (8) making or receiving personal email.³⁶

Organizational Characteristics

Formal availability. We treat the number of family-friendly benefits officially offered by the company as a measure of the breadth of its work-life program. A larger number of benefits should lead to greater use. The absence of such a relationship suggests that formal policies may be irrelevant or may be used to signal concern in settings where active programs are costly or undesirable.

Organizational size. Size is perhaps the most consistent organizational correlate of employee rewards and innovativeness in general, and this relationship holds for work-life benefits.³⁷ Larger organizations tend to pay more and to provide more fringe benefits for a variety of reasons, including their strong market positions, skilled workforces, and propensity to develop strong internal labor markets.³⁸ Because we control for the number of formal work-life benefits, however, the impact of organizational size on use is not clear-cut. It is plausible that larger organizations would show a greater use net of program adoption (because factors such as an internal labor market should encourage program participation as well as organizational adoption of benefits) or less use (because large size often diminishes organizational flexibility). We measure size as the logged number of

employees because firm sizes in our sample vary substantially, with Vantech being particularly large.

Percentage female. Organizations with many women employees are more likely to adopt family-friendly benefits.³⁹ We anticipate that they also experience greater pressure to make work-life benefits real—that is, readily available without strong barriers to use. Organizations with many women employees should be more motivated to solve work-family conflicts, and may develop progressive cultures that view family roles and responsibilities as legitimate within the workplace.

Table 18.5 gives the means and standard deviations for the explanatory variables and benefit use across organizations and gender. Substantial variation appears on both dimensions. For example, the average salary at the Fortune 500 manufacturing firm Vantech is almost double that of the average salary at the local hospital (\$35,976 a year). Citizens' Health and Upstate University employ the greatest proportions of professionals; the smallest percentage are at Valley View and Vantech.⁴⁰ Many respondents have preschool-age children, with women more likely than men to have young children in the home. Recall that the respondents we study in this chapter all work at one of the seven participating companies. All are married, but not to one another. Employees at Vantech, Transco, and Lake University report having the highest levels of control over their work.

The seven organizations differ greatly in size. Vantech has the most employees (>30,000), followed by Utilco (>5,000) and Lake University (>5,000). The health-care organizations are the smallest, with fewer than one thousand employees each. The percentage of women in the organizations also varies considerably, from 18 percent at the manufacturer Transco to 84 percent at Citizens' Health. The universities are the most gender-balanced (at 53% and 60%). Awareness of work-family benefits is highest at Vantech and Lake University.

Average use of work-life programs ranges between one and two benefits for almost all subgroups defined by employer and gender. Family-friendly initiatives are used more extensively by women than men (only at Transco are men heavier users, due to an extensive telecommuting program). Use is highest at Lake University, Valley View, and Citizens' Health. Use is moderate at Vantech (despite the fact that its formal programs are the most extensive) and is especially low among men at Valley View and Utilco and among women at Transco.

Regression Results Table 18.6 shows the results from multiple regression analyses of work-life program use. We examine the sample as a whole and also develop separate models for women and men.

Most individual characteristics bear a weak relation to program use. The effects of measures of employee bargaining power such as education, salary, and

Table 18.5 Descriptive Statistics, by Participating Organizations and Gender^a

Organization	Gender	Age	School beyond high school (years)	Annual Salary	Professional	Child <6 at Home	Control over Work Scale	Awareness	Number of full-time employees	% female	Mean no benefits used
Vantech	Male N = 353	45.12 (6.63)	4.98 (2.33)	77,176 (22,323)	0.65 (0.48)	0.20 (0.40)	3.72 (0.57)	3.80 (1.31)	>10,000	36	1.58 (1.29)
	Female N = 148	40.70 (4.85)	4.88 (2.14)	64,114 (25,025)	0.68 (0.47)	0.34 (0.48)	3.74 (0.59)	3.79 (1.31)	>10,000	36	1.57 (1.29)
Transco	Male N = 57	42.86 (7.73)	5.44 (1.92)	74,980 (30,604)	0.79 (0.41)	0.26 (0.44)	3.68 (0.52)	3.33 (1.35)	>2,500	18	1.96 (1.44)
	Female N = 38	35.87 (7.10)	4.11 (2.18)	48,610 (29,678)	0.76 (0.43)	0.42 (0.50)	3.75 (0.64)	2.95 (1.63)	>2,500	18	1.16 (1.5)
Utilco	Male N = 61	45.20 (6.42)	3.67 (2.26)	76,100 (19,250)	0.75 (0.43)	0.25 (0.43)	3.40 (0.80)	3.03 (1.09)	>5,000	21	1.31 (1.30)
	Female N = 77	40.96 (6.09)	4.30 (2.13)	62,046 (18,744)	0.70 (0.47)	0.41 (0.50)	3.50 (0.70)	2.93 (1.14)	>5,000	21	1.37 (1.25)
Valley View	Male N = 11	42.36 (10.17)	2.73 (2.05)	47,363 (22,415)	0.55 (0.52)	0.18 (0.40)	2.60 (0.80)	3.36 (1.21)	<1,000	80	1.27 (0.79)
	Female N = 60	40.37 (7.57)	2.50 (2.00)	33,888 (12,530)	0.68 (0.47)	0.28 (0.45)	2.51 (0.79)	2.95 (0.999)	<1,000	80	1.9 (1.4)
Citizens' Health	Male N = 17	43.41 (6.55)	6.82 (3.17)	85,470 (35,845)	0.88 (0.33)	0.53 (0.51)	3.33 (0.77)	2.71 (1.57)	<1,000	84	1.88 (1.32)
	Female N = 21	38.57 (8.69)	4.48 (1.99)	39,382 (16,321)	0.90 (0.30)	0.24 (0.44)	3.24 (0.93)	2.62 (1.43)	<1,000	84	1.88 (1.3)
Upstate University	Male N = 98	48.40 (10.37)	7.10 (2.62)	65,674 (22,868)	0.85 (0.36)	0.18 (0.39)	3.74 (0.62)	3.16 (1.17)	>1,000	53	1.44 (1.24)
	Female N = 132	43.46 (8.25)	5.21 (2.29)	42,599 (15,718)	0.90 (0.30)	0.21 (0.41)	3.65 (0.67)	3.14 (1.12)	>1,000	53	1.48 (1.20)
Lake University	Male N = 53	46.68 (10.45)	6.57 (2.87)	62,464 (34,297)	0.81 (0.39)	0.25 (0.43)	4.0 (0.71)	3.60 (1.26)	>5,000	60	1.8 (1.27)
	Female N = 50	44.88 (8.20)	4.92 (2.59)	45,471 (34,298)	0.78 (0.42)	0.32 (0.47)	3.78 (0.64)	3.80 (1.34)	>5,000	60	2.24 (1.38)
Total		43.74 (7.96)	5.02 (2.54)	63,509 (27,820)	0.74 (0.44)	0.25 (0.44)	3.00 (0.71)	3.45 (1.31)	26,464.85 (25,161.33)	43.40 (17.35)	1.61 (1.51)
		1,126	1,126	1,070	1,126	1,126	1,126	1,126	1,124	1,124	1,126

^a Values (other than N) are means. Values in parentheses are standard deviations. Source: *Cornell Couples and Careers Study, 1998-99.*

Table 18.6 Regression Models Analyzing Work-Life Benefit Use^a

	Entire Sample		Women		Men	
	b ^b (SE)	Significance	B (SE)	Significance	b (SE)	Significance
Individual characteristics						
Female	0.057 (0.091)	0.627				
Child < 6 at home	0.000 (0.102)	0.000	0.134 (0.049) [†]	0.105	-0.107 (0.142)	0.449
Age	0.006 (0.006)	0.350	0.005 (0.009)	0.580	0.004 (0.008)	0.626
Education	-0.000 (0.017)	-0.001	-0.01 (0.028)	0.719	0.013 (0.022)	0.559
Salary	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.319	0.000 (0.000)	0.823	-0.000 (0.000)	0.856
Professional	0.004 (0.094)	0.969	-0.020 (0.153)	0.894	0.021 (0.120)	0.863
Awareness of work-life programs	0.106 (0.031)**	0.001	0.080 (0.049) [†]	0.105	0.121 (0.041)**	0.003
Control	0.193 (0.060)**	0.001	0.252 (0.087)**	0.004	0.171 (0.084)*	0.042
Organizational environment						
Size (LN)	-0.01 (0.067)	0.875	0.123 (0.107)	0.251	-0.114 (0.087)	0.190
Women (%)	0.007 (0.003)*	0.015	0.017 (0.005)***	0.000	-0.003 (0.004)	0.523
Number of benefits formally available	0.002 (0.025)	0.924	-0.029 (0.041)	0.487	0.034 (0.031)	0.276
Constant	0.08 (0.562)	0.887	-1.27 (0.824)	0.126	1.09 (0.753)	0.148
N	1,082	1,082	461		620	
R ²	0.030	0.087	0.058		0.033	

^a†Indicates $p < 0.10$; *Indicates $p < 0.05$; **Indicates $p < 0.01$; ***Indicates $p < 0.001$; ^bb, unstandardized regression coefficient; SE, standard error. Source: *Cornell Couples and Careers Study, 1998-99.*

professional status differs by gender, with mostly negative effects for women and positive effects for men, but coefficients are modest and not statistically significant. It is even more surprising that the same pattern of weak effects arises for gender and having very young children in the home. Women and women with preschool children are not much greater users of work-life programs than are men and women with no or older children, although a more fine-grained analysis of the use of specific programs might tell a different story.

We see consistent effects of awareness of work-life initiatives and control over individuals' work on program use. With both of these variables, however, it is difficult to be confident about causal direction. Are people who are better informed about formal programs then more likely to use them (because they know about them), or do people who need the benefits become aware of them when searching for ways to solve their problems? Does control over work lead to a greater ability to negotiate for work-life benefits, or does the use of programs such as telecommuting or on-site child care enhance individuals' control over work?

Organizational context influences program use in several important ways, although here (as is not the case for individual characteristics) differences between what influences men and what influences women arise. The larger the percentage of women in the organization, the more likely women are to use work-life benefits. Women may feel more comfortable or supported when they work in organizations with many female employees to develop alternative schedules that meet family demands.⁴¹ By contrast, women who work in organizations with few women (such as Transco and Utilco) may feel pressure to behave "like men."⁴² Bringing the children to work through on-site or sick-child care advertises a woman's maternal life, perhaps to the detriment of her identity as a worker. On the organizational side, companies with many women employees may do more to ensure that family-friendly programs are readily usable.

Although we have little direct evidence arbitrating between these two mechanisms, the regression results appear to support the latter. If organizations with many women construct a pro-family work environment, we expect men in those types of companies to use more work-family initiatives as well. Our data, however, show no such relationship ($p = .548$). It appears more likely that companies dependent on female labor find ways to accommodate demands for family-friendliness, although it is notable that they do not tailor programs to the needs of women so strongly that men become less likely to use them. In fact, working in an organization with many women has a slightly (nonsignificant) negative effect on men's use of work-life programs. We suspect that men in companies in which many women are using work-life programs—in particular those who use alternative scheduling programs that necessarily complicate coordination of work—may feel more pressure to work conventional hours so as not to further complicate matters. After all, in most modern organizations, it is still expected

that someone is available to represent the department in meetings, to be called on for questions and emergencies, and to supervise staff.

We might think that the formal availability of benefits is a straightforward predictor of use; if a benefit does not exist, it cannot be used. But the story is not nearly so simple. Many formally unavailable benefits are available (at least to some employees) in practice, and formal programs may play largely symbolic roles. It is interesting to note that an important predictor of men's use is their awareness of formal work-life offerings, whereas for women being right about whether the company formally offered an initiative does not predict use. We believe this occurs because women negotiate exceptions to help them meet their work and family obligations and are less concerned with the formal availability of programs in their organization. Men, on the other hand, may feel more comfortable pursuing such programs when the organization has made them formally available, which results in, at the minimum, a tacit endorsement.

Summing Up

Four core findings emerge from our analysis of work-life benefits across the seven organizations and 1,062 workers in dual-career couples examined in *The Cornell Couples and Careers Study*. First, the formal work-life programs established by the organizations differ in substantial and largely predictable ways. The Fortune 500 manufacturer Vantech offers many more formal programs than any of the other organizations, in line with common understandings of the impact of organizational size and reputation. Other organizations follow in a way roughly correlated with size and are also linked to unionization (at Utilco), corporate sponsorship (at Transco), and industry.

The picture becomes much muddier when we turn to employee perceptions of which programs are formally available. The great majority of employees are wrong about the availability of work-life programs, at least some of the time. The larger and more formalized work-life programs (as at Vantech and Lake University) appear to have been better communicated to employees, but even here the disjuncture is startling. And although some of the difference between employee perceptions and HR reports may lie in employee misperceptions, it is also clear that formally established programs may not be readily available and that nonexistent benefits may be individually negotiated. A large number of employees not only believe that nonexistent programs are in operation, but actually use them.

Third, in developing regression analyses of who uses work-life benefits, we are struck by the modest effects of individual characteristics. Women are not significantly greater users of work-life programs than are men, and mothers with small children are not significantly greater users than women without children or with older children. Professionals are not significantly greater users than non-

professionals. The modest level of these effects may have to do with our focus on a summary score of use or on limited variation within the sample we study. Or it may indicate that benefit programs have in fact been generalized from work-family to work-life.

Fourth, organizational level variables play a larger role in influencing program participation, but the pattern of these effects varies by gender. For women, the use of programs increases with the proportion of women in the organization. This makes good sense, given the fact that women are historically the key driving force behind work-life benefits and are its core constituency. In combination with the weak direct effect of gender on use, it suggests that the effective demand for work-life integration is more a question of political influence within the corporation than individual preferences and choices. For men, program use appears to hinge on the formal status of work-life programs. Unlike women, men are sensitive to whether programs have been formally established. And, unlike women, men's use of benefits is linked to their awareness of the program's formal existence. Both effects point to men's sensitivity to the way family-friendly policies are defined within their organization and to their reluctance to negotiate individual benefits in the absence of strong organizational signals that these benefits are legitimate.

It is important for job-seekers, the media, and researchers to critically evaluate accounts linking a company's formal work-life program to its desirability as a place to work. Increasingly, work-life experts are asking companies to track the use of benefits as an indicator of how well they allow employees to manage work and home demands. Our evidence of the (dis)connection between formal use and availability underscores the importance of this distinction. And our analysis of program use suggests an important irony: companies that innovate in the area of work-life by adopting many programs do not show particularly high levels of benefit use among their employees. In fact, among the core group they were originally targeted to serve—women—there is a small negative relationship between the formal establishment of family-friendly programs and benefit use.