

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF  
WORKPLACE PROVISIONS FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is an exploratory and descriptive study of employer-provided work-life balance initiatives (WLB initiatives). Research on WLB initiatives is vast in size and scope, and recent studies in this field have been emerging from multiple academic disciplines. Findings from literature review raise questions about whether these provisions do actually help workers to balance their many roles and responsibilities in paid work and personal life. Based on an original case study in an Atlantic Canadian workplace, the current research is a focused inquiry of what WLB initiatives offer to workers. The formats of WLB initiatives, the relevance and accessibility of provisions to workers, and the interactions with organizational productivity objectives are explored. It is argued that WLB initiatives exist within and are influenced by a wider social structure that values the public sphere over the private, and that these provisions therefore do not necessarily promote real work-life balance for workers.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

On the one hand, [Westview is] very family-friendly. We have good programs, and we do have a caring, nurturing atmosphere...and it's really appreciated. Anytime I've had a need to use family-friendly policies or procedures, there's been absolutely no hesitation. Nor did I think there'd be hesitation, because the culture is very accepting. That's on the one hand. Then on the other hand, it's a very demanding environment to be in. That puts pressures on being available to the family in the first place [laughs]. So, in that sense, it's counter family-friendly. Not the policies, but the overall workload...Cause it's a demanding environment.

Eugene, staff-level employee at Westview

Work-life balance involves finding a way to juggle paid work with other important social institutions in personal life, such as family, education, and volunteering. How people can organize their paid employment and personal life on a daily basis and over the life course is a popular topic of conversation in workplaces and in academic research. This interest in work-life balance reflects its importance to personal satisfaction, quality of life, and health and wellness. Findings in recent research suggest that work-life balance has implications for employers, too: The positive impact of healthy work-life balance on desirable organizational outcomes, including staff retention, punctuality, performance and satisfaction, has been well-documented (Brunetto, Ramsey, & Shacklock, 2010; Damaske, 2011; Lee & Kim, 2010). To help people better manage their work-life balance, employers may offer a variety of provisions in the workplace, such as family leave programs, flexible scheduling options, child or eldercare referrals, financial assistance, part-time hours, and counseling services (Ferrer & Gagne, 2006; Heywood & Jirjhan, 2009; Zeytinoglu, Cooke, & Mann, 2010).

There is a considerable body of literature on work-life balance initiatives (WLB initiatives). Researchers have explored a range of different topics, such as the effect of working reduced hours on physicians' life satisfaction (Barnett & Gareis, 2000), care workers' access to workplace family policy (Medjuck, Keefe, & Fancey, 1998), and differences in how corporate and university employees perceive WLB initiatives (Anderson, Morgan, & Wilson, 2002). In research and lay discourse, it is often assumed that WLB initiatives function to support workers in finding greater balance between their paid employment and activities in their personal lives. However, some scholars have questioned whether these provisions are effective in helping workers. For instance, social scientist S. Lewis (1997) and others have found that even when WLB initiatives are officially available to workers, workplace norms may function to discourage take-up of the provisions (S. Lewis, 1997; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). As well, it has been suggested in some studies that WLB initiatives often amount to little more than company rhetoric, with few realized benefits for workers (Falter Mennino, Rubin, & Brayfield, 2005; Medjuck et al., 1998). As the quote from Eugene at the beginning of this chapter suggests, formalized workplace provisions may, in practice, compete with more dominant organizational goals, such as productivity.

In addition to studies that draw attention to the realities of how WLB initiatives may operate in workplaces, others have suggested that these provisions may not even be designed at the outset to help workers to find a balance between their paid work and personal lives. For instance, in two separate articles, researchers Duffy and Pupo (2011), and Glass and Estes (1997), both caution that while employer-provided on-site daycares

may help workers with their childcare needs, this WLB initiative ultimately facilitates a situation whereby workers are freed from family responsibilities such that they can devote more time and attention to their jobs.

Assertions that WLB initiatives may not function to help workers participate in and find balance between their many roles demonstrates the need for a more critical examination of these provisions. To this end, the current research is an exploratory and descriptive study of WLB initiatives, which questions what these provisions offer to workers' work-life balance, and how workers actually experience them in managing their paid work with their personal lives.

### **Defining Work-Life Balance and WLB Initiatives**

Despite the extensive research that has been conducted in this field, what exactly is meant by the term 'work-life balance' has not been made clear in the literature. It has been described as an "almost taken-for-granted metaphor" (Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek, & Sweet, 2009, p. 9; cited in Millan et al., 2011, p. 7). As Fleetwood (2007) suggests,

It is unclear whether [work-life balance] refers to an objective state of affairs, a subjective experience, perception or feeling; an actuality or an aspiration; a discourse or a practice; a metaphor for flexible working; a metaphor for the gendered division of labour; or a metaphor for some other political agenda (p. 352).

Extrapolating from the term itself, work-life balance should mean a (1) balance, between (2) work and (3) life – an ambiguous conceptualization at best.

Common criticisms of this term point to the difficulties of defining what counts as work and what does not, what counts as life and what does not, and what exactly would

constitute a balance between them (Glucksmann, 1995; Guest, 2002; Waring, 1999). For example, scholars have argued that the word “work” is, problematically, often used in exclusive reference to paid employment (Waring, 1999). To equate work with only paid work is limiting, as it rejects other kinds of labour that should be taken into account, such as unpaid domestic and volunteer work, commuting time, uncompensated overtime, and so on (Glucksmann, 1995; Guest, 2002). Unpaid labours are often thought of as being separate from and inconsequential to economic activity, and subsequently tend to go unrecognized and unrewarded (Waring, 1999). Because much of the unrecognized and unrewarded labour carried out in the home, family and community is done by women, feminist academics in particular have taken issue with this. The word “life” in work-life balance may be similarly problematized, though this matter has received less attention in research (Guest, 2002). Does “life” include family, education, and/or leisure? What kinds of activities or roles would be excluded from life? Can something be part of both work and life, and are there items that fit into neither category?

In contrast to the many theoretical debates about defining “work” and “life,” there has been little focus given to defining the “balance” between them (Guest, 2002). Often, research in this field likens work-life balance to something that can and should be measured, as a balance or an imbalance (Barnett & Gareis, 2000; Falter Mennino et al., 2005). However, there is no objective scale on which to measure this: Would measurements of work-life balance be weighted on a scale, where balance is struck when a person gives each social sphere equal weight? And if so, what are the units of measurement: Time, energy, resources? Alternatively, it could be suggested that balance

is something subjective which is unique to the individual, something that varies across people and cannot be measured on an objective scale. This approach would account for subjective differences between people: For example, one person may feel content working a 60 hour workweek and spending time with family on the weekend and another would not. However, taking into consideration the differences between people may ultimately limit the development of generalized understanding of what constitutes a balance. Evidently, work-life balance is a contentious term, and the conceptual challenges it presents must be considered. For the purposes of my study, the term work-life balance refers to the daily and lifelong process by which people move between and try to fulfill various roles in their paid employment and their personal lives. Work-life balance is what people do when they are managing their many interests and demands.

It is somewhat easier to define WLB initiatives than work-life balance, though there are inconsistencies across studies with this term, too. Researchers often differ in the language they use around these initiatives. Called WLB initiatives here, these workplace-based provisions have been variously referred to as family-friendly, work-family, work-life and flexibility initiatives. There are also differences in which kinds of provisions are included in or excluded from study. For instance, researchers may include provisions offered at either or both the government and workplace levels (Glass & Estes, 1997). Even when focusing solely on employer-provided initiatives, scholars do not operate out of a universally-accepted and complete list of WLB initiatives. Perhaps in response to this overall lack of standardization, some researchers have attempted to create categories of WLB initiatives in their studies. For example, in a study of the impact of WLB initiatives

on organizational attractiveness, Bourhis and Mekkaoui (2010) divide provisions into four categories: support for childcare, dependent care, or eldercare; time off in maternity, personal, parental, family-leave; employee assistance programs or counseling; and flexible work arrangements. Alternatively, in a Canadian study, Ferrer and Gagne (2006) construct three somewhat different categories: policies that facilitate leave from work (e.g., maternity and parental leave, sick leave, any other unpaid/paid leave); policies that facilitate change in work schedule (e.g., part-time, reduced workweek, flextime, telework); and family support policies (e.g., child/eldercare assistance, referral services, financial aid). Different again, in an American study of how WLB initiatives may help with parenting duties, Estes (2005) identifies three main types of workplace provisions: arrangements that address the structure of work by allowing flexibility in work time and location (e.g., schedule flexibility, telework); arrangements that include part-time hours, leave for a sick child, and leave for personal appointments; and arrangements that provide formal and informal workplace social support (e.g., employer assistance for childcare, and supervisor support). These examples showcase some differing interpretations and approaches to defining WLB initiatives.

For my study, WLB initiatives are defined generally as employer-provided workplace initiatives – including policies, programs and working practices – that offer some kind of provision around helping employees with their work-life balance. These WLB initiatives include, but may not be limited to, leave programs, flexible arrangements, childcare services, work schedules options, and other examples of employer-provided provisions mentioned above.

## **Overview of Literature**

Work-life balance and WLB initiatives are popular topics of research today, though they are not new. This field of study can be traced back, at least in part, to the 1960s through to the early 1990s, when work-family balance and workplace family-friendliness garnered significant research attention in the social sciences discipline.

Important changes occurring in the spheres of the market and the home spurred interest in exploring work-family balance and family-friendly initiatives. In particular, the mass and sustained movement of women into paid employment transformed the dynamics of the public and private spheres (Hochschild, 1997), and prompted concern over the challenges of work-family balance. Women's movement into paid work was characterized by the difficulties middle-class women faced in coupling their very demanding (unpaid) labour in the home with (paid) jobs in the workforce. Scholars cited the work-family conflicts women were experiencing as a key problem for their success in entering, staying and advancing in paid work (Friedan, 1981; Kanter, 1977; Waring, 1999). Men, historically less involved in the home and family, did not experience the challenges of work-family balance in the same way (Armstrong, 1978; Hochschild, 1989). Seminal texts on work, family and gender from this period include, for example, Kanter's (1977) *Men and Women of the Corporation*, and Hochschild's (1989) *The Second Shift*.

Literature suggests that women demanded support from their employers to help them more easily undertake their family responsibilities with paid work (Yancey Martin, Seymour, Courage, & Tate, 1988). In response to this call, family-friendly policies, such

as on-site workplace daycares, were first introduced. These were followed later by flexible schedule arrangements and other provisions (Glass & Estes, 1997). Studies of workplace family-friendliness gained momentum in the late 1980s and early 1990s, despite perhaps seeming less interesting compared to the more “exciting” research emerging at this time on sexuality, identity and cultural productivity (Bradley, 1998, p. 870).

While work-family balance and family-friendly workplace initiatives maintained a strong focus of academic study in the mid to late 1990s, there has since been an important shift in recent research. A new, though related, focus on work-life balance and WLB initiatives has emerged in recent years (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). Findings from recent literature indicate that workplace provisions, such as scheduling flexibility, are considered important not only by women with family demands, but by workers in a variety of personal and family circumstances who desire positive and healthy balance between the different roles and responsibilities they manage (Bourhis & Mekkaoui, 2010). As a reflection of the widening relevance of this topic, research on WLB initiatives is presently emerging from a variety of academic disciplines and features a range of new motivations, perspectives and methodologies. In addition to feminist researchers who continue to explore these workplace provisions in relation to women’s equality (Connell, 2005; Hochschild, 1989; Krull & Sempruch, 2011; Webber & Williams, 2008), researchers in economics, human resource management, industrial relations and, to a lesser extent, psychology (Allen, 2001), women’s studies (Barnett & Gareis, 2000; Estes, 2005; Glass & Estes, 1997), and social work (Secret, 2005) are approaching the study of WLB

initiatives from many angles. As well, a growing segment of literature today is co-authored by researchers in a range of academic disciplines and, in some cases, even private industry (McKee, Mauthner, & Maclean, 2000; Rapoport et al., 2002; Van der Lippe, Jager, & Kops, 2006).

The recent research on WLB initiatives is diverse, and is widely relevant to workers and employers alike. Researchers have explored, for example, the availability of WLB initiatives in geographical regions and in particular workplaces (Budd & Mumford, 2004; Ferrer & Gagne, 2006) and the impact of such workplace provisions on staff health and well-being (Grzywacz, Carlson, & Shulkin, 2008). As well, the increase in research on WLB initiatives from scholars in the human resource management discipline has shifted the focus away from workers and onto organizations and employers, as these researchers are investigating what kinds of business advantages these provisions may yield.

With the expansion of interest in this topic and the growth in literature, there has been some cause for debate as to whether WLB initiatives are beneficial to workers. For example, there have been a number of recent studies which have found that WLB initiatives are not always accessible to all workers (Ferrer & Gagne, 2006; Zeytinoglu, Cooke, & Mann, 2009). As well, in exploring how WLB initiatives are taken up informally by employees in a workplace, some researchers have found that organizational cultures may not be supportive of the WLB initiatives, and that employees who engage in them may experience negative career outcomes such as stalled advancement and lower earnings (Coltrane, 2004; Connell, 2005). These findings from recent literature raise

serious questions about how effective WLB initiatives can be in really promoting work-life balance for workers. It may be argued that if WLB initiatives are not easily accessible to workers, and if take-up in the workplace is not informally supported, the provisions may not actually function to help workers better manage their many activities in paid work and personal life. Moreover, the increasing presence of business concerns in this field signals that WLB initiatives may not be offered in workplaces for the primary purpose of helping workers. Human resource management researchers are interested in tapping into the potential organizational advantages of these workplace provisions, exploring the impact on, for instance, shareholder reactions (Arthur & Cook, 2004), organizational attractiveness (Bourhis & Mekkaoui, 2010), and company reputation (McKee, Mauthner, & Maclean, 2000).

Despite the issues raised in recent literature, there has been limited critical investigation of what WLB initiatives actually offer to workers and whether they are helpful in managing paid work with personal life. As WLB initiatives become increasingly popular, it is important to consider the possibility that these workplace provisions do not serve the interests and needs of workers. The current research takes an in-depth focus on WLB initiatives, to advance understanding of what these provisions really do.

## **The Current Research**

The current research seeks to explore whether WLB initiatives help workers manage their many different activities and interests. Based on literature review, my study

will consider the availability and accessibility of WLB initiatives to workers, the possible influence of organizational culture on how workers can use the provisions, and the potential for employer interests to interfere with support for workers.

For this research, I conducted a case study of WLB initiatives in a single professional office workplace, Westview (a pseudonym), located in Atlantic Canada. This research approach allowed for a focused inquiry on WLB initiatives in a particular work environment. The key guiding questions for my study included: How do WLB initiatives help workers with their work-life balance? What kinds of work-life balance needs are acknowledged through the provisions? Are there formal conditions around using WLB initiatives, and what is the role of the workplace culture? Are any employer interests present in WLB initiatives, or in how workers are encouraged to use them? In my case study, I utilized mixed methods of data collection, including textual analysis, surveys, and semi-structured interviews. These methods allowed for an examination of the WLB initiatives offered in the workplace, and an opportunity to explore how workers engage in and experience them in practice.

The WLB initiatives at Westview were each explored through thematic textual analysis of the workplace policy manual. This kind of analysis of the WLB initiatives provided an opportunity to identify the forms these provisions take at Westview, the kinds of activities and needs that are acknowledged through these provisions, and any formal conditions for accessing them. In addition to reviewing these WLB initiatives, I explored how workers experience the provisions in practice for their work-life balance. Using survey and interview methods, I collected data on Westview employees' overall

experiences of work-life balance, and how they engage in WLB initiatives in managing their many activities. The web-based surveys with the employees gathered important details on their demographic information, their employment demands, their personal interests and responsibilities, and their use of the WLB initiatives available at Westview. As well, semi-structured interviews with the employees provided an opportunity to gather rich, qualitative data on how they actually experience the WLB initiatives in their workplace. This more focused inquiry of WLB initiatives helps to achieve greater understanding of how work-life balance needs are viewed, understood, and supported (or not) in the workplace.

Full ethical clearance for the empirical component of this research was granted by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Resource (ICEHR) at Memorial University of Newfoundland on August 15, 2011, and the case study was carried out between November 2011 and January 2012.

## **Thesis outline**

This study of WLB initiatives consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1: Introduction introduces this exploratory and descriptive study of WLB initiatives. In this chapter, pertinent definitions are discussed, and an overview of the literature on work-life balance and WLB initiatives is provided. The guiding research questions for my study are outlined, and the research methodology is briefly discussed. Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review provides an important contextual background for this study of WLB initiatives. This chapter begins with a historical review of literature,

beginning with feminist literature on work-family balance. Then, different theoretical approaches to understanding work-life balance are explored. Following this, the literature on WLB initiatives is reviewed, and common themes, challenges and gaps are highlighted. Based on the review of existing theoretical tools and literature, this chapter concludes with a description of the approach for the current research.

Chapter 3: Methods describes the methodological approach for my study. First, the case study approach is described, and details are provided on the process of securing a workplace site for my case study. Following this, there is a detailed description of how data was collected and analyzed. This chapter concludes with a discussion of some notable limitations with my research approach and methodology.

The next chapter, Chapter 4: The Workplace and WLB Initiatives, examines the formal structure of Westview as a workplace in relation to work-life balance. Westview is introduced, and details are provided on the work schedules and space of this workplace. Next, all of the WLB initiatives at Westview are described. In these descriptions, particular attention is given to identifying the different forms the provisions take, the kinds of activities that are formally acknowledged by the initiatives, and the formal procedures or conditions around how workers can access them. This chapter concludes with a critical discussion of Westview's formal time, space and policy structure, and what it suggests about how workers are expected to manage their work-life balance in this workplace.

Following this is Chapter 5: Work-Life Balance Experiences of Westview Employees. This chapter explores and describes how Westview employees manage their

work-life balance. First, the participants' self-ratings of work-life balance are discussed. Building on this, there is a more qualitative overview of the participants' work-life balance, drawing out important details on their employment demands at Westview and the responsibilities and interests they have in their personal lives. As a more detailed discussion, the work-life balance experiences of a few different groups are explored, including managers/supervisors and staff-level employees, older and younger employees, and women and men. Based on the participants' accounts of their work-life balance, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the trends in how the workers go about organizing their paid work with their other activities.

Next, Chapter 6: Westview Employees' Use of WLB Initiatives is an in-depth exploration of how Westview employees engage in and experience the workplace WLB initiatives. This chapter provides discussion on how the participants use each of the WLB initiatives, and is organized according to the most popular, moderately popular and least popular provisions. In the descriptions, consideration is given to the reasons why workers use each provision, and how workers experience actually using the provisions in their work-life balance. Additionally, there is a brief commentary on the use of informal flexibility at Westview, an extra and informal strategy around work-life balance. This chapter concludes with a discussion of what the participants' experiences with the WLB initiatives suggest about how the provisions help with work-life balance. Specifically, the relevance of the WLB initiatives, their accessibility to the workers in practice, and the workplace norms around how to use them are discussed.

Chapter 7: Concluding Thoughts is the final chapter of this thesis. Reflecting on the findings from my study, concluding thoughts are offered on WLB initiatives and the question of whether they really help workers with their work-life balance. Possible implications of my research are broadly discussed. Lastly, a number of recommendations are outlined for future research in this area.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the research project, and provided an overview of this thesis. Definitions of key terms, including work-life balance and WLB initiatives, were discussed and conceptual challenges were noted. Next, a brief review of the literature was provided to illustrate the dynamic transformation of this field of study over time, and to draw attention to areas that require further inquiry. The guiding questions for my study were then outlined, and the research methodology was briefly discussed.

The next chapter provides a more in-depth overview of the literature and theoretical developments in the study of work-life balance and WLB initiatives. Historical literature on work-family balance and workplace family-friendliness are further described, and the shift in focus to work-life balance is discussed at length. Different theoretical models for understanding work-life balance are explored, including ideas from preference theory and theories of gendered organizations. Next, literature on WLB initiatives is reviewed: Key themes in research on WLB initiatives are identified, including the availability of provisions, the role of workplace norms in relation to formalized initiatives, and the possible business advantages of workplace provisions

around work-life balance. Based on the findings and gaps in literature, key questions about WLB initiatives are noted, and a framework for my study is developed.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

There is a great deal of literature on the topics of WLB initiatives and work-life balance, and my study is informed by a review of existing research and theoretical tools. This chapter begins by exploring the origins of research on work-life balance, and describing changes to the literature over time. Next, the different theoretical approaches to work-life balance are explored. Specifically, Acker's theory of gendered organizations and Glucksman's total social organization of labour (TSOL) framework are discussed as useful theoretical tools for my study. Then, focusing on the question of what WLB initiatives offer for work-life balance, recent literature on WLB initiatives is reviewed. Several overarching themes in this field are explored, including the availability of WLB initiatives to workers, the role of workplace culture in how workers use these provisions, and the promise of business advantages bound up in WLB initiatives. This literature and notable gaps in this field of research are discussed in relation to my study.

### **Overview of Literature**

Literature on work-life balance and WLB initiatives is substantial. In reviewing social sciences and humanities literature, it is evident that work-life balance and WLB initiatives have been a topic of research for several decades, though perhaps in different forms. The origins of more recent research on work-life balance and WLB initiatives can be located, at least in part, in feminist literature from the 1970s and 1980s on work-family conflicts and workplace family-friendliness. Today, the literature is increasingly dominated by researchers in human resource management and related business disciplines

who are seeking to identify the possible organizational advantages of offering workplace provisions around employee work-life balance.

### **Research origins in work-family balance**

Work-family balance has been a subject of study by feminist researchers for several decades. Before the rise of the Industrial Revolution, most labour was carried out within the home (Jackson, 1992; Stier & Yaish, 2008). Families grew vegetables, raised cattle, made clothes and furniture, brewed beer, made milk and butter, and so on. Where possible, families produced what they needed within their own homes, sharing tasks and working together as a unit. Women and men both participated in this home-based labour, what was deemed to be productive work (Jackson, 1992). Overarching divisions of labour in the family positioned men as dominant and leading. In contrast, women assumed more supportive and subservient roles in household production, raising children and preparing food and clothes (Schwartz Cowan, 1987).

The capitalist economic system eventually replaced this feudal and pre-industrial regime, and the rise of the Industrial Revolution in the late nineteenth century moved production out of the home and into the public sphere. This shift spurred changes in what it meant for people to balance productive work with family. In this new system, workers began to sell their labour to employers for wages, and from those wages were able to buy the goods and services they required. Paid work was now closely tied to and controlled by an externally developed and imposed time schedule (Strangleman & Warren, 2008, p. 208-209). Experiences of work-family balance were likely much different in the pre-

industrial and industrial economic regimes. In the pre-industrial era, when labour carried out in the home yielded what families needed to survive, how people managed their labour with their other activities was different than how they did it during the industrial era, when a clearer separation between public and private emerged.

Importantly, at this time, greater differences emerged in the kinds of work women and men did, and where they carried out their labour (Friedan, 1981; Kanter, 1977). Those workers who were engaged in the public sphere of the paid workforce were predominantly male (Strangleman & Warren, 2008); most middle-class women did not move into waged work and instead retained their positions in the home, continuing with the labours of cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, organizing schedules, and raising children. Basically, women remained responsible for what has been termed reproductive work (in contrast to productive work), including “all physical, mental, emotional and spiritual tasks that are performed for one’s own or someone else’s household and that maintain the daily life of those for whom one has responsibility” (Eichler, 2011, p. 85).

The character of the home and of the paid workforce began to change dramatically again during and following the Second World War. At this time, greater numbers of middle-class women began entering and staying in the paid workforce (Glucksmann, 1995, p. 71; Jackson, 1992). Utilizing skills they developed and honed while running the household – organizing, educating, caring – women began carving out niches in occupations that aligned with their traditionally feminine skill sets, such as clerical work, teaching and nursing (Almey, 2007; Eichler, 2011). This new paradigm prompted more changes in the dynamics of work-family balance.

Motivated by this social change and the challenges it presented to women's socio-economic wellbeing (Armstrong, 1978; Hartmann, 1976), feminist researchers began studying and publishing in the area of work-family balance. Scholarly work in the 1970s and 1980s, such as that undertaken by Kanter (1977), Gerson (1985) and Hochschild (1989) highlighted the unique challenges that women faced in juggling the new demands of paid work with their continued responsibility for family and home life. These academic studies argued that women, trying to manage a high level of involvement in both paid employment and the home, faced a different set of challenges than men, who remained highly engaged in paid work but still only marginally so in family life. Feminists contended that the demands of paid work and family life were largely irreconcilable, and that women were shouldering the burden of work-family conflicts, leaving them stressed, exhausted, and socio-economically disadvantaged. An illustrative text from this period, mentioned in the previous chapter, is Hochschild's (1989) *The Second Shift*, a large-scale and longitudinal qualitative research project on gendered divisions of domestic work in American dual-earner couples. Hochschild (1989) explored how women and men were managing their domestic roles, and found that, for many women, disproportionate responsibilities at home limited how they could commit to and advance in their jobs (Hochschild, 1989). In contrast, Hochschild (1989) found that men, unburdened by family roles and responsibilities, often did not have to make the same kinds of sacrifices in their careers. The gendered experience of work-family balance (or, in some cases, conflict) is well-articulated by *The Second Shift*; it serves as a prominent historical text in this field of study still today.

The developed world underwent another significant shift in the late twentieth century that again changed the dynamics of work-family balance. From an industrial to a post-industrial economy, from a Fordist economic regime to a post-Fordist economic regime, this was a movement away from a manufacturing-dominated economy to a more service-dominated economy (Bouffartigue, 2010; McDowell, 2005; Strangleman & Warren, 2008). This economic restructuring changed the types of jobs that were available and how paid work time and space was organized. Key terms to describe employment at this time are globalization, casualization, and feminization (Galetto, Lasala, Magaraggia, Martucci, Onori, & Pozzi, 2007; McDowell, 2005). For the purposes of this discussion, the feminization of paid work is most important: This refers to the substantial increase of women in paid work, as well as the growth of traditionally feminine sectors such as the service sector, and the expansion of low-paying, flexible and precarious employment opportunities (Turcotte, 2010). The feminization of the labour market presented new opportunities for women in the public sphere of paid work, as they became an increasingly sought after labour supply in the new economic structure.

With many employment prospects, middle-class women steadily increased their presence and longevity in paid work (Marshall, 2011). Today, similar numbers of women and men participate in paid work in Canada. For example, in 2009, women comprised almost half of the total Canadian labour force at 47.9% (Ferrao, 2010). Employment rates for women in Canada have grown over the last several decades, from 41.9% in 1976 to 58.3% in 2009 (Almey, 2007; Ferrao, 2010). In the same period, employment rates for men have gradually declined, and moved closer to that of the women's, from 72.7% to

65.2%. In Atlantic Canada, trends in women's employment reflect those at the national level (Ferrao, 2010). Women have not only entered paid work in high numbers, they have been staying employed longer: Employment rates for women with children in Canada have grown over the last several decades. Women without children are still more likely to be employed than women with children, but having children today is not considered to be as detrimental to women's employment as it has historically been. In 1976, just 39.1% of women with children living at home under the age of sixteen were employed, compared to 72.9% in 2009 (Ferrao, 2010), a substantial leap. It is notable that women began having children later in life, and fewer children overall (OCED, 2008), perhaps as both cause and consequence of their increased involvement in the paid workforce.

Not surprisingly, given the extensive feminist scholarship on work-family balance previously discussed, findings from literature review indicate that WLB initiatives were first offered in workplaces primarily for the purpose of helping women with family responsibilities. These were referred to as “family-friendly” provisions. Based on the well-documented work-family balance challenges, feminist scholars of the 1980s identified the need for workplace change toward greater family-friendliness so as to make paid employment more manageable with workers’ family responsibilities (Friedan, 1981; Yancey Martin et al., 1988). In their review of historical literature, scholars Yancey Martin et al. (1988) suggest that research at this time specifically emphasized the need for more on-site workplace daycares, which would relieve women of their caregiving duties during working hours. It was argued that daycares, set up in workplaces, would help support the working mothers who felt “torn between dependence and independence,

attachment and separation” (Woodhouse, 1988, p. 380). The calls for workplace family-friendliness emerged, at least in part, from these concerns that women were struggling to meet the demands of paid work due to their heavy responsibilities at home with childcare and housework.

### **Recent research on work-life balance**

Feminist research on work-family balance continues to emerge today. Though women have carved out a greater presence in the public sphere of paid work, studies in the last several years report that their employment still differs from men’s in important ways. For instance, women remain concentrated in traditionally feminine occupations of teaching, nursing and clerical work, which typically yield less competitive wages and compensation packages, fewer opportunities for advancement and less stable employment conditions (Armstrong, 1978; Ferrao, 2010; Hartmann, 1976; Stier & Yaish, 2008). As well, women tend to have more precarious employment situations, a trend exemplified by their dominance in part-time work. Women make up 73% of part-time workers in Canada (Ferrao, 2010). Lastly, recent research indicates that women in Canada and globally continue to hit a “glass ceiling” in terms of workplace advancement, resulting in their significant underrepresentation in management and senior management positions across the country (Purcell, MacArthur, & Samblanet, 2010; Ferrao, 2010).

Feminist and other scholars today maintain, as Hochschild, Kanter and Waring had argued in decades past, that work-family balance presents more serious challenges for women, and ultimately yields socio-economic disadvantages for them (Gornick &

Meyers, 2008; Krull & Sempruch, 2011; Percheski, 2008). In recent years, researchers have explored, for instance, how the balance between unpaid family caregiving work and paid employment differs depending on the age of one's children. In an Australian study out of University of New South Wales, Craig and Sawrikar (2009) question whether the gendered burden of childcare diminishes as children mature, and whether this has an impact on how workers can manage their employment with family demands. The authors find that the younger the children, the higher the parent's total workload and the higher the proportion of the workload that is unpaid (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009, p. 693). Importantly, these effects were most pronounced for women. The findings indicate that women's time allocation is very sensitive to variations in family circumstance, including their children's age and school stage, and that work-family balance conflicts are most significant when children are younger and caregiving demands are more labour-intensive. In contrast to mothers, fathers' total workload stays more or less the same over the course of their children's young lives (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009, p. 693). In an American study by Kahn, Garcia-Manglano and Bianchi (2014), the authors explore the effect of motherhood on women's career advancement, similarly suggesting that "as their children grow older and more independent, mothers may be able to refocus on their work lives" (p. 57). This study, based on data analysis of a sample of women in their 20s to 50s from the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women ( $n = 4,730$ ), suggests that the impact of childcare responsibilities for mothers is most costly to their careers when the women themselves are younger, and when their children are younger (Kahn, Garcia-Manglano, & Bianchi, 2014).

While work-family balance remains a key research area for feminist scholars, in recent years there has been a movement to studying more generalized work-life balance. Smithson and Stokoe (2005) note that this shift was captured by a language change in academic, government and industry from family-friendliness to “choice, flexibility, and work-life balance” (p. 148). It may be assumed that this more generalized language is used to capture more of workers’ personal life activities beyond family, such as education, intimacy, and volunteering. It may also be assumed that a movement away from ‘family’ and toward ‘life’ is more gender-neutral. In line with this assumption, recent studies report that as dual-earner couples have become increasingly common, and that men have become more involved in domestic labour and face their own work-family balance challenges (Marshall, 2010). However, studies of work-life balance today still often focus on work-family dynamics, and, in many cases, maintain a gendered perspective. For example, in an American study, Barnett and Gareis (2010) explore whether there is a relationship between workers’ life satisfaction and working reduced hours. The researchers use the language of work-life balance, but focus on a sample of female physicians with children and explored their experiences of work-family conflict.

Still, the shift to ‘work-life balance’ has opened this field of study in new ways, and there is a great deal of new research emerging which does not focus on how workers manage their jobs with family life, and which does not explore the role of gender. For example, researchers have begun studying why work-life balance matters for organizations. It has been found that when employees feel stressed, depressed, burned out, or if they are facing other physical or mental manifestation of illness or general

unwellness, it is often reflected in their work (Halpern, 2005). Work-life balance is therefore relevant for businesses. In an Australian study of the role of supervisor relationships on employees' perceptions of work-family conflict in policing and nursing, researchers Brunetto et al. (2010) illustrate how their interest in work-family conflict (WFC) is intimately tied to its links to organizational performance. In the literature review, Brunetto et al. (2010) discuss:

Previous research suggests that [work-family conflict] is related to, and negatively impacts on employee organisational outcomes, stress, performance at home and work, and work and life satisfaction (Allen, Herst, Bruck, and Sutton 2000), hours worked per week (Bruck, Allen and Spector 2002; Frye and Breaugh 2004); control over hours worked per week (Luk and Shaffer 2005), work schedules (Scandura and Lankau 1997), the length of work weeks, work attitudes, satisfaction with co-workers and supervisors (Vega and Gilbert 1997), work-family policies and initiatives (Frye and Breaugh 2004; Kossek and Ozeki 1998), and dissatisfaction with shift work (Bohle and Tilley 1998). Moreover, [work-family conflict] is related to, and negatively impacts on organisational outcomes such as productivity and financial operating costs (Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrian 1996), job satisfaction, intention to leave and turnover (Frone, Russell and Cooper 1992; Good et al. 1996; Howard, Howard-Donofrio and Boles 2004; Kossek and Ozeki 1998; Netemeyer et al. 1996; Thomas and Ganster 1995;), supportive work-family culture (Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness 1999) and organisational and supervisor support (Frye and Breaugh 2004; Howard, Howard-Donofrio and Boles 2004; Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness 1999; Thomas and Ganster 1995).

The threat of poor work-life balance to organizational performance is a key motivating factor for human resource management research in this field. Ultimately, researchers from these business-related academic fields are primarily interested in understanding the implications of work-life balance for organizations, rather than for employees (Baldock & Hadllow, 2004; Brunetto et al., 2010; Halpern, 2005). Sociologists Strangleman and Warren (2008) suggest that these scholars are primarily interested in perfecting

organizations rather than “identifying deeper structural forces that shape work patterns” (p. 31).

The literature on work-life balance in the 2000s has been strongly influenced by the interests of scholars from human resource management, industrial relations and other business disciplines. This shift in research focus illustrates the different approaches to and motivations for studying work-life balance today. Related to this, there are various theoretical frameworks for understanding work-life balance, which lead to differing views and understandings of how workers can manage it.

### **Theorizing Work-Life Balance**

To approach the study of WLB initiatives, and to explore the ways in which these provisions may or may not help workers in finding a balance between their paid employment and personal lives, it is necessary to first develop a framework for understanding how people manage their work-life balance. How do people participate in different activities and manage a variety of roles in paid work and personal life? In conceptualizing how people can participate in various social institutions and roles, there have been many, sometimes vastly different, approaches. These approaches range from those which view work-life balance as something that people have control over and for which they should assume personal responsibility, to those which try to account for the influence of social structures on how people can balance different roles.

There are theories, such as preference theories, which contend that an individual's behaviour and social activity reflect only their own interests. One popular example of

preference theory is from social scientist Catherine Hakim (1996; 2006), who has argued that trends in women's labour market participation, such as their overrepresentation in part-time work, result from women's own preferences. Preference theories posit that people carry out social activity according to their preferences, without being affected or shaped by any ideological, material, cultural or other influences (Strangleman & Warren, 2008). Moreover, these theories assume that one's preferences and desires are not themselves shaped by these social influences. As such, preference theories disregard social context, arguing that individuals themselves are empowered to act freely and according to their own interests, with a very high level of control over their choices and behaviours. Accordingly, any challenges and successes experienced by the individual can be reduced to their own preferences. Feminist scholars in particular have taken issue with this theoretical approach, suggesting that by focusing on the values or preferences of individual workers, there is a risk of making moral judgments about people and their "choices," which are heavily mediated by economic, social, moral and other forces and do not necessarily represent individuals' personal desires (Gerson, 2004). Preference theories are especially problematic in studying any disempowered or disenfranchised groups whose choices have historically been highly constrained (Strangleman & Warren, 2008).

In applying preference theory to work-life balance, one may suggest that workers participate in different social spheres according to their own personal desires and interests. Many researchers in this field carry out studies of work-life balance from this standpoint, though not explicitly. Literature on work-life balance, especially from human resource management disciplines, is often written on the assumption that workers are free

and able to undertake their paid work and other activities according to their own preferences. Moreover, many studies utilize language which suggests that workers themselves are solely responsible for their own work-life balance (Medjuck et al., 1998).

In contrast to preference theories and other individualizing models are those that take into account the social structures and systems in which people participate. For example, researchers have theorized that gender shapes and organizes our social activity, influencing how people participate in the public and private spheres (Connell, 2005). In Hochschild's (1989) seminal text, *The Second Shift* (introduced above), she explores how and why women take on a greater role in unpaid domestic labour. One factor she identifies is a couple's "gender strategy," which is the "plan of action through which a person tries to solve problems at hand, given the cultural notions of gender at play" (p. 15). In understanding how people manage their participation in paid work and family life, most feminist theories recognize the force of gender in shaping people's behaviours and interests. Applying this approach to Hakim's example above, it may be alternatively suggested that trends in women's labour market participation are influenced in part by historically gendered patterns of participation in the spheres of family and employment. That is: Women undertake more part-time work because they are busy handling the majority of unpaid domestic work, a role they take on according to historical socially-prescribed gender roles (Connell, 2005). This kind of explanation recognizes the social context in which people carry out and balance together different roles and responsibilities.

In studying the dynamics of work-life balance, it is important to recognize and explore the influence of social structures. Two particularly useful theoretical frameworks

for understanding work-life balance are Acker's (1990, 1998) theories of gendered organizations, and Glucksmann's (1982; 1990) total social organization of labour (TSOL) framework. Theories of gendered organizations help articulate, in particular, how paid work has been structured according to gender. This is an especially pertinent theory, given the literature explored earlier on women's movement into paid work and the resulting work-family balance challenges. As a complement to this theory, Glucksmann's TSOL framework helps to conceptualize the structure of paid employment itself within the wider social context, and its relationship to the private sphere of the home/family. These frameworks help to explain how it is people move between and balance different social roles and activities, and the challenges they may face in doing so.

### **Theories of gendered organizations**

In conceptualizing the structure of paid work, and the impact it has on how people participate and experience employment, there has been a great deal of discussion regarding the role of gender as an organizing principle (Strangleman & Warren, 2008). To this point, sociologist Kathleen Gerson (2004) suggests that analysis of how people manage their paid employment and family life, for instance, may be advanced by looking at the wider organization of the workplace and the home – focusing on institutions instead of (or at least in addition to) individuals (p. 53). Contrary to some lay and academic understandings of workplaces as genderless, feminist scholars and sociologists have written extensively about how occupations and organizations are gendered (Britton, 2000), and why this matters for how women have been able to reconcile their family

responsibilities with their employment. As Glucksmann (2009) put it, it is not possible to conceive of jobs as “empty spaces”; there are social processes embedded in the structure of paid work itself, which actively influence how people participate in it and manage it with other roles. It is a social institution which, like all others, is “overlaid by gender, ethnic or other principles of social difference” (Glucksmann, 2009, p. 882).

Developing this idea further, Joan Acker and others have put forth theories of ‘gendered organizations.’ Specifically, Acker (1990) argued that paid work is gendered male, and that its masculine principles have historically alienated women (p. 146). According to Acker (1998), deconstructing the demands of paid work exposes its masculine structure. She asserts that some common demands of paid work, such as the working hours and space, are based on assumptions about workers in those jobs (Acker, 1990, p. 197). In a grand narrative regarding gender and work, Dana Britton (2000) argues that the dominant ontological and epistemological practices that underpin many social institutions in which both women and men participate have been largely constructed on the experiences and realities of men – and that paid work is no exception. Theories of gendered organizations contend that, due to the public sphere having been historically comprised predominantly of men, as discussed earlier, “male patterns of working” were developed (Hebson & Cox, 2011, p. 178). These masculine working principles of paid employment, such as unrestricted temporal availability for one’s job, became common “ideal worker norms” (Coltrane, 2004, p. 215) in the workforce, and have been institutionalized through the mechanisms of promotion, recruitment, and dismissal of employees (Peterson, 2007, p. 336). Acker (1990), Britton (2000) and others

have argued that the organization of most workplaces is still predicated upon workers who are individual agents unencumbered by domestic responsibilities. Historically, men have had a greater capacity to conform to the expectations involved in paid work than women, who as both cause and consequence have primary responsibility for managing the home (Craig & Powell, 2011, p. 286). Specifically, heterosexual male employees with stay-at-home wives had the greatest capacity to meet employers' demands (Kanter, 1977; Purcell, MacArthur, & Samblanet, 2010). Women have historically experienced masculine working principles as alienating, because the structure of paid work often does not recognize that workers may have demanding family responsibilities to tend to at home.

A structure of paid work that is premised upon and rewards long hours and other similar ideal worker norms reflects a wider social system in which greater value is assigned to paid employment than to the private sphere (Strangleman & Warren, 2008, p. 218). In general, male patterns of working, or masculine working principles, are those which do not recognize that workers have other roles and responsibilities in addition to their employment. Ultimately, theories of gendered organizations assert that paid work has historically been organized in such a way that is structurally at odds with home life (Acker, 1990). Understanding the overarching structure of paid work is useful in studying work-life balance. Taking this idea further, it is important to understand how this social institution interacts with and is related to other social spheres, such as the home/family. In exploring the relationships between the public and private spheres, and how people can

navigate between them, Glucksmann's "total social organization of labour" (TSOL) framework is an especially useful approach.

### **Total social organization of labour framework (TSOL)**

Paid work and home/family are often thought of as distinct and separate spheres which have no impact on each other. Such a perspective suggests that there is no overlap between the public sphere of paid work and the private sphere of personal life (Glucksmann, 2009). This is what organizational psychologist Guest (2002) calls the "segmentation model" of the public and private, an approach which considers these to be segmented spheres that exist as independent domains and that have no influence on each other. Feminists and other theorists have challenged this dualistic approach, charging that it fails to account for the many and complex relationships between the public and private spheres. Social scientist Glucksmann (2009) has asserted that efforts must be made to "dissolve the duality" between paid and unpaid work that has become the widely accepted conceptual framework and way of thinking about labour (Acker, 2006). Alternatively, she argues, paid work and personal life should be considered interdependent spheres which are not distinct but are actually closely related to one another. This approach is likened to models put forth by Guest (2002) and others, such as the "spillover model" and the "instrumental model," both of which account for relationships between the public and private spheres and the interdependencies between them. Acknowledging the ties between spheres helps in understanding the ways people move between different roles and activities and how they manage them together.

Glucksmann's TSOL framework (1995) helps to overcome the divisions and dichotomies often assigned to "separate" spheres of paid work/family, public/private (p. 19-20). This framework was first developed by Glucksmann in 1982, as part of a study of how working-class women in Britain carried out their labour in the market and in the household. In this study, Glucksmann was seeking theoretical tools to help explain how the economies of the domestic sphere and the public market were interconnected, and how women's labour moved between these spheres. Observing a shift of women away from domestic servant jobs into factory assembly line work, Glucksmann's framework drew links between the public and the private, articulating the importance of both to the capitalist economy. As Custers (2012) noted,

...the movement of a large number of women out of employment in the domestic economy into employment in the public domain and the effect of 'integrating working class women much more fully into the production and consumption circuit of capital.'... The structural transformation can only be understood if the two poles of the economy are visualized as one interconnected whole. (p. 95)

There was a need to develop an inclusive framework to understand labour within a more total social context. As Glucksmann (1982) explained,

Intersecting divisions of labour of husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, cottons and casuals; connections between local employment structures and local cultures; networks of linkages between production and consumption, or between paid employment and domestic labour; configurations of home and work for different individuals and occupational groups; patterns that change over the life course (p. 163).

The TSOL framework was developed as a way of examining labour in a more total or complete way, to explore how people and their labour move between spheres, and to articulate how activity in one sphere affects the other. As Glucksmann (2000) later put it, the TSOL framework helps to take in a wider view of the social such that it is possible to

articulate “the manner by which all the labour in a particular society is divided up between and allocated to different structures, institutions, activities and people” (Glucksmann, 2000, p. 19, cited in Acker, 2006).

By refocusing on the “relational organization of all labour” (p. 63), Glucksmann (1995) believed that sociologists would be better equipped to develop a definition of “work” that reflects and accounts for its many forms. In line with this, sociologists Strangleman and Warren (2008) have suggested that “accepting the fundamental links between all forms of work is the only way to reach a full understanding of who does what work, why and with what consequences” (p. 36). The TSOL framework, as a theoretical approach, offers an inclusive scope of labour by acknowledging its different forms, and how it is carried out in different spheres.

In discussing Glucksmann’s work, Acker (2006) has noted that by recognizing the relationships between different spheres, applying the TSOL framework facilitates the movement of all kinds of labour onto the “same analytic plane” (p. 38), where they can all be recognized for their role in the total social organization. Bringing caregiving, volunteering, housework and paid employment into view allows for an opportunity to explore the relationships between them, how they are connected, how labour moves between them. Such efforts to show interdependencies between these spheres have drawn attention specifically to the importance of unpaid labour to all economic activity, and have helped to explain how women in particular have trouble with work-family balance (Waring, 1999).

The TSOL framework is a useful theoretical approach in understanding how people manage their work-life balance. While Glucksmann (1982; 1995) applied this framework in exploring women's labour in the public and private spheres, the TSOL framework can be applied more generally to studying work-life balance, as it allows for the conceptualization of a total social context in which people carry out their many activities. Ideas on relationality and the interdependencies of social spheres that are articulated by the TSOL framework can help to explain how people can undertake and balance together their paid work, caregiving and volunteering, leisure time, education, exercise, hobbies, and other activities. Glucksmann focused exclusively on labour; however, for this research, it is useful to conceptualize how people carry out and balance between their labour as well as other activities which may not be considered as labour (such as leisure time). To capture experiences of work-life balance more fully, the term 'activities' is utilized in this thesis.

These theoretical tools are very useful for my study of what WLB initiatives do for work-life balance. In exploring WLB initiatives and how these are experienced by workers in managing their paid work and personal life activities, my study recognizes that work-life balance is not solely the result of individual preferences and desires. Alternatively, as feminist scholars have suggested, it is imperative to consider the influence of the wider social structures on how people carry out their many activities in the public and private spheres. Feminist theory around work-family balance is pertinent for explaining how these social structures are organized and what kind of impact this has on how people can manage together their paid employment and personal lives.

Specifically, feminist theoretical frameworks, such as Acker's (1990) theories of gendered organizations, and Glucksmann's (1982) TSOL framework, are viable frameworks for understanding work-life balance. Theories of gendered organizations help to illustrate the dynamics and demands of paid employment, why paid work has been structured the way it is, and how this structure has historically caused conflicts for the workers who manage employment with other labour-intensive roles and responsibilities.

In line with and as complementary to theories of gendered organizations, the TSOL framework considers the interrelationships and influences between social spheres, such as paid work and family life, and accounts for the many different kinds of activities people pursue. It helps to conceptualize the wider social context in which people spend their time, energy, and resources and how they can balance between different roles and responsibilities. Applying these two frameworks allows for a fuller analysis of how it is that people participate in and manage between their many activities in paid work and personal life, and the possible role of WLB initiatives.

## **Literature on WLB Initiatives**

Literature on work-life balance is the backdrop to this more recently emerging sub-section of research, focused on WLB initiatives. There has been a great deal of research attention given WLB initiatives, especially in recent years. It has not been the focus of many studies to examine WLB initiatives in an in-depth way to explain what it is these provisions do for workers, but there are general themes and findings from the literature which contribute to this line of questioning. Specifically, researchers have

explored the availability of WLB initiatives by groups of workers, types of workplaces, and jurisdictional regions; the relationship between workplace culture and formal WLB initiatives; and the effects of WLB initiatives on key organizational performance variables. Reviewing this literature reveals key points about WLB initiatives that will inform my study.

### **Availability of WLB initiatives**

There has been some study done on the availability of WLB initiatives for groups of workers and in different types of workplaces. This research is relevant to my study of WLB initiatives because it provides contextual data on the general availability of these provisions. Where older studies focused on women's access to and use of these kinds of provisions, more recent research explores factors beyond gender, including class and, to a lesser extent, age and dis/ability. For example, a Statistics Canada study by Comfort, Johnson and Wallace (2003) explored access to what they called "family-friendly" work practices – flextime, telework, childcare and eldercare services – by workers in Canada. This large-scale quantitative study found that access to most of these WLB initiatives was greatest among highly educated middle class professionals. As well, findings suggest that access to flextime is greater among Canadian workers aged 15-24, and that the more expensive initiatives such as on-site daycares were more readily available to workers aged 45-64. Other studies have also found that WLB initiatives are generally more accessible to workers in the middle and upper classes, those with higher levels of education, and

those in management and professional occupations (Comfort, Johnson, & Wallace, 2003; Ferrer & Gagne, 2006; Sharpe, Hermsen, & Billings, 2002).

An American large-scale quantitative study explored use of flextime practices among 19,006 employed and married workers across the country. Sharpe, Hermsen and Billings (2002) similarly found that flextime schedules were used much more frequently by workers who were more highly educated, those in managerial and professional occupations, and those with higher incomes. As well, the researchers found that the odds of having and using flextime schedules were greater for the participants who were non-Hispanic whites, and that access was lesser for non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics (Sharpe, Hermsen, & Billings, 2002, p. 62), which they suggest may reflect the classed nature of access. Lastly, dis/ability has been largely left out of literature on the availability of WLB initiatives. One exception is found in an article by researchers Hill, Hawkins and Miller (1996), who make a fleeting note that telework arrangements in the 1980s were occasionally used to accommodate persons with physical disabilities.

Literature on the availability of WLB initiatives demonstrates that these workplace provisions are not freely accessible to all workers. It is notable that most research on WLB initiatives focuses on the employed middle-class rather than the working class, which exposes the classed nature of concerns regarding work-life balance and access to related workplace provisions. Research in this field must therefore first consider which workers have access to which kinds of WLB initiatives. Unfortunately, updated and large-scale quantitative research on access to or availability of WLB initiatives is lacking in the Canadian, and especially Atlantic Canadian, contexts.

Strengthening this area of study would allow for greater exploration of the availability of WLB initiatives, by worker and by region. As well, it would help to set a baseline for future studies, making it possible to measure any changes in the availability of WLB initiatives over time.

### **Workplace culture around WLB initiatives**

Exploring the role workplace culture around WLB initiatives is another common theme in many recent studies. This area of research is relevant when exploring what WLB initiatives do for workers, as it questions the informal work environment and how supportive it is of the formal provisions. Many researchers have suggested that “workplace cultures” around WLB initiatives – “the shared assumptions, beliefs and values regarding the extent to which an organization supports and values the integration of employees’ work and family lives” (Allen, 2001, p. 416) – must be supportive to ensure that workers can access and benefit from WLB initiatives. Specifically, it has been argued that without supportive workplace cultures, WLB initiatives fail to help employees manage their jobs with activities in their personal lives. For example, in an Australian study carried out as a joint university-government project, Connell (2005) explored the agenda for work-life balance in the public sector, drawing on interviews ( $n = 107$ ) conducted with staff from ten worksites in public agencies, as well as participant observation in a number of workplaces. She found that WLB initiatives in the public sector were available within a workplace environment that encourages workers to spend long hours on the job and to subordinate their domestic and personal lives to their

employment (Connell, 2005, p. 377). In this case, the workplace culture may not be encouraging of employees to engage in WLB initiatives.

Workplace culture was the point of study by psychologist Allen (2001), too, who explored “global employee perceptions regarding the extent their work organization is family supportive” (p. 414) in her research. Allen (2001) conducted a study of 522 American individuals employed in various occupational and organizational settings, yielding a fairly homogeneous sample of predominantly female, Caucasian/White, highly educated, married people with children. The findings of this quantitative study point to the key role that supervisors play in how employees perceive and experience their work environment and organizational culture (p. 430). Specifically, Allen (2001) found that the workers in her study who perceived less family support in their work environment reported greater work-family conflict, less job satisfaction, less organizational commitment, and were less likely to utilize the WLB initiatives available to them.

Ultimately, these studies suggest that beyond simply offering WLB initiatives, it is imperative that workers actually feel encouraged in their workplace to use the provisions. Other research has since reiterated the importance of supportive workplace culture to match formal initiatives. Falter Mennino et al. (2005) examined the importance of workplace culture in both job-to-home and home-to-job spillover, and found that positive perceptions of support for work-life balance were very important in addition to formalized initiatives. Drawing from data from an American 1997 national survey of 2,877 workers, the researchers found that the availability of policies alone does not matter as much as other workplace factors such as feeling comfortable requesting time off

(Falter Mennino et al., 2005). In line with this, some scholars have argued that when workplace cultures are unsupportive of WLB initiatives, workers who engage in them may be informally penalized. To this point, in a more theoretical discussion of the importance of organizational culture around WLB initiatives, social scientist Lewis (1997) argued that if family-friendly policies are not supported by the culture of the workplace, the workers who use them may suffer a variety of negative career outcomes. Other feminist researchers have similarly cautioned against the possible penalties for engaging in WLB initiatives, such as stalled advancement and reduced work responsibilities (Coltrane, 2004; Connell, 2005; Hebson & Cox, 2011). In an analysis of how fights for equal opportunities come up against agendas for economic efficiency, social scientist Justyna Sempruch (2011) argues, “...even when options are formally available, in a high-opportunity work environment they entail subjective, unspoken, but very real penalties and dangers” (p. 166).

The importance of work cultures has been similarly emphasized by Crompton and Lyonette (2011). In their British study, they suggest that in accounting and medical professions, workplace cultures that endorse working long hours run counter to support for work-life balance. When working long hours is bound up in promotional opportunities, which the authors assert is quite common in the accounting profession, engaging in part-time options may be limiting to career development (Crompton & Lyonette, 2011). Importantly, and in agreement with literature reviewed previously, the authors note that women face greater demands in their personal and family lives that can

limit how devoted they can be to their jobs, ultimately putting them at a professional disadvantage (Crompton & Lyonette, 2011).

Similarly, in a secondary analysis of gendered advancement in elite professional occupations, Coltrane (2004) drew conclusions which agree with those of Connell (2005) and others. Based on his findings, Coltrane (2004) cautioned that the workers who request WLB initiatives may be perceived as less committed and productive, and may be treated poorly by co-workers and managers as a result. Both Connell (2005) and Coltrane (2004) recognize that risks and penalties around WLB initiatives are gendered: If WLB initiatives are seen to negate workers' commitment or productivity, and if women are utilizing or are even assumed to be utilizing WLB initiatives more frequently, they will face greater obstacles advancing in their careers. Other researchers have echoed these warnings, in studies focused on professional occupations such as science (Whittington, 2011) and academia (Baker, 2010; Gerten, 2011).

These studies of workplace culture and WLB initiatives illustrate the role of workplace environment in how workers experience formalized provisions. Studies which emphasize the importance of organizational culture signal that there are dynamics around formalized policies and programs which have real impact on how workers can engage in them. These studies suggest that it is perhaps not enough to explore the availability of WLB initiatives, and that research should also consider the work environment and its impact on how workers can engage in the provisions.

## **The business advantages of WLB initiatives**

Finally, there is a growing section of literature which explores the possibilities of WLB initiatives yielding positive business outcomes. Like with the wider literature on work-life balance, there have been many recent studies of WLB initiatives emerging from human resource management disciplines. These studies are pertinent to consider in my study of WLB initiatives, as they suggest that it may not be the primary purpose of these provisions to help with work-life balance.

Studies consistently report a number of common organizational advantages associated with WLB initiatives, including cutting down on employee stress, absenteeism, and turnover; as well as improving recruitment efforts and employee productivity, satisfaction, and commitment (Brunetto et al., 2010). For example, in a Canadian study, experts in human resources Bourhis and Mekkaoui (2010) investigated the effect of WLB initiatives on organizational attractiveness. The researchers tested the effect of four practices – on-site childcare, generous personal leaves, flexible scheduling, and telework – on applicant attraction. The method of data collection involved a “policy-capturing research design” in which the researchers constructed different scenarios to experimentally test how people used information to make employment-related decisions (p. 104); multiple scenarios were presented to participants and they filled out questionnaires regarding their perceptions of the companies. Findings from this study suggest that the initiatives, especially personal leaves and flexible scheduling, have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness. Interestingly, the findings in this study

revealed no difference between how attractive WLB initiatives are to the female and male participants, and participants with and without dependents (Bourhis & Mekkaoui, 2010).

In an American study, Arthur and Cook (2004) examined shareholder reactions to firm announcements of WLB initiatives. The researchers suggest that by introducing WLB initiatives, firms can manipulate their reputations and attract larger pools of applicants, retain their talented employees, and help employees balance work and family. Through examination of 231 announcements by Fortune 500 firms, the researchers found that announcements of work-family initiatives positively affected firm value, as shown by share price reactions (p. 610). As well, this study found that the greatest return occurred for pioneering firms – those among the first to introduce and announce work-family initiatives. Again, because this study is framed such that it connects WLB initiatives to shareholder value, organizational agendas and interests in WLB initiatives are evident.

Another similar example is a large-scale study conducted in the United States by Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, and Weitzman (2001). In this study, the researchers drew on data from surveys of a large group of IBM employees to study the use and perceived usefulness of schedule flexibility and work-from-home strategies. Controlling for paid work hours, unpaid domestic hours, gender, marital status, and occupational level, Hill et al. (2001) found that both workplace and schedule flexibility were negatively and significantly correlated with work-life conflict, suggesting that flexibility in work time and space may reduce employees' challenges in managing their different roles. Despite a focus on how these WLB initiatives help workers, this article ultimately emphasizes the positive organizational outcomes of WLB initiatives. Noting that there is a need to make

“solid business justification” for WLB initiatives (p. 59), the research describe how workers who engage in flexible time/space have higher “break points” than those who do not, meaning they can put in longer hours at work before they become exhausted or unproductive (p. 55). The researchers found that for those who work from home, the 50-hour mark was the point at which hours worked began to create or increase work-life conflict for them, compared to the 46-hour mark reported by their on-site counterparts (Hill et al., 2001, p. 335). A later study by Hill, Jacob Erickson, Holmes and Ferris (2010), also focused on IBM employees, yielded similar conclusions. Like with the examples above, the study by Hill et al. (2010) prioritizes the organizational perspective with regard to WLB initiatives.

Finally, in a global study of WLB initiatives in oil and gas firms, researchers McKee, Mauthner and Maclean (2000) conducted interviews with human resource and other personnel in eight American, Canadian, Italian, French, Norwegian, and British-owned oil and gas companies. Firms included in this study offered on-site childcare service, nursery vouchers, maternity leaves, career breaks, part-time work, job sharing, and other initiatives (p. 591). This study explored how and why these companies offered such initiatives. The researchers found evidence of an increasing consciousness of work-family issues in the majority of companies, and found that many of them may also offer this kind of support for reasons relating to their reputation, public good, corporate welfare, and desirable organizational outcomes. The findings of this study are many, but perhaps most interesting for the purposes of this review is that many of the oil and gas firms often formally offer family-friendly initiatives to improve recruitment efforts and

these amount to little more than public image-building rhetoric for the companies (p. 565). This study explicitly links employer motivations for offering WLB initiatives to desired business outcomes.

Ultimately, research on the business advantages of WLB initiatives illustrates the possible competing motivations for offering these provisions to workers. This relatively new and growing area of research is cause for questioning how employer or organizational interests are bound up in WLB initiatives, and any subsequent effect on workers' use of and experience with the provisions. Research on WLB initiatives should consider how such employer interests may influence workers' engagement in and experiences with WLB initiatives.

### **Gaps in literature on WLB initiatives**

Evidently, literature on WLB initiatives is far-reaching. There are some areas which have received little attention in this field of study, which, if explored, would enhance understanding of WLB initiatives overall. As was mentioned in the Introduction, WLB initiatives include a variety of different provisions, such as flexible scheduling, leave programs, personal and family counseling, and financial subsidies. While some researchers have attempted to construct categories to capture the different forms WLB initiatives may take, there is no standardized list. Perhaps related to this, there has been very little discussion of the different forms of provisions available to workers. Do the initiatives offer time off from work, financial assistance? Creating a typology of WLB initiatives would illustrate the ways in which workers are, and are not, supported in their

work-life balance. Also missing from the more recent literature on WLB initiatives is any investigation of how exactly the provisions recognize and address workers' work-life balance needs. Historical literature, reviewed above, focuses on the family-friendly provisions offered in workplaces. Given the transformation from family-friendly policies to WLB initiatives, it is worth questioning what kinds of work-life balance needs are recognized or addressed by the provisions today.

Overall, the literature on WLB initiatives explores a number of different topics. There are few studies that directly question what WLB initiatives actually do for work-life balance. However, themes emerging from this field still contribute to the current research. Based on literature review, key questions in my study of WLB initiatives include: What kinds of provisions are available in the workplace, and to which employees? What are the formal conditions around using the provisions, and how do workplace norms mediate employee engagement in WLB initiatives? Do workers understand WLB initiatives as a help for their work-life balance, or as a help for the organizational bottom line? My study will consider these dynamics, as they inform greater understanding of what WLB initiatives offer to workers. Additionally, my study will explore the formats of WLB initiatives in a more in-depth manner. Do the initiatives offer time off from work, financial assistance, childcare services? Related to this, my study will also gather details on what kinds of activities that WLB initiatives target, and how workers' actual work-life balance needs are or are not supported. My study of WLB initiatives will contribute to an identified gap in the wider literature, enhancing general

understanding of the ways in which employers are, and perhaps are not, interested in supporting work-life balance through these provisions.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed literature on work-life balance and WLB initiatives, and provided important background information for this research. Historical feminist literature on work-family balance and workplace family-friendliness was described as the origins of recent research on work-life balance and WLB initiatives. Next, recent literature on work-life balance was reviewed to illustrate the transformation of this research topic over time. Different theoretical approaches to studying work-life balance were discussed, and two main frameworks were described for my study. Next, recent literature on WLB initiatives was reviewed for common themes and gaps. Findings were summarized from studies on the availability of WLB initiatives, the role of workplace culture or norms in mediating access to and experiences with WLB initiatives, and the promise of organizational advantages attached to WLB initiatives. Based on the themes, findings and gaps emerging from literature review, questions for the current study of WLB initiatives were noted.

The next chapter describes my methodology for this study of WLB initiatives. Details are provided on my case study approach and methods of data collection, including textual analysis of WLB initiatives, and web-based surveys and semi-structured interviews with workers.

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

This chapter describes the research methods for my study of WLB initiatives. To begin, the case study approach is described. The research site, Westview, is discussed generally and a demographic profile of the participants is provided in this chapter. The process of data collection and analysis are then outlined, including textual analysis, surveys and interviews. To conclude, possible limitations of my research approach are discussed.

### **Case Study of Westview**

This research on WLB initiatives is grounded in a workplace case study. The case study approach is an effective way to explore WLB initiatives in an in-depth manner. In general terms, a case study approach involves “systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social event, setting, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions” (Berg, 2009, p. 317). It is a viable approach for gathering in-depth and contextual data (Ravenswood & Mackey, 2011, p. 490), and it is “an extremely useful technique for researching relationships, behaviours, attitudes, motivations and stressors in the workplace” (p. 331). Workplace case studies, in particular, are popular in recent research on WLB initiatives (see, for example, Hill et al., 2010; Ng & Fosh, 2004). These may focus on an entire organization or worksite, or may explore a specific unit or situation occurring in the organization (Berg, 2009, p. 331). Case studies offer many advantages, such as ease of access to participants (Berg, 2009).

However, like all methodological approaches, the case study approach is not without its challenges. Recruiting a workplace as the research site for my study was difficult. I began my search for a research site by reviewing websites of companies in Atlantic Canada, and seeking informal referrals and recommendations from personal contacts. The organizations approached first for recruitment were those that, according to their websites or other sources, offered some WLB initiatives to their employees. Despite my efforts to recruit, organizations were hesitant to discuss their policies with me, and/or were uninterested in participating in the kind of research I was proposing. My frustrations with finding a research site were compounded when I secured and later lost one early in the process. Two months into my search, a new organization, Westview, committed.

Westview is a single, office-based workplace in Atlantic Canada. It is the central office of a larger organization called Tech Inc. (also a pseudonym). Tech Inc. is a company in the natural resource sector that has a number of different offices and worksites which vary by geographic location, size and operations. There are over one-thousand employees of Tech Inc. In the Westview workplace, there are approximately three hundred employees. Westview employees work in professional occupations, such as human resources, finance and engineering. Most work full-time on fairly standardized and predictable schedules, and have some autonomy in the workplace. Perhaps most importantly, Westview offers a variety of WLB initiatives to its employees, providing an opportunity to study these provisions and how employees engage in and experience them. Taken together, these characteristics made Westview an interesting and viable research site for my study.

This case study of WLB initiatives at Westview was conducted over a three-month period, and, as such, should be considered a “snapshot” case study: A “detailed, objective study of one research entity at one point in time” (Berg, 2009, p. 328). Because Westview is a fairly large workplace, my study focused on a smaller group of employees therein. In advance of collecting original data for my study, I worked with my Westview-appointed facilitator, a staff member there, to further define the study sample. My facilitator informally spoke with the managers of different departments within Westview, to gauge their interest in and capacity to participate in the study. Based on these conversations, my facilitator recommended four departments for me to approach regarding participation in the survey, and one additional department to approach for interviewees. Choosing the departments/employees according to the interest and availability of supervisors and managers is a type of convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling is a form of non-probability sampling by which participants are recruited because they are a convenient group (Berg, 2009, p. 50). The primary advantage of a convenience sample in my study was the reach it afforded to a pool of potential participants. This reduced the time required to recruit for the study. Notably, there are limitations to this sampling method, including that convenience samples may not be representative of the wider population (Saumure & Given, 2008).

To collect data on WLB initiatives at Westview, I utilized mixed methods. Past studies on WLB initiatives have applied different approaches to data collection. Typically, studies on the availability of WLB initiatives are larger in scope, capturing a geographical region or a type of occupation (McCurdy, Newman, & Lovrich, 2002;

Zeytinoglu, Cooke, & Mann, 2009, 2010). In studies that explore WLB initiatives in a more qualitative way, methods of interviewing (Baldock & Hadlow, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Webber & Williams, 2008), participant observation (Connell, 2005; S. Lewis, 1997), and experimental design (Barnett & Gareis, 2000; Bourhis & Mekkaoui, 2010; Rapoport et al., 2002) have been used. Alternatively, the mixed methods approach is quite popular in research on WLB initiatives (see, for example, Doucet & Merla, 2007; Gerstel & Clawson, 2001; Heywood & Jirjhan, 2009). It has been suggested elsewhere that mixed methods “allows qualitative approaches to fill in the gaps of quantitative work, and vice versa,” overcoming limitations of each approach such that greater validity and reliability may be achieved (C. S. Lewis, 2010, p. 61). This complementary approach allows for “finding general patterns from aggregate quantitative data and using qualitative data to increase the depth and complexity of the inquiry” (Y. Zhang, 2010, p. 177).

The mixed methods of data collection used in this study include textual analysis of WLB initiatives, and surveying and interviewing Westview employees to gather data on how they engage in these workplace provisions. Notably, all Westview employees who were contacted regarding participating in this research were regularly reminded in all communication that their participation in my study was completely voluntary. In line with ethical research practices, Westview employees were not forced or coerced into participating in my study, regardless of Westview’s commitment to serve as the research site. Details on these specific data collection processes are provided next.

## **Textual analysis**

First, textual analysis was conducted on the WLB initiatives to explore common themes in the provisions for work-life balance at Westview. In short, textual analysis is a method of reading documents. C. S. Lewis (2010) describes it as the “close reading of texts to identify patterns, themes, cultural assumptions, and/or ideological meanings that are not manifest in the content alone” (p. 68). Carrera-Fernandez, Guardia-Olmos, and Pero-Cebollero (2013) draw on a similar definition originally from Hewson (2008), which suggests that textual analysis is a “technique of document analysis that uses qualitative procedures to assess the importance of particular ideas or meanings within a document” (Carrera-Fernandez et al., 2013, p. 1593). Textual analysis is focused exploring “underlying meanings that lie below the surface” (C. S. Lewis, 2010, p. 68). Documents are a rich source of data that provide cultural information, and as such are useful to sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists (Carrera-Fernandez et al., 2013). In a discussion of the role of documents in social research, Prior (2008) argues that documents should not merely be regarded as containers for words, images, information, instructions and so forth, but how they can influence episodes of social interaction, and schemes of social organization, and how they might enter into the analysis of such interactions and organization (p. 822).

Noting that analyzing documents has long been considered an unobtrusive research technique, Prior (2008) asserts that we should consider these documents to be active agents that guide and influence behaviours. In textual analyses of workplace provisions, it is worthwhile to study the assumptions made about workers that are built into the content.

Notably, at Westview, there is no set of WLB initiatives offered to employees, per se. For this research, I developed a typology of these kinds of provisions at Westview. Provisions were categorized as WLB initiatives based on a review of the kinds of workplace provisions often included in other research on WLB initiatives, as well as a reading of the Westview Policy Manual (2012) and informal consultations with Westview human resources personnel regarding what they consider to be WLB initiatives in their workplace. Two initiatives were later added to this list of WLB initiatives, based on interviews with Westview employees. This list of WLB initiatives includes official policies, programs, and working practices at Westview. It is notable that of the WLB initiatives at Westview, only the official policies are documented in the official policy manual. Details on the working practices and programs were collected by conducting more informal telephone and email consultations with human resources personnel at Westview. Details about the WLB initiatives were queried, including what they offer around work-life balance and to which workers, and the formal workplace procedures around accessing them. When appropriate, direct and indirect quotations from the Westview Policy Manual (2012) are provided in this thesis.

Textual analysis of WLB initiatives allows for theorizing about how these provisions can, as Prior (2008) suggested, influence behaviours and schemes of social organization in this workplace. In my study, I analyzed the WLB initiatives at Westview thematically. Details on all of the policies, working practices and programs were read closely to draw out and examine common themes in several key areas. First, the type of provision offered by the WLB initiative was identified for each (e.g., Is this provision

offering time off, services, money?). As well, each policy, working practice and program was reviewed to identify the work-life balance need(s) acknowledged or targeted (e.g., Does the initiative help workers with family responsibilities, educational pursuits, other activities?). Lastly, details on the conditions for employee access and use of the WLB initiatives were examined (e.g., Can all employees access the initiative?). Exploring the WLB initiatives in this great detail, it was possible to question what kinds of assumptions are embedded in the provisions about the workers and their work-life balance needs. Specifically, close reading of each WLB initiative revealed how the employer seems to understand and set expectations around work-life balance. This review of the provisions also aided in the development of survey and interview questions.

## **Surveys**

Next, a group of Westview employees were surveyed to gather general information on their experiences of work-life balance and their use of the WLB initiatives in their workplace. The survey consisted of a very short introduction to the research, definitions of key terms used in survey items, and a question to confirm participants' review of documents pertaining to their informed consent. The survey questions were designed to query details on respondents' work-life balance, by asking them to self-rate their work-life balance on a 5-point scale with options ranging from very good to very poor, and by gathering additional details of their employment at Westview and the activities they pursue in their personal lives. As well, survey questions asked respondents to select, from a list, the WLB initiatives they have engaged in at Westview, yielding data

on which initiatives are most and least commonly used. Finally, questions on respondents' demographic information, such as their age range and gender, were placed at the end of the survey (see Appendix D for a copy of the survey questions). Prior to distribution, I submitted the survey questions to my Westview-appointed facilitator for review. No issues were found and no requests were made for edits to existing content. However, my facilitator asked if it would be possible to include an additional question in the survey, specifically querying employees' sources of work-related stress (Question 7, Appendix D). The workplace was interested in the results of this question. I was pleased to include this question in the survey, as I appreciated Westview acting as the research site for this study and for their general support of the topic.

I developed the survey using an online survey software program, SurveyMonkey. Web-based surveys have tended, in the past, to yield lower response rates compared to other survey distribution methods. However, Tepper Jacobs (2011) suggests that this may be changing, as computer technology becomes increasingly popular. For my study, the web-based survey option was most useful: Using computer software facilitates easy survey building and design, and administering the survey online creates a distance between the researcher and participants, providing a greater degree of anonymity. To recruit Westview employees as survey participants, I drafted a recruitment email that introduced me and my research and provided a link to the online survey (see Appendix A for a copy of the recruitment email for survey participants). Attached to the email was a document providing further details for informed consent for participants in the research (see Appendix C). This recruitment email was forwarded by my facilitator to all

employees of four departments in Westview, a total of 74 individuals. The survey was open for a ten-day period, during which one reminder email was sent to the group from the facilitator on my behalf (Appendix B). This email thanked participants for completing the survey, provided an update on the response rate, and encouraged others to consider participating. At its closure, a total of 38 of the 74 individuals had completed surveys, for a final response rate of 51%. All of the survey respondents indicated that their consent to participate in the survey was fully informed and voluntary.

The survey respondents represent a fairly diverse group at Westview (see Table 1). Female and male employees are almost equally represented in the survey group, at approximately 53% male ( $n = 20$ ) and 47% female ( $n = 18$ ). Survey respondents are diverse by age, too: The median age range is 46-50 years old, though survey respondents range in age from their mid-20s to mid-60s. Most survey respondents are legally married (68%;  $n = 26$ ), and quite a few are not married but are in co-habiting relationships (16%;  $n = 6$ ). Fewer survey respondents are in relationships and living away from their partners ( $n = 3$ ), and fewer still are married and separated ( $n = 1$ ), or single ( $n = 2$ ). Also noteworthy is that the majority of survey respondents have dependents (61%;  $n = 23$ ). Of those with dependents, the number of dependents ranged from just one ( $n = 3$ ), to two ( $n = 12$ ), and less commonly three ( $n = 5$ ) and four ( $n = 3$ ). In terms of having dependent children specifically, just under half of the total survey group have a child or children eighteen years or younger (45%;  $n = 17$ ). In contrast, at 39%, a sizable group of the survey respondents do not have dependents. Finally, management and staff-level employees were included in the case study. Of the survey respondents, approximately

32% ( $n = 12$ ) are in management positions, and 68% ( $n = 26$ ) are not. Not surprisingly, given the gendering of organizations discussed in Chapter 2, most of those respondents in management positions are men who are over the age of 41.

**Table 1. Demographic Overview of Survey Respondents**

<b>Demographic Overview of Survey Respondents</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 53% male and 47% female</li><li>• Median age range of 46-50 years</li><li>• Majority are legally married</li><li>• 60% have dependents and 40% do not have dependents</li><li>• 68% not in management roles and 32% in management roles</li><li>• All work full-time schedules at Westview</li></ul>

Survey data were analyzed using quantitative analysis software SPSS to produce descriptive statistics and to perform basic cross-tabulations to uncover possible relationships between, for example, demographic characteristics and engagement in WLB initiatives. Tables and figures, generated in Microsoft Excel, are included in the thesis to illustrate survey findings where appropriate.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

Finally, in addition to textual analysis and the online survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with several Westview employees. Interview questions were designed to gather in-depth details on the employees' experiences of work-life balance

and their engagement with the WLB initiatives at Westview (Appendix I). As well, interviews with those in management/supervisory positions were designed to gather additional information regarding their experiences managing and supervising workers' use of WLB initiatives at Westview (Appendix J). Interviewing yielded abundant qualitative data on how workers navigate and manage their many demands and interests in and outside of paid employment. As well, details were gathered on how the employees engage in the WLB initiatives at Westview, through informal probing questions regarding the workplace environment and culture around these provisions.

After the survey was closed, an email request for recruiting interviewees was distributed by my facilitator on my behalf (Appendix E). This recruitment email was sent to the same group of 74 who were targeted for the survey. The first email request yielded only two responses from employees who indicated interest in participating in an interview – a fairly disappointing return, as I was aiming to conduct between 12-15 interviews. One possible reason for this initial low response is that I was recruiting interviewees in late November, which was a reportedly busy time for many Westview employees and a busy holiday season in general. As well, Westview employees may have felt hesitant to participate in an in-person component of my study for reasons relating to anonymity, or they may simply have been uninterested in the research.

A couple of days after sending the first interview recruitment email, a second email (Appendix F) was sent from the facilitator on my behalf to the employees of the same four departments, to remind them of my research and encourage them to consider participating in an interview. This second email included a note that Westview, as an

employer, would allow interviews for the study to be conducted during regular work hours and in private interview rooms in the building. This was a nice benefit for the interview participants, and I welcomed the support of Westview in helping me to recruit interviewees. Ideally, from a researcher perspective, all interviews would be conducted outside of the research site, so that participants would not be observed by other employees as being involved with the study. It is possible that by meeting outside of their place of employment, participants might feel more comfortable to speak honestly and openly about their opinions and experiences. Given these advantages, I reminded all potential interviewees that I could do the interview at a time and place of their choosing. In response to the second recruitment email, eleven more employees indicated interest in participating. Eventually, there were no more expressions of interest from employees of the four departments. To reach more interviewees, an additional department was approached for potential participants. From this extended effort to recruit interviewees, two more interview participants were secured. Notably, these two individuals did not complete surveys. In total, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Westview employees, from 5 different departments.

The individuals interested in participating in an interview emailed me directly, and all who expressed interest were interviewed. I followed up with each person to provide some information on the research, to discuss what the interview would entail, and to set up a time and place to meet for the interview. As well, each was sent an electronic copy of a brief information sheet on the research itself (Appendix G), the consent form (Appendix H), and the interview guide questions (Appendix I-K) for review prior to our

meetings. I decided to send along this information before the interviews in an effort to keep participants fully informed about the research. As well, since the issue of limited time availability seemed to be a major concern among the participants, I felt it would be useful to give them an opportunity to review the (fairly lengthy) consent form and guiding questions in advance of the interview.

Each interview was carried out at a time and place decided upon by the participant. In the end, I conducted most of the interviews at the Westview office. Participants who opted to be interviewed in the workplace were made aware that this arrangement may compromise their anonymity as participants. I explained to them that the more trips I made into the office, the more recognizable I became to staff, and because it was often obvious who I was meeting with if we were seen together, participation in the study by employees could be visible. Before beginning each interview, I described my research project, went through the consent form, and responded to any questions or concerns from the participants. Interviews ranged in time from 22 minutes to more than an hour and a half, with most lasting approximately 30-40 minutes. Most interviews were audio-recorded; however, five participants stated that they would feel more comfortable if they were not audio-recorded. In these cases, I took hand-written notes during the interview. The interviews without the audio recorder were slightly more stressful for me as the interviewer, as it was difficult to note and later remember everything the participant said, especially long and/or detailed stories or comments. As well, because I was taking notes during the whole interview, the conversational dynamic that was achieved in the audio-recorded interviews was, in large part, lost.

Immediately following each interview, I made notes of what I felt were the most interesting or relevant details, and transcribed the audio recordings and/or hand-written interview notes. The practice of making notes while the interviews were still ‘fresh’ was very helpful for me in analyzing interview data. As well, the process of listening to and transcribing the audio recordings and written interview notes was useful in honing my interview techniques and in identifying new questions to ask. For example, while I conducted the interviews, I reflected on possible ways to improve my set of questions. One change made to the format of the interviews was the placement of demographic questions (Appendix K). Originally, these questions were asked at the end of the interview. However, I found that without having these details upfront, I had trouble contextualizing and appropriately framing the questions to participants. To remedy this problem, I moved the demographic questions to the beginning of the interview. As well, following the first few interviews, I added some new questions, such as one to query participants’ household labour demands. Following an amendment to my application for ethical clearance for this research, I emailed previous interviewees with the new questions; all replied and I updated the interview transcripts accordingly.

To strengthen my relationship with all of the interviewees, I assured them that I would send them the transcribed audio recordings or notes from their interviews, such that they could clarify, remove or amend any of their responses. In so doing, I was able to offer them greater inclusion in the research process. As well, I found this approach helped me gain their trust, to keep contact with interviewees after our sessions, and to ensure greater accuracy in my understanding of what the participants had said. A small number

of interviewees identified something in the transcripts/notes that they wanted to address.

In these cases, I made the appropriate changes and sent back the document for their records.

Generally, the survey and interview samples mirror each other. The gender breakdown of the interview group is almost even, like with the survey group, with eight male and seven female interviewees. Also similar to the survey group, interview participants range in age from their mid-20s to mid-50s, and the median age range is 46-50 years old (see Table 2 for demographic overview of the group of interviewees).

**Table 2. Demographic Overview of Interviewees**

Demographic Overview of Interviewees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 8 males and 7 females</li><li>• Age range from mid-20s to mid-50s</li><li>• Majority are married</li><li>• 8 with children and 7 without children</li><li>• 6 managers/supervisors and 9 staff members</li><li>• All work full-time schedules at Westview</li></ul>

Most interviewees are married ( $n = 9$ ), and others are single ( $n = 2$ ), married and separated ( $n = 1$ ), in a relationship and co-habiting ( $n = 1$ ), and in a relationship and living apart ( $n = 1$ ). Notably, all interviewees who indicated the presence of a partner ( $n = 14$ ) identified as being in a heterosexual relationship – a detail not gathered through surveying. Many of the interview participants have children ( $n = 8$ ), and their children's ages vary from just one year old to late teens. Others in the interview group do not have

children ( $n = 7$ ). As well, one interviewee noted having responsibility for a semi-dependent aging parent. Interview participants differ by organizational rank, too, like survey respondents. Employees in management or supervisory roles ( $n = 6$ ), and those in staff-level positions ( $n = 9$ ) are represented in the interview group. Additionally, there are newer and more seasoned employees identified in the interview group (another detail not gathered through surveying): Some participants reported having worked with Westview for less than six months, and others for Westview or Tech Inc. for over 30 years. In this thesis, pseudonyms are used for interviewees to help disguise their identities. Further efforts have been made to protect their identities by, for example, using more generalized characteristics such as age range instead of exact age.

Analysis of interview data was an on-going process over the course of interviewing. I reviewed interview transcripts and notes closely, and coded thematically to analyze how employees understand and engage in WLB initiatives at Westview. Where appropriate, interview data was compared to survey data, such as regarding participants' engagement in WLB initiatives, to identify areas of agreement and disagreement. As previously noted, mixed methods of data collection sometimes yield complementary and conflicting findings, which add new dimensions to research and enhance understanding of an issue (C. S. Lewis, 2010; Y. Zhang, 2010). Ultimately, I found that analyzing interview data contributed to greater understanding of how the employees experience their paid employment with their personal lives, and the role of WLB initiatives have in this experience.

## **Limitations of the Current Research**

There are several important considerations regarding my research methodology. For instance, the case study approach with a focus on a single workplace may limit the generalizability of the findings of my research. To start, the participants in my study are mostly middle-class professionals who work in an office environment and who enjoy access to a variety of WLB initiatives. This is not a coincidence, as past research suggests that workers in professional occupations tend to have greater access to WLB initiatives (Heywood & Jirjhan, 2009; McKee, Mauthner, & Maclean, 2000; Wysong & Wright, 2003). Still, it is important to consider that this case study is focused on a privileged group of workers, and that the findings may not be generalizable to, for example, assembly-line workers.

Even within Westview, only certain employees were included in the study. The small sample size, and difficulty recruiting interviewees, may limit generalizability even within this workplace. The method of recruiting departments/employees through a convenience sample, based on managers' or supervisors' interest, prompts important questions about the participants in the research and whether they are representative of other workers at Westview. Why were certain managers interested in participating in my study and not others? What does it mean for the findings of my study that only departments that were interested in participating in the study were included in it? Are findings skewed more positively than they would be if Westview managers who were interested and others who were not interested in research on WLB initiatives were

included in the study? It is possible that the employees at Westview who participated in my study are not representative of the Westview.

The findings from my case study may be unique to the Westview employees who participated in it, and it is possible that another study grounded in a different workplace would yield different results. The case study approach has been criticized generally for limiting how future researchers can explore similar questions. Still, Berg (2009) suggests that “objectivity rests on the ability of an investigator to articulate what the procedures (of the study) are so that others can repeat the research if they so choose” (p. 329). I have attempted in this thesis to articulate the research approach, the methods of data collection and analysis as transparently as possible, such that readers will understand and future researchers would be able to replicate a similar study if they were so interested.

Finally, there are possible limitations resulting from research technique. For example, the list of WLB initiatives at Westview was developed by me, from review of literature and consultations with my Westview-appointed facilitator. These policies, programs and working practices are not offered at Westview under the label of WLB initiatives, or as explicitly in support of employee work-life balance. This is worth noting, as it may have important implications for how the employees view and engage in the provisions. To mitigate this risk, most of the initiatives included in my study are those which are commonly identified as WLB initiatives in the wider literature. As well, because the development of this list was done in consultation with human resources staff, it can be assumed that these provisions are understood by employees in the workplace as related to work-life balance.

As well, there were some notable challenges with terminology used in interaction with participants in my study. When I began data collection for my study, I used the language of ‘work-family balance’ and ‘workplace family-friendliness’ (based on more historical literature, discussed in the previous chapter). It is possible that the focus on family may have functioned as an inadvertent exclusionary tool in my study. A couple of interviewees mentioned originally self-selecting out of my study because they “do not have a family.” Eventually recognizing this shortcoming, I switched to the term work-life balance, which I found to have a more universal reach to the participants. However, the language of family-friendliness was already used in most of my recruitment materials, as well as in the survey questions and interview guides.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the research methods for my study. The purpose of conducting a case study was explained, and details were provided on the mixed methods of data collection used in this research. The research site and participants were briefly introduced, to set up the organizational context for the next chapter. Finally, possible limitations with the research methods in this study were identified, including the challenges inherent in the case study approach itself, as well as some issues with research technique.

The next chapter is an exploration of the formal work environment around work-life balance at Westview. The Westview office space and the employees’ work schedules and responsibilities, and the WLB initiatives at Westview are listed and described

individually. Based on the description of the formal demands Westview puts on its employees and the provisions made available to them around work-life balance, there is a critical discussion how this employer formally approaches employee work-life balance.

## **Chapter 4: The Workplace and WLB Initiatives**

This chapter explores the Westview workplace and its formal WLB initiatives. To begin, the workplace is described generally, and details are provided on the departments included in the case study. Next, based on textual analysis of the WLB initiatives, each provision is described. For each WLB initiative, details are provided on the type of provision, how it addresses particular work-life balance need(s), and any specific conditions that are involved in employee access and use. From here, there is a critical discussion of Westview's time and space structure, and the formal WLB initiatives, which questions how this employer formally approaches work-life balance in the workplace, and the assumptions and expectations that are made about workers.

### **The Workplace**

Westview, briefly introduced in the previous chapter, is an office-based workplace located in an urban area in Atlantic Canada. It is the central office of Tech Inc., which is a large company with several offices and worksites in urban and rural areas. For reasons of confidentiality, Tech Inc. is described here in more general terms, and specific details on the daily operations of the organization are not provided. Tech Inc. operates in the natural resources industry, and employs approximately 1,500 employees who work in a range of occupations in the fields of engineering, technology, administration, safety, data management, and others. As an organization, Tech Inc. is hierarchically organized with multiple levels. At the top, there is a small group of individuals that comprise the lead group, which oversees all operations of Tech Inc. This includes the chief executive

officer, and vice presidents for each of the lines of business and functional areas of the organization. Below the leadership team is executive support services, which includes a group of professional lawyers and internal auditors. Next, there are the managers, then supervisors, and finally staff-level employees in the more than twenty departments of Tech Inc. These employees have different job titles, responsibilities, levels of earnings and decision-making power. Tech Inc. is a male-dominated organization, with total workforce composed of 78% male employees and 22% female employees (Westview Annual Report, 2011). Management positions and the eight-person board of directors of Tech Inc. are also both male-dominated. This is in line with research which suggests that technical companies and occupations, as well as management and senior management positions in most all sectors, tend to be male-dominated in Canada (Ferrao, 2010; Ferrer & Gagne, 2006).

In the Westview office of Tech Inc., there are approximately three hundred employees, most of who are in professional office-based occupations. Because Westview is the central office of Tech Inc., the lead group and executive support services are located in this office, as well as several other departments of Tech Inc., such as engineering and human resources. The Westview office itself is a single building with several floors. There is an entrance foyer of the Westview building that serves to separate the inside from the outside. A team of female secretaries occupy the front desk in the entrance foyer of the building, which is a fairly large, open and very tidy space. To enter beyond the foyer, one must possess keys or must be escorted in by an employee. Westview employees pass through the locked doors seamlessly with their own keys;

guests must check in with the front desk and are met in the main lobby by an employee to let them into the office space. Access to the different departments and offices beyond the foyer is therefore secured for employees and accompanied guests only. Once inside, most of the departments of Westview have their own independent and separate spaces.

Notably, each departmental space is organized in a hierarchical manner. A typical department has cubicles with desks in the middle of the floor space, and individual personal offices located on the outside perimeter of the space. Generally, cubicles are occupied by lower-level staff, and the managers and supervisors work in the offices on the perimeter.

As noted previously, only select Westview departments are included in this case study. These include Human Resources, Safety, Information Systems, Environmental, and Accounting and Finance. These departments at Westview differ in many ways, such as by operations, size, and staff gender ratio. The employees of these five departments have different job titles and sets of job responsibilities. Some work independently and others work in team-based environments; some provide front-line service to clients while others work out in the field; some work with all employees of Tech. Inc. and others work with a very small group or independently within Westview. These departments are all in separate spaces in the office, except for Human Resources and Safety, which share the same space.

The Human Resources department is located on the main floor of Westview. There are 14 employees in this department, most of whom are female. These employees are responsible for human resources roles, such as contract development, hiring staff,

salary administration, job evaluation, policy and program development, and assisting Tech Inc. staff in any organizational or interpersonal issues they may have. Most employees of this department have interactive roles, working on team-based tasks, or one-on-one with other Westview and Tech Inc. employees. The Safety department, located in the same office space as Human Resources, has eight employees. Unlike Human Resources, this is a male-dominated department. This department handles roles related to occupational safety and health for all Tech Inc. operations, including, for example, developing and implementing policies around safety protocols, injuries, sick leave, and disability. Most employees in Safety have expertise in specialized areas, but still work very interactively with one another.

Also located on the main floor is the Accounting and Finance department. There are approximately 17 employees in this predominantly female department, involved in forecasting, budgeting, and overall financial operations of Tech Inc. Next, the Information Systems is a larger department of 42 employees, with equal numbers of men and women. This department is located in the bottom floor of the Westview building, and is accessible by elevator or stairs. This department is responsible for software, security and application development. Employees manage information and records in Westview. Tasks in this department tend to be activity-based, and employees are interactive with one another and with clients. Lastly, the Environmental department is located upstairs in the Westview building, above the main floor. This department has 10 employees, most of whom are female, who are responsible for all Tech Inc. tasks relating to environmental scans and issues, and work to ensure that the organization is in compliance with all

relevant environmental legislation. Employees in the Environmental department work both independently and in team-based environments, and some travel regularly to work in the field.

Workers in the Westview office carry out their jobs on fairly standardized daytime full-time schedules: Employees typically start work between 8:00am and 9:00am, and work 7.5 hours daily, Monday through Friday (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). As well, some Westview employees may work evenings, weekends and on-call schedules. Employees have two 15-minute breaks during a normal work day and a one-hour unpaid lunch period, which is usually taken between 12:00pm and 2:00pm. Employees are paid for (or given time off in lieu of pay) overtime hours if approved; supervisors and managers are not compensated for overtime hours as “their salary includes provision for the performance of duties outside of normal working hours” (Westview Policy Manual, 2012).

In addition to these requirements around work space and time, workplace provisions are part of the formal employment structure at Westview. Westview has a variety of WLB initiatives in the office. These WLB initiatives include policies, programs and working practices. As noted in Chapter 3, the WLB policies are included in the official Westview Policy Manual (2012). These have formalized procedures around how employees can access them, and explicitly outlined conditions for how employees can use them for work-life balance. In contrast, the WLB programs are not included in the official workplace policy manual. These programs are made available to Westview employees, who can engage in them according to their own needs and interests, without having to

coordinate with or seek approval by a manager or supervisor. Lastly, the WLB working practices differ from policies and programs. These are more unofficial provisions in the office around how employees can carry out their work. Like the programs, these practices are not written into the Westview Policy Manual (2012). However, to use them, employees must negotiate with their managers or supervisors, though on an informal, case-by-case basis.

### **WLB Initiatives at Westview**

Westview offers several provisions in the workplace that can be categorized as WLB initiatives (see Table 3 below).

**Table 3. List of WLB Initiatives at Westview**

<b>Policies</b>	
Family responsibility leave	<i>Paid leave for family reasons (1-3 days a year)</i>
Bereavement leave	<i>Paid leave to grieve loss of a close relative (4 consecutive days)</i>
Educational leave	<i>Paid leave for reasons relating to school (1-3 days a year)</i>
Maternity leave	<i>Unpaid leave for birth of a new child (15 weeks)</i>
Adoption leave	<i>Unpaid leave for adoption of a new child (15 weeks)</i>
Parental leave	<i>Unpaid leave for birth/adoption of a new child (35 weeks)</i>
Top up	<i>Financial top-up for employees on maternity/adoption leave</i>
Work-leave integration	<i>Communications connection for employees on maternity leave</i>
Employee assistance	<i>Externally-provided services for personal counseling and</i>

program	<i>advice</i>
<b>Programs</b>	
Wellness program	<i>Services to support health and wellbeing of employees; includes fitness and mental health initiatives</i>
On-site daycare	<i>Daycare located in the workplace</i>
<b>Working Practices</b>	
Flextime	<i>Adjustment of workday start and stop times</i>
Telework	<i>Work from home</i>
Variable workweek	<i>Work different days/hours from week to week</i>

## **WLB policies**

The official policies around work-life balance at Westview, as displayed in Table 3, include family responsibility leave, bereavement leave, educational leave, maternity leave, adoption leave, parental leave, top up for maternity and adoption leave, work-leave integration for maternity leave, and an employee assistance program. To avail of these policies, employees must submit a formal request to their manager, through an online request system. This is true for all policies except for the employee assistance program, which employees pursue on their own through an independent external provider.

### ***Family responsibility leave***

Family responsibility leave is an official policy at Westview that grants up to three days of paid leave, per year, for employees to use for “family reasons” (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). Family responsibility leave is reported in hours and, if left unused, employees may carry time over for a maximum of six days per year. The family reasons

for using this provision include: “to attend to the temporary care of a sick family member; needs related to the birth of the employee’s child, medical or dental appointments for dependent immediate family members; meetings with school authorities; home and family emergencies” (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). This is a time-based provision, as it gives employees up to three days off per year in order to provide direct care to a family member. Notably, what constitutes “family member” is not outlined in the official policy, and it is therefore unclear whether this official policy could include immediate relatives, and/or friends and neighbours (Westview Policy Manual, 2012).

Access to family responsibility leave is different for permanent and term employees at Westview. Temporary employees who have worked more than four months in a calendar year are entitled to one family responsibility leave day per year, compared to the three days available to permanent staff (Westview Policy Manual, 2012).

### ***Bereavement leave***

There is a bereavement leave policy at Westview, which states “in case of death of a close relative, an employee shall be granted bereavement leave for four consecutive working days, including non-working days, beginning on the day of death, with no loss of pay” (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). Like family responsibility leave, this is a time-based initiative, as employees are able to take time off from their jobs to grieve. And as with the family responsibility leave policy, this is a fairly short amount of time off from work. The length of time available for bereavement leave may be questioned, as this provision is offered around what is likely experienced as a serious and deeply saddening

life event. Also of note is that the time off work for employees to grieve the loss of a close relative must be taken immediately and consecutively following their death and lasts for up to only four working days. Employees are therefore expected to grieve their loss within a particular timeframe; time off from work cannot be taken sporadically as one might need it, as is the case with family responsibility leave.

Unlike family responsibility leave, the official bereavement leave policy specifies which relationships are eligible: “Close relatives” include “husband, wife, common-law spouse, child, parent, brother, sister, mother-in-law, father-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, grandparent, grandchild, and other relatives living in the household of the employee” (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). Additionally, Westview employees may be granted one day of paid leave to attend the funeral of a brother-in-law, sister-in-law, niece, nephew, aunt or uncle (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). Evidently, this policy formally recognizes only traditional bloodline and in-law familial relationships. There are other relationships that are not included in this list and which do not qualify as close relatives, such as friends, neighbours, or mentors.

### ***Educational leave***

The educational leave initiative at Westview offers paid time off for employees to “prepare for and write the final examination for an approved course of study” (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). Using this WLB initiative, employees who are attending school while working with Westview may take a short time off from their jobs to focus on their school work without suffering financially. Like family responsibility leave and

bereavement leave, this is a time-based initiative offering a small number of days off from work. Notably, this is the only education-specific WLB initiative offered at Westview.

Access to this provision at Westview is based on two different factors. The first is employment status: Permanent employees are granted up to three days of leave per year, and temporary or term employees may avail of one day per year of educational leave. As well, accessing educational leave is contingent on employees being enrolled in what Westview considers to be an “approved course of study” (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). The parameters around what constitutes an “approved course” are not outlined in the official policy. As such, decisions around granting access to this provision may rest with the supervisors or managers in the workplace.

#### ***Maternity, adoption and parental leaves; Work-leave integration and top up***

Westview also offers longer-term and unpaid time off from work to employees who are providing care to a newly born or adopted child. These provisions include maternity, adoption and parental leaves. Maternity and adoption leave both grant a maximum of 17 weeks of leave, and parental leave offers a maximum of 35 weeks. These are time-based provisions, but unlike the previous initiatives described, they are longer and are not paid in full. These maternity, parental and adoption leave are provided under the Federal Labour Standards in Canada (“Maternity and Parental Leave” Labour Program, 2014).

After taking maternity, adoption and/or parental leave, employees can return to work at Westview. These policies state that an employee who returns to work upon completion of an approved leave is reinstated to her/his former position, or given a comparable position in the same location and with the same wages and benefits (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). As well, returning employees receive any increased salary rate or step that would affect classification rate, ensuring that they do not fall behind their counterparts in salary because they had taken longer term leave. These protections, built into the official policy, may help to offset risks of immediate and future lost earnings from taking longer term unpaid leave (Evans, 2007; Marshall, 2008; X. Zhang, 2009).

Notably, Westview offers employees who are on maternity leave a support that could be referred to as work-leave integration. A feature of the maternity leave policy states that “upon written request of employees, information will be provided on training and promotional opportunities while on maternity leave” (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). This provision facilitates communication between the employee on maternity leave and their supervisor, to keep employees informed of the goings-on at their workplace (Heywood & Jirjhan, 2009). At Westview, this is an optional initiative, and employees are not obligated to maintain such a connection while away on maternity leave. Both the top-up and work-leave integration initiatives suggest that workers may benefit from financial support and continuous communication with work while they are away from their jobs.

As well, Westview provides a financial top up to government-provided maternity and adoption leave programs, offering extra compensation for employees who are on longer-term leave from their jobs (Marshall, 2010). If an employee is engaging in the federal Parental Benefits Program (PBP), they should receive employment insurance payments while away from work, up to pre-identified maximum amount (“Employment Insurance Maternity and Parental Benefits,” 2014). As an employer, Westview tops up these earnings to 100% of the employees’ salary during the two-week waiting period before federal benefits begin, and to 85% of salary during the fifteen weeks of maternity or adoption leave.

Access to each of the unpaid maternity, adoption and parental leave provisions is formally mediated by employment status at Westview. Permanent employees are eligible for these provisions and temporary and term employees are not. Employees’ access to these WLB initiatives is also gendered: While adoption and parental leaves are open to both women and men, only female employees can engage in the maternity leave initiative. Because work-leave integration is only written into the maternity leave policy and not adoption and parental leave policies, this initiative is formally accessible to female employees only. Similarly, because the top up of federally-provided benefits is available only for those on maternity and adoption leave policy, access to this provision is also somewhat gendered.

### ***Employee assistance program***

Westview has an official employee assistance program (EAP) policy. The EAP is a 24/7 service provided through an external organization, to offer guidance and counseling to employees. Employees can engage in this program in-person, or via telephone or email. The official policy states that the EAP “provides guidance and counseling for employees with a human problem, whether it be alcohol or drug related, physical, mental or emotion, or other distressing concerns” (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). Different from the initiatives that grant short or more extended time off from work, the EAP may be best described as a service-based initiative. According to information-gathering consultations with Westview’s human resources personnel, there are a number of services offered under the EAP, including child and eldercare referral services, personal counseling, nutrition planning, and legal advice. Westview monitors the general use of the EAP program through aggregate reports from the EAP provider, which, in order to uphold confidentiality, do not provide details on the actual employees.

All employees, permanent, term and temporary, can engage in the EAP. Notably, the official policy encourages Westview employees to avail of the EAP if their unwellness “adversely affects their job performance” (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). This is the only initiative at Westview that is explicitly linked to organizational interests. This policy phrasing suggests that Westview is primarily motivated to help employees with their personal issues, insofar as this helps solve an organizational issue relating to job performance. In line with this, researchers Medjuck et al. (1998) have noted that

EAPs often stipulate that employees should pursue them if their work performance is suffering.

As a group, the WLB policies offer different kinds of provisions, including some very short-term paid leave, longer-term unpaid leave, and services for workers. These policies formally address employees with family responsibilities, educational pursuits, and health/wellness needs. Access to these workplace provisions is not equal among all employees at Westview.

## **WLB programs**

In addition to the official policies, there are programs around work-life balance at Westview, including the on-site daycare and the wellness program. Unlike the policies, the programs are not written into the Westview Policy Manual (2012). Also different from the policies, Westview employees can access the WLB programs without coordinating with, or putting a request into, supervisors or managers.

### ***On-site daycare***

There is a daycare located inside the Westview office building. Employees who have young children between 2-5 years old can enroll them in the on-site daycare during regular working hours. Providing an option for external childcare to employees, the on-site daycare is a service-based WLB program at Westview. This daycare is owned and run independently of Westview, but a contract between the service provider and Westview stipulates that Westview employees are given priority to register their child or

children at the daycare. Westview employees must therefore pay to enroll a child or children in the on-site daycare, and the cost is not subsidized by Westview. Because this is a program, employees are free to pursue the on-site daycare without permission of their employer, manager or supervisor.

### ***Wellness program***

Westview also offers a wellness program to employees. The wellness program consists of a number of different initiatives which target employee health and wellbeing. For example, employees can avail of discounted gym memberships, subsidies for purchasing personal fitness equipment, sponsorship for sports competitions, an on-site fitness facility, workshops for improving personal health, and other health-related services such as on-site blood donor clinics. Like the EAP and the on-site daycare, the wellness program provides services to employees to help with their work-life balance.

Some services of the wellness program are offered during regular workdays and on-site in the office building, such as the blood donor clinic and workshops on mental health. Other components are to be pursued outside of the workplace and outside of regular working hours, such as fitness classes. Like with the on-site daycare, Westview employees can pursue the wellness program without permission from their supervisors or managers and without formal request.

Taken together, the WLB programs at Westview provide services to address employee work-life balance needs in areas of childcare and health/wellness. Employees can engage in the programs according to their own needs, without negotiation with their

supervisors or managers. Notably, the programs do not have much to do with the time and space structure of work at Westview, but offer more external services to enhance work-life balance.

## **WLB working practices**

Lastly, there are more unofficial working practices at Westview which can also be considered as WLB initiatives. Like the WLB programs, the workplace practices are also not included in the Westview Policy Manual. The working practices in this office include flextime, telework, and variable workweek. However, to access the working practices, employees have to negotiate with their managers/supervisors, though on a more informal basis.

### ***Flextime***

Flextime is an unofficial working practice at Westview. Flextime involves “working a certain number of core hours, but being able to vary start and stop times while working the equivalent of a full workweek” (Zeytinoglu et al., 2009, p. 559). It is perhaps most commonly understood as adjusting a 9am-5pm workday to a 7:00am-3:00pm workday, but can include other variations in start/stop times, such as a 10:00am-6:00pm schedule, or a 6:30am-2:30pm schedule. This initiative formally offers some flexibility in employees’ work time schedules, such that they can arrange their employment schedules to better suit events or responsibilities in their personal lives and still fulfill a full-time workday schedule. There is no official flextime policy, and access to this initiative is fully

mediated by supervisors or managers, who may approve or deny employee requests at their discretion.

### ***Telework***

Telework is another working practice at Westview. This is an arrangement whereby employees work from home with the support of information technology, for part or all of their paid employment during the week (Comfort et al., 2003; Nilles, 1998). Like with flextime, employees who engage in telework continue to work their full-time schedules (Smith, Wainwright, Buckingham, & Manadanet, 2011). This is another flexibility-based initiative: Teleworking allows employees to flexibly adjust their work space and perhaps also time, such that they can better manage their personal activities and continue to work full-time hours.

At Westview, employees have access to technology which connects them to their work remotely. They can electronically access to their work programs and files when they are outside of the office. Because no official policy exists for telework, no official parameters surround its use. Like with flextime, access to telework is not guaranteed to employees of Westview, and use of this working practice is informally negotiated between employees and their supervisors or managers.

### ***Variable workweek***

Another flexible work arrangement unofficially available in this workplace is variable workweek. This is an arrangement by which employees work a variable schedule

week by week. By definition, variable workweek is “a workweek length that varies weekly...normally not working the same number of paid hours per week” (Zeytinoglu et al., 2009, p. 559). In a two-week period, this may involve, for example, working seven days in one week and three days another week. As such, this initiative formally offers flexibility in work time schedules, by days and hours. Like with flextime and telework, access to variable workweek is contingent on the discretion of an employees’ supervisor or manager.

As a group, the WLB working practices offer a new kind of provision around employee work-life balance, different from the policies and programs. Specifically, the working practices offer workers some flexibility in work time or space. Moreover, these provisions do not acknowledge or target a particular type of work-life balance need, like the policies and programs. There are no official rules regarding the reasons for which employees can or should engage in flextime, telework, and variable workweek. The other notable difference is that engagement in these WLB initiatives involves informal negotiation between employees and the employer.

## **Discussion**

As discussed in Chapter 2, social scientists have explored how the formal structure of paid work factors in people’s lives and how they manage it with other institutions, such as the family. It has been argued that paid “work is not simply a way to make a living... It also constitutes a framework for daily behavior and patterns of interaction because it imposes disciplines and regularities...Regular employment provides

the anchor to the spatial and temporal aspects of daily life" (Wilson, 1996, p. 73). The formal structure of employment at Westview, including the official hours of work, the physical building space, as well as the WLB initiatives offered in the workplace, have influence on how workers organize their lives and how they manage their work-life balance (Prior, 2008). By reviewing the time and space structure of Westview, and conducting textual analysis on the WLB initiatives in the workplace to draw out themes of content, key findings emerge regarding how this employer formally understands and offers provisions around employee work-life balance.

In terms of work-life balance, where and when Westview employees carry out their paid work is important. The time and space structure of employment at Westview is designed to have a substantial presence in the lives of its employees. That is, employees are expected to work 37.5 hours a week at Westview, and to carry out this work in a public space, external to their homes. Employees must therefore commute to and from their office building to carry out their jobs. These are common features of paid employment today, especially in office-based and professional occupations (Strangleman & Warren, 2008). While commonplace, these characteristics of paid work at Westview reveal the employer's assumptions about workers and their availability for employment (Acker, 1998, p. 197). Historical feminist literature, explored in Chapter 2, argues that this kind of employment structure was suited to a predominantly male workforce who had few or no responsibilities for home and family (Kanter, 1977; Purcell, MacArthur, & Samblanet, 2010). Strangleman and Warren (2008), citing Glucksmann (1998), note that "a 9-5, Monday to Friday as the optimal standard week was a markedly gendered

decision” (Strangleman & Warren, 2008, p. 215). The time and space conditions at Westview therefore qualify as traditional masculine working principles. Applying theoretical work from Acker (1990), Britton (2000) and others, it can be argued that the overarching structure of employment as Westview is organized – like many workplaces – in a way that shows little regard for employees’ personal lives and assumes that they are free and able to devote most of their time and energy to their employment. Demanding and rigid time schedules for paid employment, and requirements to work within a space external to the home, expect that workers do not have other time or energy-consuming roles and responsibilities to fulfill in their lives.

Examining WLB initiatives in the workplace also reveals Westview’s formal expectations about how its employees should manage their many roles. Textual analysis of these provisions focused on drawing out themes regarding what types of provisions are offered by the provisions (e.g., what formats of support they offer to workers), what kinds of work-life balance needs/activities they target, and what, if any, conditions exist around accessing them. WLB initiatives were also read to identify any possible business interests embedded in the provisions. This analysis of the policies, programs and working practices reveals that Westview formally offers WLB initiatives to support employees in particular ways, and that these provisions are not general and open. In fact, there are numerous formal conditions put on the WLB initiatives in this workplace, such as on the types of provisions available to workers, on the work-life balance needs that are addressed, and on how employees can access the provisions.

First, textual analysis of these provisions indicates that the WLB initiatives at Westview take particular forms. Some of the initiatives offer time off from work (short or long), such as family responsibility leave or parental leave. Other provisions offer flexible arrangements around work time and space, such as variable workweek and telework. Lastly, there are more service-based provisions, including a wellness program and an on-site daycare service. Notably, there are certain kinds of WLB initiatives which are not offered by Westview. For example, other researchers have studied workplace programs that provide workers with financial assistance, such as for childcare costs (Ferrer & Gagne, 2006). Others have studied reduced scheduling options, such as part-time work or job sharing, as possible provisions around work-life balance (Barnett & Gareis, 2000). Workers who require financial assistance or a part-time schedule to manage their work-life balance will not find such provisions available to them at Westview – and therefore may not be able to work effectively within this structure.

In the literature, there has been some conceptualization of the different forms that WLB initiatives may take (e.g., Estes, 2005; Heywood & Jirjhan, 2009; Secret, 2005), though few researchers have problematized the availability of certain types of provisions and the absence of others. It is important to consider why Westview offers certain forms of work-life balance provisions and not others. Arguably, any of these provisions could be helpful in managing various work-life balance challenges for workers. Time off, flexible schedules, childcare services may all be useful to people managing paid employment with personal roles. However, reflecting on human resource management literature on ideal worker norms, the types of WLB initiatives available in workplaces

may be explained by their costs and benefits to organizations. For example, researchers have suggested that flexible scheduling options are, for example, fairly inexpensive to offer employees (Wysong, & Wright, 2003). Flextime, telework and variable workweek options may also be attractive to employers because they allow for workers to maintain full-time work schedules. As such, the demanding structure of paid employment persists, despite the use of flexible working arrangements. In a similar vein, it could be argued that granting short-term time off from work, just a few days a year – such as is offered through family responsibility leave, bereavement leave, and educational leave at Westview – is a small concession on the employer’s part to help with employee work-life balance. These provisions give employees an opportunity to take a small number of days off per year to manage events in their personal lives, perhaps resulting in a minimal impact on organizational performance and ultimately yielding some of the positive business outcomes associated with offering WLB initiatives. In contrast, the longer term family leaves may be a greater concession for the employer and should facilitate a higher level of family engagement for the workers. Notably though, these provision are unpaid, and therefore may not be easily manageable for workers in terms of financial support.

Service-based provisions may similarly offer organizational advantages to employers, as they do not interfere with its dominant structure. For instance, regarding on-site daycares, researchers Duffy and Pupo (2011) have argued that this service actually benefits companies, as the workers who avail of it can focus more on their jobs (instead of on their childcare demands). A similar argument could be made for the wellness program at Westview, as well. Offering physical fitness classes to employees after work,

for example, may provide a service they are interested in and find useful, but will not take away from their time spent at work. These provisions therefore align with the masculine working principles at Westview, as they encourage employees to take care of any personal demands while still maintaining their full-time hours in the office-based environment. Alternatively, Westview may not be willing to provide employees with options to reduce their overall work hours for the purpose of enhancing their work-life balance, because part-time hours or job sharing arrangements would disrupt the full-time schedule standard in the office.

Second, textual analysis of the WLB initiatives at Westview suggests that many of the provisions formally address specific work-life balance needs. For example, Westview offers three days of paid leave for reasons relating to education and family responsibilities. Beyond the questionable adequacy of this very short-term leave for these time-consuming and labour-intensive activities, textual analysis indicates that the three days of paid leave cannot be used for just any work-life balance reason employees may have (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). All of the policies and programs discussed above are structured to be used for particular and specified reasons. Only the working practices at Westview – flextime, telework, variable workweek – do not have official outlines regarding reasons for which employees may engage in them. These could potentially be used by workers for a variety of reasons to help with work-life balance, depending on the discretion of the supervisor or manager and what they consider to be a legitimate request.

While early research on family-friendly workplace policies was clear that these provisions were offered to help workers with family responsibilities, as discussed in

Chapter 2, there has not been much attention in recent studies of WLB initiatives on what kinds of work-life balance needs are targeted. The majority of WLB initiatives at Westview are offered to workers with family and caregiving responsibilities. Family responsibility leave, bereavement leave, maternity leave, adoption leave, parental leave, the on-site daycare, and components of the EAP are all made available for workers with (certain) family responsibilities. The multitude of provisions around family caregiving at Westview may reflect the historical origins of WLB initiatives; in the 1980s, employers offered what were often called ‘family-friendly’ provisions in the workplace to help women manage their paid work with their family caregiving needs (Yancey Martin et al., 1988). But the family-focused initiatives at Westview are not offered for just any family reason: In most cases, the initiatives are to be used for specified family demands. For instance, some provisions are available to employees who have short-term family needs such as attending an appointment, or employees who are experiencing family crises such as the loss of a family member. Other provisions are to address employees’ longer-term childcare needs, such as the on-site daycare which may be useful to an employee with a child between the ages of 2 and 5 years old; and the maternity, adoption and parental leaves which may be relevant for employees who have recently given birth to or adopted a child.

How workers can use the family-specific WLB initiatives is clearly and explicitly outlined by the employer through the policies and programs. It is worth noting that what constitutes “family” is, in some cases, quite narrowly defined by Westview. For example, in the case of the bereavement leave policy, “close relative” is defined in terms of

traditional bloodline relations and therefore excludes friends, neighbours, or mentors (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). The details that are written into policies and programs illustrate how Westview views family, and how the organization puts parameters around what is considered a legitimate family need. Westview's provisions around employees' family demands and interests are not all-encompassing as they are conditioned in various ways.

There are provisions at Westview which acknowledge other work-life balance needs beyond family. There are WLB initiatives which address employees' education, physical fitness, and health activities. At Westview, educational leave is available to employees who are enrolled in an education program; the EAP supports employees' personal health through advice and counseling services; and the wellness program offers services to employees around mental health and physical fitness. These work-life balance activities have not historically garnered much attention in the literature. However, the move from work-family balance to a more generalized work-life balance in recent years may help to explain why Westview, and other employers, are formally recognizing and offering provisions around additional needs beyond family. Again, there are certain parameters around how employees with these work-life balance needs can use the workplace provisions. For instance, the educational leave is available for employees who are undertaking particular "approved" post-secondary programs, and may not be available for every possible educational program that employees may be enrolled in. The EAP and wellness programs target mental and physical health and fitness of employees, and this is also conditioned in particular ways. For instance, provisions around physical fitness

include an on-site fitness facility that has equipment but does not include facilitated nature walks.

Exploring how WLB initiatives target particular needs is illustrative of how employers view and understand employee work-life balance. It also suggests that this employer is interested in offering provisions around certain needs and not others. The many provisions around family responsibilities at Westview may be explained, at least in part, by the historical demand for such provisions (discussed in Chapter 2). The availability of workplace provisions around education, health and fitness may be based on the demands and interests workers have – the new work-life balance needs. Alternatively or additionally, employers may be interested in addressing these activities in order to yield business advantages. By offering provisions to help employees pursue education or physical fitness, employers may subsequently encourage employees to become more ideal workers. Organizations likely benefit from a workforce that is engaged in professional and personal development opportunities, such as achieving higher education or become more physically active. In this way, the provisions at Westview align with the overall structure of employment at Westview, contributing to the importance of employees' paid work roles.

Third, close review of the WLB initiatives at Westview indicates that not all workers have free and equal access to the provisions in the office. Recent research on the availability of WLB initiatives, discussed in Chapter 2, has found that there is unequal access to these kinds of provisions across the workforce, with greatest access granted to professional and middle-class individuals (Ferrer & Gagne, 2006; Sharpe et al., 2002;

Zeytinoglu et al., 2009). In the academic literature, there has been little discussion of how access to WLB initiatives may be unequal in particular workplaces or organizations, even among a group of professional office workers.

At Westview, there are formal conditions around how employees can access some of the WLB initiatives. For example, access to the programs of on-site daycare and wellness program is fairly free, as workers can engage in these programs according to their own desires or needs. Alternatively, access to the working practices is informally mediated by supervisors and managers. Access to these working practices is likely contingent on many unofficial and undocumented factors, and ultimately rests with the discretion of managers/supervisors. This process reflects the hierarchical structure at Westview and illustrates the power dynamics between the employer and employee in relation to WLB initiatives.

For the official policies, there are explicit conditions regarding employee access, clearly written into the policy manual. For example, term/temporary employees have fewer family responsibility leave days available to them than permanent employees do. In this case, employment status is a factor mediating which employees have opportunities to engage in WLB initiatives. This suggests there is some level of privilege associated with having access to this policy at Westview, and that some types of employees are more deserving of these provisions than others. Of course, this is in line with the hierarchical structure of Westview and the different levels of benefits for employees of different rank. As another example, while both women and men have access to unpaid parental leave and adoption leave at Westview, only female employees have access to the unpaid maternity

leave. By gendering access to maternity leave, it is clear that Westview has particular ideas about the kinds of work-life balance needs that women and men have (or should have). The conditions around maternity leave at Westview reflect ideological principles of traditional gender roles which ascribe caregiving responsibilities to women more so than men (Evans, 2007). This is perhaps not too surprising, as the federal Parental Benefits Program in Canada has similarly gendered access.

By offering different levels of access to some WLB initiatives, Westview asserts control over which employees can and cannot engage in the available workplace provisions around work-life balance. This exposes some assumptions, made by the employer, about which employees are expected to have which kinds of work-life balance needs. Moreover, linking access to organizational rank, employment status or gender communicates implicit messages to the workforce about who is more or less deserving of WLB initiatives. Ultimately, literature suggests that different degrees of access in the office may prompt employees to perceive WLB initiatives as privileges, rather than entitlements. Other studies have found that this kind of perception can function to marginalize the WLB initiatives in the workplace, and limit how employees use them (S. Lewis, 1997; Sempruch, 2011).

The time, space and policy structure at Westview reveals how this employer formally approaches employee work-life balance. Employees are expected to work full-time schedules in an office space from Monday to Friday, and to have minimal and manageable demands relating to family caregiving, post-secondary education, physical fitness, and health. In offering workplace provisions around these work-life balance

needs, Westview makes available some short and longer time off from work, some flexibility in when and where employees can carry out their full-time jobs, and some services. These WLB initiatives at Westview target certain work-life balance needs, and are available to certain workers. Based on these findings, it could be suggested that WLB initiatives are not necessarily inclusive or all-encompassing in addressing work-life balance needs of workers. Overall, these provisions do recognize that workers have interests and responsibilities in their personal lives, yet most of the WLB initiatives are formatted to endorse full-time employment and a more educated and healthy workforce. The provisions seem therefore to align with the overarching masculine structure of employment at Westview.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the formal structure of employment at Westview, including the provisions around employee work-life balance. It was argued that the time and space demands of work at Westview reflect a historical masculine structure in which full-time, office-based workers are ideal. Moreover, such ideal working principles are evident in the WLB initiatives at Westview. It was suggested, based on textual analysis, that the types of provisions made available in this workplace, the kinds of work-life balance needs formally acknowledged by the provisions, and the different levels of employee access, indicate that WLB initiatives may not necessarily respond to workers needs. Instead, Westview may offer WLB initiatives in a way that best serves the needs of the organization.

Building on this, the next chapter is a descriptive and exploratory account of Westview employees' experiences of balancing their employment at Westview with their other activities. Ultimately, this chapter aims attempts to conceptualize a comprehensive view of Westview employees' work-life balance experiences. This involves a discussion of how the workers operate within the formal workplace structure, and how they balance this with their personal lives. In exploring the Westview employees' experiences of work-life balance, groups of managers and staff, women and men, and older and younger employees are discussed.

## **Chapter 5: Employees' Experiences of Work-Life Balance**

This chapter explores Westview employees' experiences of work-life balance.

Drawing on survey and interview data, a general description is given of the elements of work-life balance for these Westview employees, including activities and demands they undertake in their paid jobs and in their personal lives. Following this, there is a focused discussion of managers/supervisors and staff-level employees, younger/newer and older/tenured employees, and women and men, to explore experiences of work-life balance in greater detail for these different groups of workers. This chapter concludes with a critical analysis of how the participants talk about organizing their jobs with other activities, and what this reveals about the patterns of their work-life balance and, in particular, the dominance of paid employment.

### **Exploring Participants' Work-Life Balance**

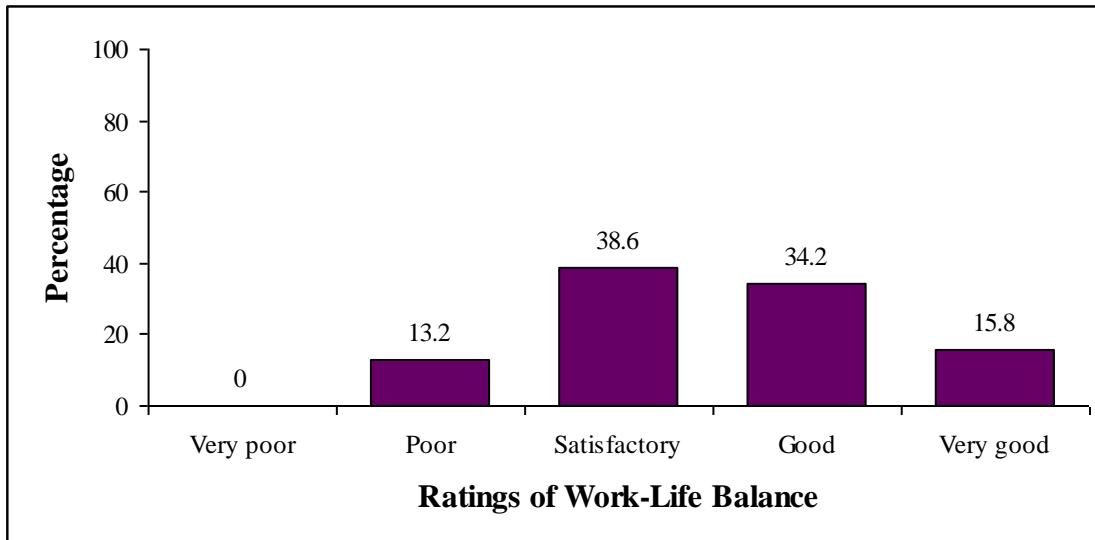
There are many possible questions to ask around WLB initiatives and work-life balance, and, as discussed in Chapter 2, researchers have explored these topics in different ways. For my study, I collected data, through surveys and interviews, on the different activities the Westview employees engage in ranging from paid work, to family roles, to education and leisure – and how they go about organizing these activities together.

To gauge the overall feeling about work-life balance for the participants, survey respondents were asked to self-rate their own work-life balance on a scale with values of very poor, poor, satisfactory, good, and very good (Figure 1). Other survey and interview

questions added depth and richness to understanding the participants' lived realities of work-life balance, gathering details on what they do at work and in their personal lives. For instance, survey respondents were asked to select, from a closed list with an "other" option, the activities they engage in outside of their paid employment (Appendix C, question 6), and were asked specific questions about their hours of work. Interviewees were asked to describe their work-life balance on a typical day, and were probed about their employment responsibilities and the activities they undertake outside of their jobs.

The majority of participants in the study reported that they are satisfied with their work-life balance. For instance, in response to the scale survey question on rating work-life balance, most respondents rated theirs as satisfactory (37%, n = 14) or good (34%; n = 13). Similarly, in response to an interview question asking interviewees to describe their work-life balance, most quickly described it as "good" or "pretty good." As well, some participants reported their work-life balance as very good or, in stark contrast, very poor. There was a small number of survey respondents who reported very good work-life balance (16%; n = 6), and another small group who indicated that their work-life balance is poor (13%; n = 5). Again, in agreement with survey findings, a small number of interviewees described feeling very satisfied with their work-life balance, and a few others suggested their work-life balance is strained or stressed. Interestingly, no survey respondents selected "very poor" work-life balance in the survey question (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Ratings of Work-Life Balance, Survey Respondents**



Survey data on the participants' self-ratings of work-life balance, as portrayed on Figure 1 above, provides a high-level and admittedly general scan of how the workers feel about balancing their paid work and personal life. Interviewing and other probing survey questions gathered greater detail on the dynamics of participants' work-life balance.

The following discussion explores, in a comprehensive way, the elements of work-life balance for the Westview employees. First, the participants' experiences of working at Westview are described, and common informal job expectations are noted. Next, key activities in the participants' personal lives are discussed. These details help to illustrate the general areas in which the workers experience pressure or high demands, and how they go about juggling their different responsibilities and demands.

Following this overview of participants' work-life balance, there is a more focused exploration by select groups. Specifically, work-life balance experiences of managers/supervisors and staff-level workers, of younger and older/newer and more tenured workers, and of women and men are explored. Findings from literature review suggest that workplace rank and gender are important factors to consider in work-life balance (Ford & Collinson, 2011; Krull & Sempruch, 2011). Exploration of how younger and older/newer and more tenured workers manage their work-life balance is not especially popular in research, though, based on the age diversity in survey and interview samples and the different levels of job tenure/seniority, this variable is worth exploring in my study.

### **Experiences of working at Westview**

Participants have different roles and responsibilities in their jobs with Westview, though there are some features of paid work that many of the employees share. Most of the interviewees spoke of their jobs at Westview in positive terms, using descriptors such as "interesting" and "challenging." Through surveys and interviews, key details were collected on participants' work hours, job responsibilities, and informal job expectations.

Survey and interview findings indicate that for most of the participants, working at Westview involves carrying out paid work from Monday to Friday, on fairly standardized daytime schedules and full-time hours. In response to a question about their regular hours of work, over 97% of survey respondents, and all interviewees, indicated that they typically work from Monday to Friday. A smaller group ( $n = 7$ ) reported

working occasional evenings, weekends, and/or on-call and shiftwork schedules. As well, two interviewees described occasionally being on-call in their positions. In terms of work hours, the majority of survey respondents reported working between 31-40 hours a week (55%; n = 21); a substantial percentage of the survey group reported working between 41-50 hours a week (37%; n = 14), and some even reported between 51-60 hours a week (8%; n = 3). Notably, confusion may have arisen over the survey question querying respondents' hours of work at Westview (see Appendix D, question 8), because it was not specified whether they should report on official working hours or actual hours worked. This issue was addressed in interviewing. Interviewees were explicitly asked to describe their official working hours and their actual hours worked: All reported working full-time schedules from Monday to Friday, but most contradictorily noted that they work in excess of the standard 37.5 hours a week.

Most participants indicated that they carry out their jobs at Westview in the office, commuting regularly between their homes and the workplace. However, for a small group, traveling for work was central to their descriptions of working at Westview. Among the interviewees, there are three who travel regularly for their jobs, such as once every month. The group of participants that travel, especially regularly, is quite small, though they are not a homogenous group. Both women and men from different departments, staff and management-level employees, with different family situations and of different ages indicated traveling with Westview. Other participants described traveling only a few times a year, or almost never and never.

Most of those who travel in some capacity noted that they enjoy the opportunity to be mobile in their jobs, because this offers career development opportunities, as well as interesting work experiences and a chance to connect with new clients or other coworkers. Wayne is a staff member in the Environmental department; he travels regularly for his job – sometimes just for a few days at a time, sometimes for several months. Wayne is in his 40s, and has a partner and pets at home, but no children. In describing his job, he notes that the travel is somewhat unpredictable and therefore can be difficult to manage:

There's a lot of travel, but sometimes it's not always known... You know, if somebody calls and says 'you gotta go out and do this now,' and it's like you only got so many hours to get ready, right?

Traveling regularly and/or for long periods of time can be very demanding on employees. Wayne explains how regular and lengthy work-related travel has worn on his spousal relationship somewhat:

It does get a bit tense after a while, if you're not home that much. And my partner has got to do things on her own and that, which is not a big deal but we kinda lose contact a little bit.

Another interviewee, Stacey, works with Wayne and also travels regularly for her job. She is in her 30s, and has a partner and a young child at home. Like Wayne, she is in a staff-level position at Westview, and, as part of her job, she travels for about a week every month. In discussing how she manages this with family roles, she notes: "That week a month when I'm out of town... my [partner] is on his own, with work and our little one and everything that's involved." Comments from these interviewees suggests

that traveling and being away from home regularly or for extended periods of time, adds new challenges to work-life balance.

The feedback from participants regarding work schedules generally reflects the formal structure of employment at Westview, discussed in the previous chapter, though it is obvious that many employees work beyond 37.5 hours a week and that some have to travel outside of the office for their jobs. Data from participants also illustrated some of the more informal components of employment with Westview. For instance, many of the interviewees described the nature of their work at Westview as objective-based. Several interviewees noted that supervisors or managers are not very involved in how employees carry out their roles, but rather care that their work is completed according to pre-established deadlines. Interviewee Wayne, the staff-level employee in the Environmental department at Westview, sometimes works on team projects and sometimes independently. In discussing how he reports to his supervisor, Wayne indicated that he has some autonomy in his role, and that his supervisor is not heavily involved in his work:

My supervisor is pretty lax, he says ‘As long as you get the work done’ sorta thing. So he’s not really looking over my shoulder all the time, so I try to accommodate... if I am late, say, I’ll work an extra hour in the office or something like that. So I’m kind of keeping track of my own schedule, if there’s anything major... Sometimes I... just worry about what the other person might think, that I’m cheating when I’m really not. But then my supervisor is pretty open, he’s pretty carefree, right. So he understands, right... I’m just a bit neurotic, so that’s why I try to keep track of everything, even if he doesn’t care, I do keep track of everything in case somebody wants to see it, right?

Wayne’s description of his manager’s style may be likened to what Bouffartigue (2010) calls “objective-based management” (p. 225), a management approach that has become

an increasingly popular style in the post-industrial era. Bouffartigue (2010) describes this approach:

“The objectives are either assigned by employers, in which case they often form part of a contract, or defined by employees themselves, depending on the way in which professional norms are appropriated and the level of income sought. It is evident that regulation of the temporality of work is shifting away from the sphere of time towards that of the objectives or targets that ultimately define the reality of workloads, with its mental, cognitive and subjective dimensions that are the most difficult to objectify, and of fair and legitimate professional norms” (Bouffartigue, 2010, p. 225).

Wayne’s comment illustrates the importance of completing work at Westview, but it also points to some concern about work time. While Wayne feels confident that his supervisor is primarily interested in seeing his work completed, he still keeps a record of the time he spends on his job, just in case “somebody wants to see it.” Like Wayne, most of the staff-level employees spoke about being present at work, and the importance of meeting their deadlines at Westview.

### ***Workloads and expectations***

Interview findings indicate that many Westview employees manage high and growing workloads in their jobs. For example, Joseph works in a specialized staff-level position in the Safety department. He has worked with Westview and Tech Inc. for many years, and his role is highly interactive with co-workers. He typically works upwards of 45-50 hours a week at Westview, and he is sometimes on-call during the evenings and weekends. Joseph is in his 40s, and he has a partner but no dependents at home. In our

interview, Joseph described his own workload at Westview as high. Of his work schedule, he explains:

I do come in on a scattered Saturday, if I know there's something that's [pressing], I'll come in on a Saturday and maybe work four hours... cause you get so much done on a Saturday when no one else is around.

In reflecting on some other employees' workloads, Joseph went on to describe a mismatch between employees' resources and capacity and what they are expected to accomplish in their roles:

[Other employees] were expected to do this, and now they're expected to do *this* [gestures significant increase with hands]...There's no more resources being hired, so who's gonna do the work? Right? Do the math. [Laughs].

Another interviewee, Eugene, similarly described undertaking a high workload in his role. Eugene works in a staff-level position in the Human Resources department, and has been employed with Westview for approximately four years. Eugene typically works about 45 hours a week in his job. He is in his mid-50s, and he has a partner and dependents at home. In a general description of working at Westview, Eugene described the continuous, and sometimes overwhelming, flow of work from the top-down in his office:

We are asked to deliver projects when already our plates are fairly full. And we're getting better at pushing back and saying: 'Well, if you want us to deliver X then something else has got to come off the plate.'

The comments from Joseph and Eugene suggest that they experience high expectations in their positions, and observe that others in the workplace face similar demands.

Another interviewee in Eugene's department, Kate, has recently taken on a supervisory position at Westview and has seen an increase in her workload. Kate is in her late 20s, has a partner and no dependents at home. She started working with Westview

approximately five years ago, and in the last year has taken on this new supervisory role.

Kate described how she found it challenging to meet the higher volume of work as a supervisor, but accomplished this through working long hours to catch up, staying late at Westview until 8:00pm or 9:00pm at night, and often coming into the office on the weekends. In describing her paid work demands and activities, Kate expressed a willingness to devote extra time and energy to her job in order to meet her new job responsibilities and expanding demands. Since then, she has settled into her role, and now feels that her work-life balance is “pretty good.” On her work hours now, she points out:

Well I definitely get in my 37.5, so that’s our standard workday, 7.5 hours. And then I might work an extra hour or two, you know, in the evenings. I try not to do that on Fridays, cause it’s Friday. So I might work an extra, say, eight hours maybe on top of [the 37.5 hours a week]. It sounds like a lot more, like, when I talk about it than when I’m actually doing it [laughs].

In the accounts from Kate, Eugene and Joseph, it is evident that they manage high workloads, often under tight deadlines. They work beyond their standard full-time hours, putting in extra time and effort. Several other interviewees in different departments spoke of working longer hours and managing considerably high workloads in their roles at Westview.

Interviewees’ discussions of working at Westview also revealed that many of their jobs involve work-related technology which, in many cases, expands their workloads. Checking email and using smartphones is a big part of many employees’ jobs. For example, interviewee Joseph, described earlier as working in a specialized staff-level position in the Safety department, spoke about email as a big part of his workload at Westview:

I'll check my email, and there'll probably be ten to twenty new emails from the day before, cause yesterday evening I left and I never checked any email after 4pm. So people are still working from 4-5pm, really 5:30pm, so you're still getting emails and the junk ones I got going to inbox, but there's some of them too that you just don't want to get rid of because they might be training, opportunities [...]...and everyone wants something in writing...

For Joseph, email requires substantial time and attention on his part. Because "everyone wants something in writing," Joseph feels he has to be careful and thoughtful in his email replies.

While email dominates Joseph's time at the office, other interviewees spoke of the effects of technology while they are outside of the workplace and work hours. At Westview, most employees have remote access to their work email and files outside of the office. A number of interviewees spoke about checking their Westview email accounts at home, before they come to work in the morning or at night before they go to sleep, and several interviewees described carrying company-issued smartphone technology for work. Smartphones enable telephone, internet, and email access for employees at all times, in and outside of the workplace and official working hours. One interviewee, Laura, also in the Safety department, carries a company smartphone because in her specialized role she must be available in case there is an organizational emergency anywhere in Tech Inc. operations. In discussing carrying a smartphone, she admits that it is hard to cut ties with work at the official end of the day:

The challenge is, I guess, there's so much to do in the run of a day that it's hard to, sort of, cut your tie from the end of the day, particularly with the technology now and having a Blackberry. And you're hearing that 'ding!' of the emails coming in during the evenings and on the weekends. And the nature of my role is I have to be sort of available if there [are] injuries that happen...we intervene right away. So it's just trying to find that balance of really separating yourself. It can be a challenge... Blackberrys helped in some ways, in that you're probably able to stay on top of

things, particularly when you're traveling. When you're traveling, you often can't get good internet service to log on to catch up on emails. So you're able to sort of stay on top of things, but it's hard to say. The tradeoff is there is, I think, extra work associated with having a Blackberry. But, you know, it's good to have that contact. But, you know, you really have to make conscious efforts to separate yourself from work?

Laura's comment hints that carrying a company-issued smartphone helps her do her job, but has also expanded her time working. Using smartphone technology, employees are kept informed of what is happening at work, without necessarily having to actively check emails or messages, as they are instead involuntarily alerted by a "ding," that Laura mentioned. Many of the interviewees described this as useful and even convenient, but there was also recognition by most that because they carry smartphones, they are expected to be readily available and accessible to their employer at all times.

At Westview, then, employees' projects and job tasks are not necessarily tied to physical papers and documents, or even face-to-face conversations in the workplace, and tasks can be carried out beyond the typical 9:00am – 5:00pm shift at the office. Research suggests that computer technology, such as email, facilitates longer work hours and makes workers ever-accessible to their employer. In a collection of articles exploring and untangling work-life balance, researchers Smith, Wainwright, Buckingham, and Manadanet (2011) point to the impact of technology on employees' experiences and demands of paid work (p. 605). Being ever-accessible can interfere with employees' other activities, such as spending time with family. For those who carry smartphones, the ever-presence of this technology carves out a continuous paid work demand in their work-life balance. From interviewing, it is clear that employees understand this, but at the same

time feel there is value in being as responsive as possible in their jobs – even if it means they have to work more.

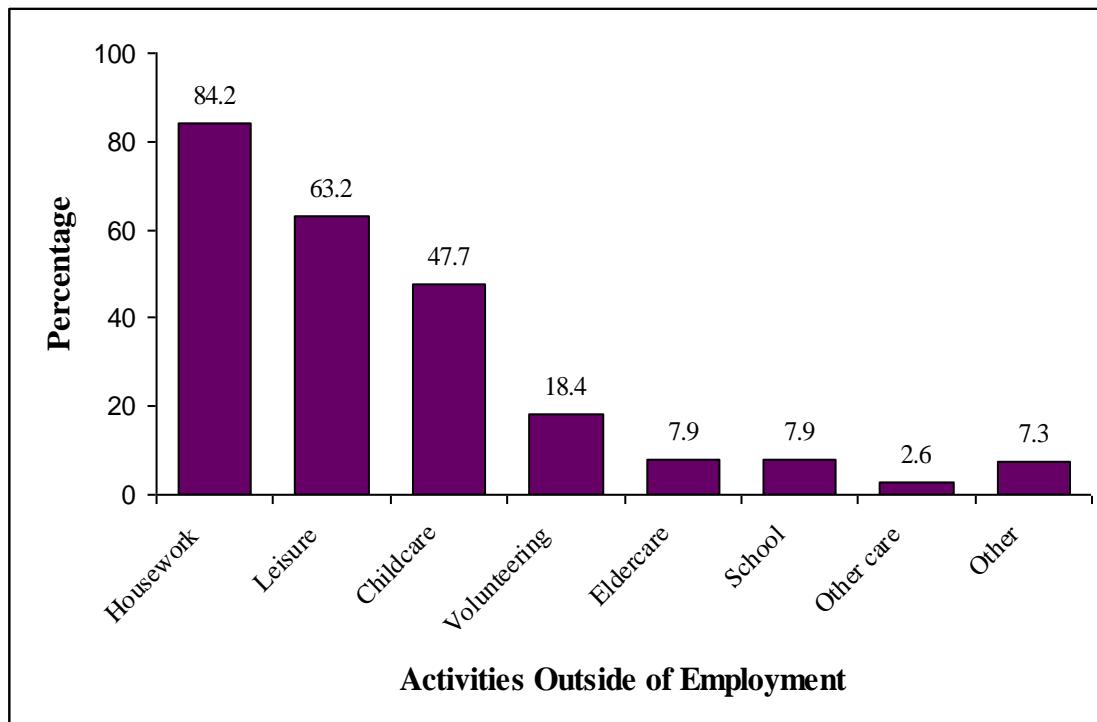
Even though many interviewees commented on their workloads at Westview as heavy and demanding, very few described this as problematic. Most interviewees did not talk about their workloads as a burden to them, or as causing problems for their work-life balance. However, in contrast to this, in response to a survey question regarding sources of work-related stress, the most common response among respondents is “high workloads,” with 83% (n = 32) selecting it from a closed list. This finding indicates that Westview employees may indeed experience their paid work demands as stressful. The discrepancy between interview and survey findings may be one example of how conducting interviews in the employee’s workplace had an impact on how they spoke about their work, as the interviewees may have held back more negative feelings about their jobs at Westview.

### **Participants’ personal life activities**

In addition to offering some insightful details about participants’ experiences of actually working at Westview, surveys and interviews also gathered rich data on the workers’ personal lives. While many studies of work-life balance continue to focus exclusively on how workers manage their employment with their family responsibilities, efforts were made in this research to develop a more complete understanding of the activities employees juggle together. Findings indicate that workers undertake a variety of activities in their personal lives. For example, in response to a closed survey question

(with an ‘Other’ option) asking “Outside of your job, which activities/responsibilities occupy most of your time?,” many survey respondents indicated that they undertake housework, leisure and caregiving; as well, somewhat fewer participants indicated engaging in volunteering and school activities (displayed in Figure 2). This very general question showcases the participants’ interests and responsibilities in their personal lives which they manage with their employment at Westview.

**Figure 2. Activities Outside of Paid Employment, Survey Respondents**



Through interviewing, qualitative detail was gathered about what these activities entail, and how the participants organize them together and with their paid work. In describing

their work-life balance, many interviewees included the activities displayed in Figure 2, as well as other activities which were not captured by the survey, such as physical fitness.

### ***Housework***

Housework is the most commonly reported activity outside of paid work for survey respondents, with 84% selecting it (Figure 2). Interestingly, most interviewees did not speak about housework as part of their work-life balance but, with prompting, all expressed that they do housework some time during the week. Participants spoke about regular household chores like preparing meals, vacuuming, washing dishes, shopping for groceries, getting their laundry done, and cleaning the bathroom. They also described the more occasional chores, like doing household maintenance and repairs, mowing the lawn and doing other yardwork, and shoveling snow. Notably, the interviewees described doing these housework chores mostly in the evenings after work, and on the weekends.

### ***Leisure***

Leisure activities are also a big part of work-life balance for the participants (Figure 2). Most interviewees and a fairly large group of survey respondents (63%; n = 24) indicated that they pursue some kind of leisure activities outside of their paid work. The interviewees described reading books, watching television, working with tools in the shed, going to the movies, participating in social clubs, and spending quality time with a

partner or friends. For all interviewees, they described carrying out their leisure activities in the late evenings and night times during the workweek, and on weekends.

The high levels of engagement in leisure activities was not anticipated, as some recent studies suggest that workers are increasingly strapped for time, feel stressed and are limited in their ability to pursue personal interests and relaxation (Coyle, 2005). Still, interview findings suggest that the participants engage in leisure activities to different degrees. Some have ample opportunities for leisure on a regular, daily basis. For example, interviewee Hailey is a staff-level employee in the Human Resources department. She is in her mid-20s, and has a partner at home but no dependents. In describing a typical day, she talks about her opportunities for leisure:

After work I go home, I'm lucky because my [partner] doesn't start school [for a while] so supper's already cooked. So we'll chit chat...sit down, have supper, watch the news, might have to run a couple of errands together. I do the dishes every night after supper, don't have to do the laundry... I'm lucky like that [laughs], I know. Evenings I wish were more productive and just kind of 'me time.' Mindless TV, or just mindless chitchat, or go out for a coffee. We don't have any kids yet, so, when you actually have kids you're gonna wonder what you did with all your time. I don't do anything with my time. So for me, if I'm checking emails in the nighttime, or I want to read a book, or if I want to take a course, I do. I have a lot of time.

Similarly, interviewee Trevor, who is in a supervisory role in the same department, described what he does outside of work at Westview as "not a whole lot," and noted that he spends his time exercising, spending time with his partner, going on shopping trips and volunteering on a weekly basis. Trevor is in his 30s, and, like Hailey, has a partner at home and no dependents.

Leisure activities have a lesser presence in other interviewees' descriptions of work-life balance. In particular, participants with dependents described limited time for

pursuing leisure activities because they are so busy with caregiving demands. For example, Joyce is a manager in the Accounting and Finance department. She is in her 40s, and has a partner and two younger children at home. In describing her work-life balance, Joyce's comments indicate that she is very busy both at work and at home. She noted that most of her relaxation time is spent with her kids, and that she does not get much time to spend alone or with her husband. In an interview with Laura, a specialized staff-level employee in the Safety department, a similar lack of time for leisure emerged. Laura has a partner who does not live with her, and she has both childcare and eldercare responsibilities in her life. In our interview, she described making plans to relax and watch a television program with her kids, who are teenagers, at the end of the day:

I'm not the type of person to sit around and watch the television, but when you're at home, even those things you're doing there, it's relaxing to be there and be able to finally get your dishes done at 8pm [laughs]. And spending quality time with the children, it's like there's certain things we like to watch and like last night...I got home like twenty-after-nine from visiting my mother and ... You have to plan those times where...you relax.

Comments from both Joyce and Laura illustrate how leisure activities can be sacrificed in work-life balance for people who have to juggle paid employment with demanding caregiving roles in their personal lives.

### ***Caregiving***

Many of the participants in my case study have caregiving roles. At 59%, more than half of the survey respondents indicated that they are responsible for providing some kind of care, including childcare, eldercare, and other care (Figure 2). In line with survey

findings, 7 of the 15 interviewees indicated having responsibility for dependents, including infants, young children, teenagers, children with disabilities, aging but fairly independent parents, and pets. Regardless of what kind of caregiving roles the participants have, they described managing these outside of their working schedules in the mornings, evenings and on the weekends. The interviewees described walking their dogs in the morning before work, visiting elderly parents in the evenings, and taking children on outings during the weekends.

Interviewees' descriptions suggest that caregiving roles can be very demanding, especially if workers have regular responsibilities for dependents. This matters for how they can participate in other activities. For example, Stacey is a staff-level employee in the Environmental department. She typically works 40 or more hours a week, and travels regularly in her role. Stacey is in her late 30s, and has a partner and a young child at home. Balancing her job with her family responsibilities makes for a regularly busy schedule. As Stacey describes, caring for her young child requires substantial time and attention and is an organizing feature of her life outside of paid work:

We get home about 5-5:30pm. Some days my little one has swimming lessons and other things after work, so it might be 6:30 before we get home...And so then you make supper, and then it is bath time. Basically you're flat out until 9:30pm.

Other interviewees with dependents, especially younger children, described similarly busy mornings and evenings. Joyce, Accounting and Finance department manager, has two children at home under the age of ten. In our interview, she described the responsibility she feels to get involved with her kids at home in the evenings after work, wanting to make sure they are "engaged" and not just "watching TV all evening."

Mentioned in Chapter 2, literature suggests that caregiving demands are greatest on parents when children are younger (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009; Kahn et al., 2014).

In addition to those with young children at home, five of the interviewees had older children, ranging in age from early teens to mid-twenties. These parents described somewhat different caregiving responsibilities than those with younger kids. For instance, Roxy is a staff-level employee in the Information Systems department, who is married and has two teenage children at home. She described her caregiving role as involving “lots of running around” with her children to school and work and other activities. Eugene, a staff-level employee in the Human Resources department, has two teenage children at home as well. In his busy schedule, Eugene notes that in the evening time, he is “usually doing something to help them in one form or fashion, either [with their] studies, or photocopying or computer stuff; this, that, and the other thing.”

Caregiving experiences differ again for other employees. For example, two interviewees spoke of caring for a dependent with special needs, which requires a high level of attention while at home. As well, one interviewee described regular eldercare responsibilities, and two others indicated that they have occasional eldercare demands. For these employees, eldercare involves visiting with and attending medical appointments with an aging parent. Lastly, an unexpected kind of caregiving that emerged in interviews is pet care. Pet care is not often included in discussions of caregiving or work-life balance, and in developing her definition of “work,” Glucksmann (1995) specifically pointed to pet care as a “substantial non-economic activity” (p. 70). As one interviewee asserted, pets are dependents, too:

I say [we have] no dependents cause you always think kids, but we have animals, two cats and two dogs....So we got to look after them, make sure they get exercise and feed them and all that.

Three interviewees described taking care of their pets as a regular, fairly inflexible commitment that they accommodate in their lives. Outside of providing basic care needs, such as feeding a pet, participants spoke about the importance of maintaining physical fitness with pets, by making time in the morning before work, and/or in the evening after work, to walk or run with dogs. While of course different than the labour typically involved in childcare or eldercare, pet care still consumes time and energy and is a major activity in work-life balance for some employees.

In general, interviewees' descriptions of caregiving suggest that this is a labour-intensive, time-consuming, and inflexible demand. Just how much time and energy is involved with caregiving roles became especially evident from interviewing Westview employees who do not have these demands. These individuals reported having more time for themselves and their personal interests, and seemed less busy overall. A telling finding is that none of the interviewees without dependents expressed any real strain on their work-life balance. Some interviewees without dependents were quick to note that they did not have the "burden" of caregiving responsibilities. One participant noted, "My work-life balance is pretty good [...] because I have no dependents. That makes it easier." Ivanna, a younger female staff member not in a management role, describes her temporal freedom for paid work in comparison to someone with children:

Some days if I want to stay later [at work] to get something done, I can, where someone with children wouldn't be able to. So my work-life balance is okay from my standpoint.

Those without responsibilities for caregiving described their personal lives as generally less busy and filled with more personal interests or hobbies.

### ***Physical fitness***

Another key activity for the Westview employees is physical fitness. This activity is not discussed in much literature on work-life balance, and the participants' emphasis on physical fitness was not anticipated and was not included as a survey option (Figure 2). However, many of the interviewees spoke of physical exercise as a key part of their work-life balance. As an example, in response to a question about any challenges or obstacles in his work-life balance, interviewee Joseph noted:

There shouldn't be [any problems with work-life balance], because there is a facility here in the building that we can go and I'm sure that if I went to my supervisor and manager, I could go to the weight room downstairs and work out any time at all.

Other interviewees similarly described fitness in a way that suggested they view it as intimately related to their work-life balance. Several of the interviewees described regularly undertaking physical fitness activities in their personal lives, such as walking, jogging, rowing, biking, working out, and participating in recreational sports such as hockey and ultimate Frisbee. In general, the interviewees who engage in these activities described pursuing them outside of their employment (like the other activities so far discussed), such as in the mornings before work, during lunchtimes, in the evenings after work, and on the weekends.

Some of the participants exercise on a daily or weekly basis, while others find they cannot always pursue fitness activities as much as they would like. For example, Stacey, a staff-level employee in the Environmental department, suggested that her caregiving responsibilities leave her with less time capacity for physical fitness:

You don't get time, or at least in our situation, you don't get time to go to the gym anymore. You don't get time to exercise, things like that. So things that I used to do on a regular basis, hike, kayak, and go to the gym and these sorts of things, we just don't do anymore. We don't have time. By the time we get home from work, and make supper, and it's play time and bath time...so that sort of thing. So even though the work-life balance is okay, the amount of time you have for yourself to actually get some exercise, look after yourself, that's not there.

In general, the participants with intensive caregiving responsibilities described less capacity for fitness activities.

Alternatively, those who have more time for themselves and for leisure also have more time for fitness. Interviewee Ivanna of the Accounting and Finance department, who is in her mid-20s, is single and does not have any dependents, described exercising regularly, participating in local recreational events, and playing on sports teams. Another interviewee, Peter, is a manager in the Safety department and works over 50 hours a week in this role. He is married and has no dependents. In describing his work-life balance, Peter noted that he goes for a walk every morning before work, "religiously," without fail. He described the value of physical fitness and health to create a balance with the long hours he works at Westview. In his words, in order to combat stress, he "lives well and socializes well," which involves a physically active lifestyle. Another example is Hailey, a staff-level employee in the Human Resources department, who also described a regular fitness routine. She works approximately 45 hours a week in her job, has a partner at

home and no dependents. When asked to describe her work-life balance, she questioned back, “[you mean]… getting to the gym, seeing family and friends?” In the mornings before work, or in the evenings after work, Hailey attends sessions at a local gym with her personal trainer. Apparently, physical fitness – like spending time with family and friends – is a key activity in her work-life balance.

### ***Volunteering and post-secondary education***

Lastly, a few of my case study participants reported undertaking volunteering and education activities in their personal lives. Of the sample, 18% of survey respondents and three interviewees indicated that they do volunteer work (Figure 2). These interviewees described their volunteer work as a weekly commitment; one discussed doing his volunteer work on the weekends, like other personal activities, but this was not the case for the other two interviewees. Steve, who works in a management role in the Information Systems department, volunteers on a weekly basis, but during work hours. Steve is in his 50s, and has a partner and two dependents at home. He described being given time off from his regular workday to attend meetings for a volunteer group that is involved in an area of personal interest to him. Similarly, Trevor, who works in a supervisory position in the Human Resources department, spoke of volunteering with a morning breakfast program one day a week. On those days, Trevor comes into work a little later than usual. Like Steve, this volunteer time is approved by a manager at Westview, and he does not have to make it up later. Interestingly, and unlike the other activities described above,

Westview employees may pursue volunteer activities during instead of outside of their employment schedules.

A small number of individuals in the study sample also were pursuing or had recently completed some form of post-secondary education while working full-time at Westview. Three survey respondents, and 3 of the 15 interviewees, reported balancing part-time school with work at Westview. Interviewees described attending weekly classes, completing assignments, and studying for tests for part-time school programs. They each spoke of managing their educational pursuits outside of their full-time employment with Westview, studying and completing assignments in the evenings during the week, and on weekends.

Kate and Ivanna are both females in their 20s, and are without dependents. Reflecting on her work-life balance in the past couple of years, Kate observed, I had school, so that was a big part of my life up until [recently]. I was doing two courses at a time, part-time, so that was two nights a week that I was doing that...it was a lot.

Another example is Eugene, a staff-level employee of the Human Resources department. Eugene is older than Kate, and has dependents at home. He is currently enrolled in a part-time education program in addition to his full-time job at Westview.

A regular day...Typically I start work at 9:00 in the morning, having dropped the children off at school. I work 'til 5:30 um, then pop home and sorry, I should've prefixed that by saying that I am up at 6 exercising at 6:30 for about 45 minutes, um, usually outdoors so I'm then in the house before the children are out of bed...Take them to school, work 9:00 to 5:30, come home have supper, then back in the office at 6:30, and then typically work 'til 9:30... each night is study and it's not work. Although...and it's happened recently, what's happened is the work has started to filter into the evening time in the office. And so I often don't hit the actual study books until probably about 7 or so. But I really try to do about two hours minimum of study every night.

From Monday to Thursday, when Eugene finishes his workday in the evening, he heads back to the office to study for school, usually from 6:30pm – 9:30pm. As well, he spends eight hours on Saturdays studying and completing assignments. Overall, the interviewees' descriptions indicate that attending school part-time is a labour-intensive and time-consuming, like caregiving. Kate, Ivanna and Eugene discussed balancing their education with paid employment by making sacrifices in other areas, such as leisure time.

This review provides a comprehensive, if brief, snapshot of the many elements of Westview employees' work-life balance. Ultimately, these findings suggest that the participants have a range of demands and interests, both in their jobs and in their personal lives. To explore the workers' experiences of work-life balance more closely, further analysis was done on different groups of employees, including managers/supervisors and staff-level employees, younger and older/newer and more tenured employees, and women and men. The sample numbers for these categories are quite small, though interesting differences and similarities still do emerge in how the groups approach paid employment and home life, and how they go about balancing them together.

### **Work-life balance of managers/supervisors and staff-level employees**

Literature suggests that experiences of work-life balance may vary by organizational rank, between higher- and lower-level employees (Crompton & Lyonette, 2011; Falter Mennino et al., 2005). As a group, the six managers/supervisors in my study have different roles at Westview and have diverse interests and demands in their personal lives. The managers/supervisors include three men and three women, and they range in

age from late 20s to mid-50s. Two of the six are over the age of 41 and have dependents at home. The four others do not have dependents; three of them are ages 40 and younger, and one is older. Some are interested in fitness and some are not, some do a lot of housework and others do little, and their leisure activities differ. In the other group, there are nine participants in staff-level positions. These employees range in age from mid-20s to mid-50s. Of the nine, six have dependents and three do not. Most of those with dependents are over the age of 41, except for one, and those without dependents range from their mid-20s to their mid-40s. The participants in staff-level positions also have a variety of different activities in their personal lives.

While there is diversity within the group of managers/supervisors, and within the group of staff-level employees, there are some general trends that emerge which point to the possible role of workplace rank in work-life balance. There are participants in both groups that are busy with their employment with Westview and in their personal lives, and there are also participants from both groups who do not seem to be experiencing strained work-life balance. However, in rating their work-life balance, survey respondents in management/supervisory positions have slightly lower ratings overall than staff-level employees. By examining survey and interview questions regarding the participants' work demands, some notable differences emerge between managers/supervisors and staff-level employees which may help to explain this. Specifically, workloads and expectations around work hours differ somewhat between these two groups. For example, survey findings indicate that those in management roles work slightly longer hours than those in staff-level positions. Among the survey respondents in staff-level roles, the largest group

indicated working between 31-40 hours a week (68%; n = 17). Conversely, among the managers, the largest group reported working between 41-50 hours a week (50%; n = 6), with some even reporting workweeks between 51-60 hours (n = 2). In line with this, all interviewees in management and supervisory positions indicated that they regularly work beyond their standard 37.5 hours a week.

In a study on work-life balance experiences of managers in a government organization, management sciences researchers Ford and Collinson (2011) argued that employment contracts for managers often incorporate informal expectations that they will work long hours, beyond what would constitute a regular full-time schedule (p. 258). That is, there are informal expectations that managers will put in more time than staff-level employees. One interviewee, Ivanna, commented on her observation that, while she puts in extra time during peak periods, those in higher ranking positions in the Accounting and Finance and other departments seem to work excessively long hours. She explains:

I know there are a lot of people, especially in [my department], that work extreme hours, like 7-7, 9-9, like twelve plus hours. They are higher levels, and certain times during the year we are really busy and a lot of people work long hours. During those periods, what are your options?

Ivanna's point applies to Peter, a manager in the Safety department. Peter typically works about 50 hours a week, but noted in our interview that this can expand: "There are certain times, especially around board meetings [...] there's a lot of paperwork, reports and all that. So you end up putting a bit more effort in during those times."

While the findings show that workers in management/supervisory positions tend to have high workloads and put in long hours, many employees in staff-level positions at

Westview do the same. This is especially true for those who are in specialized positions or, as they were described by some interviewees, “one-of’s.” Six of the nine interviewees in staff-level positions described regularly working hours in excess of 37.5 per week. As well, as discussed above, several of the staff-level participants commented on the steady flow of work coming from the top-down, and the expectations they face to take on new responsibilities and tasks regardless of their existing workload. This is perhaps related to the high workloads that managers have, as they may delegate some extra work to their already busy staff.

### **Work-life balance of younger and older/newer and more tenured employees**

Research on work-life balance does not often explore experiences by age. In my study, age does not emerge as a strong factor in how participants rated their work-life balance. As well, interview findings indicate that employees of different ages seem to face similar high expectations, put in extra time on the job, and meet other working norms at Westview. For instance, both younger and older employees, and newer and tenured employees, spoke of high workloads at Westview. However, these employees described approaching their work at Westview differed somewhat.

In my case study, the participants over the age of 41 were more likely to have a dependent at home, a finding which is in agreement with current Canadian trends (Carter, 2006). For example, among the ten interviewees age 41 and older, seven have dependents at home. The younger participants, under the age of 41, were less likely to have dependents at home. For example, among the five interviewees younger than 40

years of age, only one has a dependent. As well, most managers/supervisors in my study are over the age of 41. In some cases, but not all, age was directly related to career stage, as most of the younger participants were earlier in their careers.

In general, the younger and, in some cases, newer, employees described their workloads at Westview in relation to career building. Hailey is a young staff member in the Human Resources department who is early into her career. Hailey's description of her paid work indicated that she enjoys her job and is very committed to it. She displays this commitment by making herself available to her job at all times. When asked about checking her work email while she is off-site, Hailey responded that she does not resent working outside of regular hours, such as on the weekends: "I like to check my email. So, if something's in my email, and if I can answer quickly, I'm certainly gonna do it. I'm not gonna hold someone up because it's not Monday at 8am." Similar to Hailey, a comment from another younger employee, Kate, explains why newer employees may be interested in treating their employment as a main priority in their lives:

I think when you take on new roles and responsibilities and stuff, you can kind of get lost for a while. But I think you need to do that also to advance in your career. And I'm fairly early into mine.

For Kate, and likely for Hailey and other new employees too, putting in long hours and taking on more responsibilities is an important part of career progression. Other interviewees made similar comments which suggest that it is common practice for younger and/or newer employees to devote themselves to their jobs to become established and to make important career advances. Interviewee Steve is in his 50s, and works in a supervisory role in the larger department of Information Systems at Westview. Steve has

put in over thirty years at Westview and Tech Inc. In discussing changes to his work-life balance over time, Steve commented that while his work-life balance is pretty good today, he did “the extreme overtime thing” early in his career in order to become established.

Expectations for newer and/or younger workers to accommodate changing workloads throughout the year is communicated by managers like Peter, who demonstrates his own commitment to his job by putting in long hours. In a comment about how he manages his staff, Peter notes that some of his younger staff members are not interested in prioritizing their jobs the way he does:

We’ve got a fairly young team out there so I look at someone who is 25 years old, or 27 years old, their work ethic or need for motivation... is very different from what mine is. I’m probably a workaholic type... where they’re like ‘4 or 4:30pm, we’re out of here.’ I struggle managing that.

Peter considers it a challenge to manage employees who leave the office when their workday has officially ended. He “struggles” to manage this, as it is at odds with his own behavior and perhaps with what he views as appropriate or desirable “workaholic” behavior at work. It may therefore be communicated to workers at Westview that putting in extra time and effort on the job has important links to security, recognition, promotion and other organizational rewards (Peterson, 2007). As researcher of organizations and management Tanya Carney (2009) put it, “social norms...dictate that rewards in employment should be given to those employees who can behave as ideal workers” (p. 117). Peter’s comment suggests that younger and/or newer workers are not putting in sufficient extra time at work, but descriptions of work hours from younger interviewees such as Kate and Hailey suggest otherwise. This may reflect differences in the

participants' departments, or, alternatively, very high expectations on the part of the managers in this workplace.

The older and/or more tenured employees, like Peter, described devoting themselves to their jobs too, but not necessarily for career building reasons. An example of a longtime employee of Westview is Laura, who has worked with Tech Inc. and Westview for over twenty years in a staff-level position. She is in a small department, where she has a great deal of responsibility. She sometimes puts in more than 37.5 hours a week, and is responsive to her work through smartphone technology, which she carries all the time. In responding to a question about any changes in workload over her career, Laura commented that her workload has increased over time, which she believes "comes with experience and knowledge base." As such, for older and/or more tenured staff, workloads may be high because those workers are seen as sources of knowledge and experience in the workplace, which other employees draw on to accomplish their own work.

### **Work-life balance of women and men**

As discussed in some detail in Chapter 2, literature suggests that work-life balance experiences of women and men may be very different (Fudge, 2011; Gerson, 1985; Kanter, 1977; Krull & Sempruch, 2011; Rapoport et al, 2002; Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2010). Specifically, research has found that women have historically faced greater challenges in juggling their disproportionate responsibility for family caregiving with the demands of paid work (Damaske, 2011; Hochschild, 1997).

In this case study, women and men are almost equally represented. As a group, the women range in age from mid-20s to mid-50s. Four of the seven women have dependents at home, and three do not. The women have diverse work-life balance activities. Fairly similarly, the men range in age from early 30s to mid-50s. Four of the eight men have dependents at home, and four do not. The men, like the women, have diverse activities in their personal lives. Interestingly, in response to the scalar survey question querying self-ratings of work-life balance, women and men answered similarly. Female survey respondents had slightly lower ratings of work-life balance than males overall, though cross-tabulation analysis does not suggest any significant differences in ratings of work-life balance by gender. It is worth noting that in their ratings of work-life balance, the findings from the female respondents have a wider range than those from the male respondents: Female survey respondents reported work-life balance ratings from poor (17%), to satisfactory (33%) to good (33%), to very good (17%). Somewhat differently, male ratings of work-life balance are more concentrated in the satisfactory (40%) and good (35%) categories.

Unlike between managers/supervisors and staff-level employees, and younger and older/newer and more tenured employees, there are few differences in the paid work experiences of women and men in the case study. The female and male employees work similar hours and have comparable levels of job responsibility. Overall, both women and men described their work as challenging, and emphasized the importance of meeting their job demands. Still, it is worth noting again that women are underrepresented in management, leadership and executive roles at Westview, positions which, according to

interview data, entail somewhat higher workloads and longer hours. This may reflect a difference in the levels of job commitment that women and men at Westview can actually meet.

In general, differences in the work-life balance experiences of women and men seem to be based instead on the activities and responsibilities they have in their personal lives. Specifically, findings from my case study indicate that women and men have somewhat different roles in the family and home which matter for their overall experience of work-life balance. Specific details on workers' time use were not gathered in this case study, though findings still suggest a general discrepancy between how women and men share domestic work. Women take on a greater share of the housework and caregiving responsibilities than men do. Regarding housework, survey responses indicate that doing housework is a time-consuming activity for 94% of the female respondents, compared to three-quarters of the male respondents. Interviewees' spoke about their divisions of housework in a more complicated way. For example, most interviewees who are in a couple ( $n = 14$ ) described sharing their housework equally with their partner, "fifty-fifty," as some of them put it. However, in further discussing their divisions of domestic work, participants' accounts revealed subtle gender differences in housework.

In general, divisions of domestic labour were characterized by women taking on more of the unpaid domestic work and more routine and traditionally feminine tasks such as cleaning, and men taking on more occasional and traditionally masculine tasks – as some interviewees described it, "outside work" – such as home maintenance and lawn and garden work. For example, in explaining how she and her male partner share

housework, Hailey noted that her partner “takes care of all outside chores [like] lawn mowing, recycling, garbage day.” Somewhat different from Hailey’s division, other participants described alternating or mixing up housework tasks. Wayne, a male in his 30s, noted that he and his partner alternate housework chores. Still, his explanation has some evidence of a more traditional division:

I do a lot of the cooking. We mix it up a bit. I usually do most of it. The cleaning, she does most of it. Repairs and stuff I usually do. Renovations and that sometimes we do a bit of both, mostly it’s me but she’ll help out on certain things.

Wayne takes on some housework, like cooking, and his female partner does the cleaning. Their division falls along traditional gendered patterns as he does the “repairs and stuff” as well as most of the “renovations.” Like Wayne, interviewee Stacey described overlap in housework and caregiving with her partner. In a discussion about the division of housework and childcare, she notes that they share in some chores, but not others: “housework and garden work is shared pretty equally at our place. Though my husband does all of the snow clearing and household repairs! However, I tend to do the majority of the cooking and most of the childcare.” Stacey’s description of how she and her partner organize housework fits more obviously with historical gendered divisions of family labour.

Like housework, caregiving is a gendered activity for Westview employees. In terms of actually having dependents, women and men in my study are quite similar. Of the eight interviewees with dependents, four are women and four are men. Of the 23 survey respondents with dependents, there is a greater number of males ( $n = 13$ ) than females ( $n = 10$ ). However, interview descriptions revealed that the women and men

undertake different kinds of caregiving responsibilities. In general, the four male interviewees with dependents spoke much less about their caregiving demands than their female counterparts. In interviews, the women with dependents generally described undertaking the more repetitive and often labour-intensive tasks such as bathing and educating children, while men spoke more about general caregiving involvement (e.g., “I spend time with the kids”). It is no accident that most descriptions and quotes regarding caregiving provided earlier in this chapter came from female participants in my study. Women seem to take on the burden of the “second shift” (Hochschild, 1989) and men can be involved, but it is usually in less intensive ways. As one participant, the mother of a young child, who was reflecting on the division of childcare between she and her partner, put it:

Even today – and things are improving today, and dads are more and more involved and men are doing a lot more around the house with regard to cooking and cleaning and childcare and all of that, but – when the rubber hits the road, and when a child gets sick or has a doctor appointment, generally speaking, it’s Mom. And that’s just the way it is. Even if Dad is willing to take time off work and go home, usually the little one wants Mom.

This interviewee points out that her role as the primary caregiving persists, despite the involvement of her male spouse in family responsibilities. Of note is that of the four employees in the sample with young children (who may require the most direct caregiving), three were women. However, these findings do align with other recent research on gendered caregiving (Marshall, 2010).

The types and amounts of unpaid domestic work people carry out matters for their work-life balance. The men with dependents have fewer caregiving responsibilities, and are freer to pursue other activities in their personal lives. An illustrative example of this is

interviewee Eugene, a staff-level employee in the Human Resources department, who is married and has two teenage children at home. His description of his work-life balance, provided above, spoke to the long hours he works at Westview, his work for post-secondary school, his pursuit of physical fitness every morning, and volunteer commitments once a week. In his own words, Eugene spends “about 45 minutes” a night with his children, helping them in some way with their homework or hobbies. Eugene is able to pursue these many activities because he is not bound by time- and labour-consuming domestic labour. The division of housework between Eugene and his partner reflects a historically gendered pattern, in which his partner “does most of the cooking and cleaning, while I do most of the house maintenance and yard work.” Eugene’s wife prepares meals for him and spends more time helping the children during the workweek and on Saturdays so that he can move from paid work to school work to exercising to volunteering seamlessly, mostly without the interruption of housework and caregiving. In contrast, the women in my study who have dependents and other demanding responsibilities at home are more time-stressed, and have more limited opportunities for personal relaxation, leisure activities and physical fitness. This is in line with theories by Glucksmann (1982), Kanter (1977) and others which suggests that gender plays a key role in shaping the public and private spheres, and how individuals can navigate between them.

## **Discussion**

My case study participants have unique work-life balance experiences, and there are many possible dynamics to explore within my sample. The description of participants' elements of paid work and personal life, and how they juggle these together, provides an overview of work-life balance for these workers. The brief discussions of workplace rank, age/tenure, and gender have shed some light on the factors at play in workers' experiences of work-life balance. Importantly, a common pattern emerges in how the participants described going about organizing their work-life balance.

Westview employees have a range of demands and interests in their personal lives and in their paid jobs. Some employees work extra hours regularly in their jobs and others do not; some carry company-issued smartphones that keep them connect to their work and others do not; some have responsibilities for dependents at home and others do not; some work on their physical fitness on a daily basis and others do not. Some feel too busy while others have an abundance of leisure time. Managers/supervisors and staff-level employees both undertake high workloads at Westview, though managers/ supervisors put in slightly longer hours overall. Younger and newer employees go beyond their standard job requirements to help build their careers, and older and more tenured workers devote themselves as their level of responsibility and knowledge grows over time. Women juggle somewhat more demanding roles in housework and childcare than men. Most participants are satisfied with their work-life balance, and smaller groups are very satisfied or very dissatisfied. It is somewhat surprising that only a relatively small group of the participants in my study reported distress or discontentment with work-life

balance, given that much recent literature, as well as lay discourse, suggests that workers today often feel a great pressure in managing many roles and experience some at risk of exhaustion, stress and burnout (Damaske, 2011; Grzywacz, Carlson, & Shulkin, 2008; Halpern, 2005; Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2010).

Overall, all the participants in my case study explained their unique experiences of work-life balance, how they undertake different activities on a daily basis, in a similar way. That is: Westview employees – managers/supervisors and staff-level, women and men, and younger and older/newer and more tenured alike – spoke of managing their work-life balance by always fulfilling their (often demanding) employment responsibilities, and pursuing their personal interests and roles generally outside of their jobs while they were not working. Applying ideas from the TSOL framework, participants' work-life balance reflects a wider social organization that values and prioritizes the public sphere of paid work over the private sphere of personal life (Waring, 1999).

Participants' descriptions of work-life balance construct paid work as a rigid and inflexible activity that they treat as a priority. Westview employees work their full-time hours in the office-based environment, carrying out projects and meeting objectives. The employees also honour more informal working norms at Westview. Interviewees described undertaking high and growing job pressures and workloads, putting in time beyond the required 37.5 hours a week, carrying Blackberry technology or at least checking email on personal computers at home, and traveling sometimes with little notice. These features of employment at Westview contribute to a quite demanding work

environment, with expectations by the employer for meeting high volumes of work and putting in extra time when required. In alignment with the arguably masculine formal structure of employment at Westview (noted in Chapter 4) - the full-time, office-based environment – it appears that the more informal ways of working at Westview, the workloads and expectations, also reflect a historically gendered organization (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2000). While many described high workloads and demanding jobs in general, none of the participants described taking actions to address their work demands, such as reducing their time at work, having conversations about lessening their workloads, or pushing back on work travel demands. In fact, the workers seem to accept the demanding nature of working at Westview. Examples of staff-level employees coming in to work on Saturdays to handle their workloads, and examples of newer/younger employees putting in extra time and energy at paid work in order to build their careers, illustrate the workers' approaches to meeting and even exceeding their job expectations at Westview.

To successfully meet their employment demands, Westview employees undertake their personal interests and roles outside of their jobs. Housework, leisure, caregiving, fitness, and education are activities which interviewees spoke of carrying out around and outside of their employment schedules. For instance, some interviewees described studying for exams in the evenings and on the weekends, others spoke of getting their children ready for daycare or school in the mornings and spending time with them in the evenings and on the weekends. Some described playing recreational sports and working on their physical fitness in the mornings before work, during lunchtimes, and in the

evenings and on weekends. The one exception to this general pattern was a couple of interviewees who described undertaking some volunteer work on weekdays, during regular working hours at Westview.

Findings from interviews suggest that the workers prioritize their jobs and meet high expectations at Westview, despite their sometimes challenged work-life balance. Even for those who indicated that their work-life balance is strained, none discussed a negative impact on their ability to meet the requirements and expectations of their jobs. As an example, interviewees who are or have been part-time students while working full-time described spending a lot of time and energy on their studies, making sacrifices in areas such as leisure and family, but not in their jobs. Similarly, the workers with young children who have very demanding caregiving roles at home still described the importance of meeting their employers' expectations and completing work by deadlines. Even the women with heavy workloads at home caring for young children described ensuring that they meet their employment demands. As literature suggests, women with children have historically faced the greatest challenges in finding a balance, and have been less able to meet the ideal working demands of employment (Hochschild, 1989; Gerson, 1985). In this study, all the workers seem to accommodate their demanding employment, and experience sacrifices or pressures in their personal life instead.

As discussed in Chapter 2, researchers have suggested that workers may be interested in acting as ideal workers in order to reap the related organizational rewards, such as promotions and job security (Coltrane, 2006). At Westview, employees may feel compelled to meet these ideal worker norms in order to prove commitment to, and

interest in, their jobs. Findings from previous research suggest workers may be interested in coming into the office on the weekends or staying late in evenings, to showcase their commitment to their jobs. As Lyon and Woodward (2004) put it, organizations may believe that “time functions as a crude proxy for performance and commitment” (p. 211). This has been called “presenteeism” (Walby, 2003, p. 10): The idea that being present in the workplace, or banking long hours, displays commitment, productivity and other desirable worker characteristics (Hebson & Cox, 2011, p. 182), which may be rewarded by employers (Peterson, 2007). Similarly, Westview employees may be willing to travel with little notice in order to advance within the Westview hierarchy. With the feminization, globalization and casualization of paid work described in Chapter 2, employers are increasingly interested in a mobile and flexible workforce and may therefore reward employees who can offer this (McDowell, 2005; Strangleman & Warren, 2008). For example, in a study of ideal worker norms in white-collar organizations in the United States, social science researchers Kelly, Ammons, Chermack and Moen (2010) suggest that a willingness to relocate or travel for work is an increasingly popular ideal worker norm (p. 283). Similarly, in a study of gender in high-level careers, Lyon and Woodward (2010) suggest that geographical mobility may be very important for career advancement (p. 213).

Westview employees’ dedication to paid work raises important questions about the kinds of workers that find and keep employment with Westview. Do rigid formal and informal demands of work in this organization weed out people who cannot or will not devote themselves to their jobs in these ways? While individual workers may yield

personal career advantages for abiding by the ideal working norms at Westview, this is ultimately to the advantage of the employer. Westview reaps positive business outcomes from workers who put in extra hours, high workloads, travel regularly. likely offers many business advantages to Westview.

Overall, this pattern of how the participants carry out work-life balance reflects the historical dominance of the public sphere over the private (Waring, 1999): Treating paid employment as an inflexible and dominant priority, and carrying out their other activities during non-work time, is a system that assigns greater value to paid work. A full-time workforce that prioritizes employment, operates within a historically masculine work structure, and, perhaps as a consequence, is required to undertake their personal activities in a more flexible manner.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed Westview employees' experiences of work-life balance. Survey and interview findings were provided to illustrate how the participants experience their employment at Westview, and the kinds of activities they undertake in their personal lives. It was argued that the employees' experiences generally reflect the formal structure of employment at Westview, including full-time hours and office-based work, but that the workers are also expected to manage the more informal expectations in the workplace, such as meeting deadlines through long hours. It was found that in their personal lives, Westview employees pursue housework, leisure, caregiving, education, volunteering, and fitness activities. To explore the workers' diverse experiences of work-

life balance in some more detail, there was a discussion of how higher- and lower-level employees, younger and older workers, and women and men undertake activities in their work-life balance.

Based on analysis of how the participants described their work-life balance, it was argued that Westview employees tend to organize their personal activities (such as school, caregiving and fitness), around and outside of their employment schedules and demands. The value and importance ascribed to paid employment by the participants, regardless of their work-life balance experiences, is a key finding in my case study. Organizing work-life balance in this way reflects the dominance and rigidity of paid employment, and the expectations for workers to treat activities their personal lives as secondary to their jobs.

So far, the formal structure of employment at Westview has been discussed, and employees' lived realities of work-life balance have been generally explored. From here, the next chapter will explore how workers actually engage in and experience the WLB initiatives at Westview, as they manage their work-life balance. How these provisions are accessed and taken up in practice illustrates how useful the workers find these provisions in addressing their actual work-life balance needs. It also provides important details on the workplace culture and norms around using these provisions.

## **Chapter 6: Westview Employees' Use of WLB Initiatives**

Moving from descriptions of the formal structure of employment at Westview and textual analyses of the WLB initiatives in Chapter 4, and the exploration in Chapter 5 of how the participants experience their employment at Westview and balance it with other activities, this chapter questions how the workers at Westview actually use the WLB initiatives in the workplace to manage their work-life balance. To organize this chapter and provide discussion on each of the WLB initiatives, I have grouped them according to their general take-up level by participants – including most popular, moderately popular, and least popular. For each provision, descriptions are given of who uses it and for what reason(s), and the workplace norms around them. These details help to illustrate workers' engagement in WLB initiatives, and how the provisions address some of their work-life balance needs. In addition to exploring take-up of the WLB initiatives, there is also a discussion of how the participants spoke about informal flexibility at Westview as an aid in their work-life balance. Based on the findings regarding how workers take up and experience the official WLB initiatives in practice, this chapter concludes with a critical discussion of how relevant the provisions are in addressing actual work-life balance needs and the role of workplace norms in governing how workers use them.

### **Workers' Experiences with WLB Initiatives at Westview**

How Westview employees engage in the workplace WLB initiatives was queried through both survey and interview questions. For instance, survey respondents were asked to select the WLB initiatives they have used at Westview, from a closed list with an

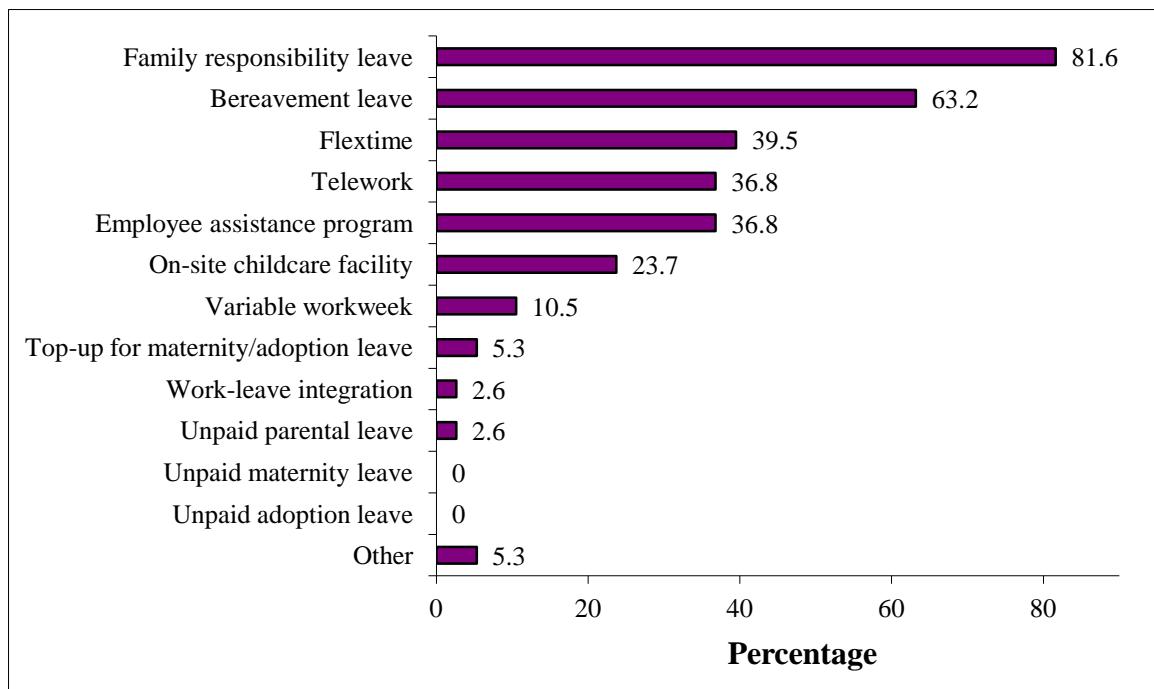
“other” option (Appendix D, questions 2-3). This survey data illustrates the more and less popular WLB initiatives (Figure 3). Interviewees were asked to describe their use of and experiences with each initiative from this list (Appendix I, questions 6-10). This gathered important details on how, when and why the participants engage in each WLB initiatives at Westview. Both survey and interview findings indicate that the participants engage in the available WLB initiatives at Westview to different degrees, and to address different work-life balance needs. In this chapter, the overall levels of engagement with each provision are first discussed. This is a useful way to explore the provisions, but popularity should not necessarily be equated with need. Popularity of WLB initiatives may be contingent on a number of factors, such as length of employment with Westview and other demographic details of the participants. Gathering details on which WLB initiatives are used by workers is therefore helpful only for conceptualizing the general take up of WLB initiatives in this workplace. Following this broader discussion, participants’ experiences with using each of the WLB initiatives are then described, beginning with the most popular. This exploration provides richer detail on how the workers use WLB initiatives in relation to their work-life balance needs, and they experience the workplace culture around these provisions in the workplace.

### **Participants’ engagement with WLB initiatives at Westview**

Participants engage in WLB initiatives at different levels, and survey and interview data suggest that some provisions more popular than others. The most popular WLB initiatives, in terms of use, are family responsibility leave and bereavement leave.

More moderately popular initiatives include flextime, telework, the EAP, the wellness program, and the on-site daycare. Finally, there are other WLB initiatives that only a few participants reported engaging in. The least popular provisions include variable workweek, educational leave, unpaid maternity leave, unpaid adoption leave, unpaid parental leave, work-leave integration for maternity leave, and top-up for maternity/adoption leave.

**Figure 3. Use of WLB Initiatives, Survey Respondents**



Survey and interview findings regarding popularity of initiatives mirror each other closely, with some minor differences. For example, a fairly sizeable group of survey respondents (37%), but only a small number of interviewees ( $n = 2$ ), reported having used

the EAP. Additionally, several interviewees described participating in the wellness program at Westview, and a small number spoke of engaging in educational leave; these provisions were included as survey options and therefore are not captured in Figure 3 (but are still discussed in this chapter).

### **Most popular WLB initiatives**

The two most utilized initiatives by the participants are family responsibility leave and bereavement leave, both official policies at Westview. As discussed in Chapter 4, the employees who qualify for access to these provisions, and the reasons for which they can use them – all family-related – are clearly outlined in the Westview Policy Manual (2012).

#### ***Family responsibility leave***

Eighty-two percent of survey respondents ( $n = 31$ ) and all 15 interviewees indicated having used family responsibility leave at Westview. Participants of various ages, those with and without dependents, and those in different departments all reported using this WLB initiative. Interviewees explained their reasons for using family responsibility leave, all of which align with the “family reasons” outlined in the official policy (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). For example, the interviewees described using family responsibility leave to take care of a sick child or other family member, to be there for a partner who was having surgery, and to bring another relative to a medical appointment. Most interviewees described the three days of paid time off per year as

helpful to them, especially when they have to manage short-term and/or unforeseen caregiving demands.

Managing childcare responsibilities is a central reason for which the participants use family responsibility leave. All participants in this study who have children reported having used this provision. Discussed in Chapter 5, childcare is a key activity in work-life balance for several of the participants (Figure 2). One example is interviewee Stacey, a woman in her mid-30s who works in the small-staffed Environmental department in a staff-level position. Stacey has a partner who also works full-time, and a young child at home. She described using family responsibility leave when her child is home sick, which, as she explained, can be a fairly common demand for any employee with young dependents:

We get family [responsibility] leave, but it's, I don't know, two or three days. Last year come mid-January, mine was gone. My little one had a bad cold, she was home from daycare for a few days, and that's it... family [responsibility] leave is gone. [When a child is sick], it's two or three days and then, of course, daycare has policies whereby children have to stay home until you know, they can't come in with fevers or if there's been vomiting, or that sort of thing. So, you can use up your family leave pretty quickly.

Stacey's comment suggests that this provision can be utilized by workers who have to take care of their children if they become sick, but that the length of family responsibility leave policy may be inadequate for dealing with all of their childcare needs.

This provision is used by participants with more occasional family or caregiving demands, too. While all of the survey respondents who had not used family responsibility leave ( $n = 7$ ) also do not have dependents, many of the interviewees without regular dependent care responsibilities spoke of availing of the family responsibility leave

initiative. This is the case for interviewee Hailey. She is in her mid-20s and is in a staff-level position at Westview in the Human Resources department. Hailey has a partner and no dependents at home, and she exercises regularly and pursues leisure time with her family and friends often. She gave an example of using family responsibility leave when a more occasional eldercare responsibility came up:

I've actually had to avail of family responsibility leave. We shipped our parents off on a vacation... so then everyone in our family had Nan. So people had to take her to medical appointments, I was able to avail of [family responsibility leave].

A similar example was given by another interviewee, Ivanna, who also does not have dependents. Ivanna is a single woman in her 20s, who is a staff member in the Accounting and Finance department. Until recently, Ivanna was also in school part-time. Now, she balances paid work with spending time with her family and friends and exercising regularly. Like Hailey, Ivanna has used family responsibility leave during an irregular and occasional family situation. She described availing of this WLB initiative when a relative of hers was in serious condition:

My relative was at [the local hospital], and she was on life-support, and we had big decisions to make. I found it too hard to be at work, so my supervisor was like: 'Ivanna, use your family responsibility leave.' So I used two days.

In this case, Ivanna was experiencing an unforeseen family crisis, and she found the family responsibility leave initiative was very useful in allowing her to take a short time off from work to deal with a difficult situation. While Ivanna did not comment on the adequacy of the length of leave, like Stacey, it could be suggested from this example that two days may be considered quite a short time to deal with a range of possible family caregiving responsibilities.

Evidently, family responsibility leave may be used by employees who have quite different sets of caregiving/family demands, like Stacey, Hailey and Ivanna. It is notable that all of the examples provided so far of participants using family responsibility leave are from women. Women and men reported similar engagement in this WLB initiative, but the women gave greater descriptions of how they used family responsibility leave. In fact, none of the male interviewees ( $n = 8$ ) gave details about why they used this provision, whereas six out of the seven female interviewees provided detailed reasoning and examples of their use, all relating to direct caregiving roles. This is perhaps also reflective of women's greater responsibility for caregiving and childcare specifically found in my study and in other research (Connell, 2009; Hochschild, 1989).

Noted in Chapter 4, there are formal rules around how Westview employees can access family responsibility leave. In addition to the availability of formal conditions, literature suggests that a supportive workplace cultures around WLB initiatives is very important in order for workers to adequately access these provisions. All the interviewees in my case study are officially entitled to three days a year of family responsibility leave. Most interviewees' comments indicate that they can access this provision with ease when they require it. In requesting access to this provision, some of the interviewees described their supervisor or manager as being "really good about it." Studies have found that supervisor's attitudes about work-life balance are an important mediator in how employees can access formalized initiatives (Allen, 2001; Brunetto et al., 2010). One interviewee theorized that managers or supervisors who can directly relate to employees' family needs may be more supportive of them:

Our [manager/supervisor] is a parent of young children, so really sensitive to all the demands...you can empathize and you can understand and you can also connect a lot better...and if you have individuals who haven't had that experience...they may not necessarily have the ability to make the connection and see the priority, and therefore they may give it token support.

This suggests that the work environment at Westview is supportive of this provision and employee engagement in it. Only one interviewee commented on a barrier presented by their manager. She described how her manager has asked too many questions around employee requests for family responsibility leave. She explains, "I don't think that's appropriate at all times. Like maybe I'm going somewhere to do something that I don't feel like sharing with my manager." This particular example illustrates how Westview employees could be unofficially discouraged from requesting family responsibility leave, despite it being a provision they are entitled to.

Related to the informal workplace dynamics around access to this provision, interviewing provided details about how the workers are informally expected to use this provision in relation to their paid work demands. Clearly, family responsibility leave helps some workers to handle short-term, family-related events in their lives. Even though this leave is quite short-term, interviewees' descriptions of using the provision indicated that leave from work must not interfere with meeting overall employment objectives and fulfilling paid work responsibilities. Specifically, some interviewees' comments indicate that when they take time off from their jobs by using family responsibility leave, they ensure that their work productivity does not decline. In a discussion of what it is like to take a short time off work to care for her child who is sick, Stacey noted:

If I have to take a day [off], then I'm going to ensure that whatever is supposed to be done that day gets done. Whether it's done on the weekend or in the evening, or you skip lunch, whatever, you get it done. And most people will do that. I mean, you've got a work plan, you've got your responsibilities, you get it done.

Stacey's explanation of taking time off work suggests that she can leave her job for a short time to tend to her family demands, but that she makes up any missed time and works longer hours upon her return. Part of her explanation – “you've got a workplan, you've got your responsibilities, you get it done” – aligns with the objective-based style of management at Westview that many of the participants described, discussed in the previous chapter. Stacey's example suggests that work objectives are quite inflexible and are not to be adjusted and must be met, even when employees using a provision meant to help them fulfill their family-related responsibilities. The workplace culture may therefore encourage workers to use family responsibility leave when they need it for their family needs, but to always meet their employment demands regardless.

### ***Bereavement leave***

The bereavement leave initiative is also utilized by many participants: 63% of survey respondents ( $n = 24$ ) and 5 of the 15 interviewees reported taking this leave. Like family responsibility leave, Westview employees of different departments, various ages, gender and workplace rank all reported engaging in bereavement leave. Use of this WLB initiative is therefore quite broad across the Westview workforce. Again, recognizing that family activities are common among participants in this case study, the relatively high level of engagement in this family-related provision is not too surprising. While many

have used it, most interviewees did not speak at length about their experiences with this provision, perhaps due to the sensitive nature of the leave. Still, the five interviewees who have used it described feeling supported in availing of bereavement leave when they needed it, and the others, who had not used it, still spoke of it in very positive terms.

Described in Chapter 4, the official bereavement leave policy does outline the conditions under which Westview employees can engage in this provision, and it is quite specific about the kinds of relationships which are eligible. One interviewee commented on how the policy parameters affected him. In this example, Westview evaluated a request for bereavement by sticking to the official policy. Joseph is in a staff-level position in the Human Resources department, where he puts in upwards of 45-50 hours a week in his role. He does not have dependents at home. He described not being granted bereavement leave following the death of someone with whom he was close:

Bereavement [leave], yeah, I think that's a given. I think you need that, I've never had to use it, other than one time. You know what, and that irked me for a little while... My girlfriend at the time, her grandmother passed away... but I wasn't covered. [...] I found I was closer to her grandmother than some of my relationships [outlined] in the contract. I was a bit [pissed off] about that [...] I called up my supervisor, and voiced my displeasure and I wasn't happy at the time. And I called who was, at that time, the CEO... I wasn't happy that I couldn't get out. Cause I thought more of her than some of my relationships that were in the contract. Anyway, through the jigs and reels, I really respect [the CEO], he called me back, and you know what, he told me the truth. He told me how it was. And he didn't agree with it either, but like, his hands were tied. And so I appreciated the call back from him. To the day, I still look at that and say you know, 'thanks for doing it.' Anyway, that was one of the things and I never forgot it... In the contract it's black and white. And if you break it for one, you gotta bend for all. I understand that, so I'm over it now.

In this case, Joseph's request to take some paid time off from work to mourn the death of his partner's grandmother was denied because this particular relationship is not included

in the policy, which, as he says, “is black and white” regarding the losses for which paid leave is warranted. This example suggests that, in practice, employee access to bereavement leave at Westview is in accordance with the official policy.

These most popular initiatives of family responsibility leave and bereavement leave both offer Westview employees a short-term leave from one’s job to manage an occasional or sometimes unpredictable family event or need. In general, findings suggest that these provisions unfold in practice generally as they are formally offered: Participants described using the provisions in accordance with what is stated in the official policies, and their examples of how they request and access these WLB initiatives indicate that the formal conditions around use are enforced. The relevance of these family-specific initiatives to Westview employees’ work-life balance needs may contribute to their popularity. As discussed in Chapter 5, many of the participants reported undertaking family-related activities outside of their paid employment, such as childcare (Figure 2). As well, the provisions are both fairly accessible to workers and encouraged for use. As was suggested in Chapter 4, these short-term leave programs have few implications for workplace functioning, which may contribute to greater internal support for using them. Moreover, in practice, the workers take measures to ensure that even these short-term absences from the office do not negatively impact workplace productivity.

### **Moderately popular WLB initiatives**

Other WLB initiatives at Westview are moderately popular, with some participants reporting use. The moderately popular initiatives consist of official policies,

programs, and working practices alike: Several of my case study participants indicated having used flextime, telework, the EAP, wellness program, and the on-site daycare at Westview.

### ***Flextime***

Flextime is a fairly common working practice at Westview, with 40% of survey respondents and just over half of the 15 interviewees ( $n = 8$ ) reporting having used it. Similarities emerged between how managers and staff, and younger and older participants reported and described engaging in flextime schedules. Survey findings indicate a greater percentage of male survey respondents used flextime (45%;  $n = 9$ ) than female respondents (33%;  $n = 6$ ), though more female interviewees used flextime than male interviewees. In general, few patterns emerged around how these groups engage in flextime schedules. Previously noted in Chapter 4, there are no official procedures around how Westview employees can engage in flextime. Interviewees gave examples of using this flexible scheduling practice in order to align their work schedule with the end of a child's school day or some other family need, to have more time in the mornings for exercise, and to attend an afternoon class a few times during the week.

Importantly, most of those who used flextime described it as an occasional arrangement rather than a regular one. For example, interviewee Kate described working a 7:00am – 3:00pm schedule one Friday when she planned to travel out of town after work for the weekend to visit with family. Kate is a young supervisor in the Human Resources department at Westview, who does not have dependents to take care of at

home. According to most interviewees, this kind of one-off flextime situation requires only a conversation with one's supervisor or manager to request a temporary schedule adjustment. Alternatively, a few interviewees discussed using flextime as a regular arrangement. One example is Roxy, a longtime staff-level employee in the Information Systems department, who works a regular flextime schedule. Roxy has a partner and two teenage children at home, with whom she spends a lot of time "running around." Roxy works a regular flextime schedule, from 7:00am to 3:00pm, every day. She began working these hours when one of her parents – who had been very involved in taking care of her children – passed away. By switching to a regular 7:00am – 3:00pm schedule, Roxy was able to meet her children at the bus after school, and to spend more time with them overall. For Roxy, flextime is a useful provision to help with her regular childcare demands. Other participants described using flextime as an occasional arrangement to deal with family-related events, too. As discussed in the previous chapter, family is a big part of many participants' work-life balance.

Another example of using flextime as a regular practice was given by Ivanna, a young staff-level employee in the Accounting and Finance department. She described a time when she worked a regular flextime schedule on Tuesdays and Thursdays, because she was registered for afternoon academic classes on these days. In this comment, Ivanna suggests she was able to adjust her work start/stop times to accommodate this:

Two years ago when I was doing school courses...My work hours were from 8am-4pm. My class was at 3pm. My supervisor allowed me to come in 7am to 3pm. So I would leave at 3, to get to my class for 3:30. That was flex hours, and I did that twice a week.

Ivanna used a regular flextime schedule on a couple of days during the workweek, and only for one school semester. Of course, part-time school is an activity that a small group of participants in this study reported undertaking in their personal lives. Clearly, in practice, flextime can take different forms and be used for a few different reasons at Westview: Kate used flextime for family visiting, Roxy used it to help with her childcare needs, and it helped Ivanna balance paid work with her educational pursuits.

As was mentioned in Chapter 4, because there is no official flextime policy, access to this WLB initiative is fully mediated by supervisors or managers in departments at Westview. Several interviewees commented on going through their managers or supervisors for approval of flextime. Most of the staff-level interviewees who had used flextime described how their supervisors or managers were fairly willing to grant them access to this working practice. As interviewee Laura put it, “if I had to leave today a little early, say at 3:00pm, I would work my schedule such that I would come in at 7:00am and it’s just a conversation you can have with your supervisor.” In line with this, some of the participants seem to have a great deal of control over their own scheduling. Wayne, a male Westview staff member in his 40s travels regularly for his work with the Environmental department. He described how he adjusts his schedule sometimes without coordinating with his supervisor: “if I am late, I’ll work an extra hour in the office or something like that. So I’m kind of keeping track of my own schedule, if there’s anything major.” In practice, then, several of the participants find flextime is an accessible and supported workplace provision, especially for occasional use.

While most of the interviewees who have engaged in occasional flextime schedules described fairly easy access through their supportive managers or supervisors, this was not true for all participants. Some interviewees in smaller departments, and/or those in specialized ‘one-of’ roles, spoke about limited options for working a regular flextime schedule in their jobs. A number of interviewees explained that flextime would compromise coverage during core business hours, that this kind of arrangement “just wouldn’t work.” Some staff-level employees took up this explanation, and so did one manager. Peter, a manager in the Safety department, described how he cannot grant much access to flextime in his department, whereas the roles of other departments may be more amenable to this schedule flexibility:

There’s people who want to work from 7:00am to 3:00pm, well... we have clients to service, right? I’d love to be able to do it myself, but you can’t be just shutting the door in your office at 3:00 in the afternoon. So, some of those are just having some discussion and kind of tempering expectations. With my crew, they’re quite good on that, but it can add... a ripple to it. Especially when you start to compare yourself to other departments... If someone is working 7:00am to 3:00pm, another working 8:00am to 5:00pm, and another 9:00am to 5:00pm, so you have good coverage... but when you have such a small team with a singular focus, it’s tough to do that, right?

By Peter’s comment, it is evident that he understands employees may desire flexibility in their work start/stop times, but that extending this option is simply not possible for his small team. Access to flextime is likely greater for some employees. Those in front-line service positions, employees in specialized roles in organizations, and those in smaller departments may not be extended this kind of time flexibility in their jobs because of the potential interference with organizational performance. In contrast, flextime may be more readily accessible to employees who work in large teams, those who can perform their

roles by using technology communication, those not in front-line positions. This approach to extending flextime based on employment responsibilities illustrates the workplace norms around using scheduling flexibility. If varying work start/stop times compromises staff ability to attend to client needs during core business hours of the day, it is not a provision that can be used.

### ***Telework***

Telework is another moderately popular provision among the participants, with 37% of survey respondents ( $n = 14$ ) and one-third of interviewees reporting having used it ( $n = 5$ ). Like flextime, telework is a flexible arrangement and working practice at Westview. Descriptions of using this flexible working practice by interviewees suggests that it is used only occasionally, and not as a regular arrangement. The level of uptake and reasons given using telework are similar among the managers/supervisors and staff-level employees, the women and men, and the younger and older employees.

There are no official conditions around how employees can use telework. Interviewees described working from home for a few different reasons. Helping workers to better manage family/caregiving roles with paid work is one reason cited by interviewees. One such example was given by manager Peter, who described taking his work home with him such that he could remain productive and provide eldercare to his father-in-law:

My father-in-law is in [for] a doctor's appointment... he'll be back at the house probably at noon tomorrow, right. And he's elderly now, can't stay at home with the two big dogs in my house, don't want to go to home and find god knows what,

right? So I'll just kind work from home tomorrow. So I will go up and say [to my manager]: 'I want to have tomorrow afternoon...and I'll just be home.' I'll be accessible. I'm on the line, so I'm still being productive.... It's just managing my time and still contributing, but also looking after my family responsibilities.

By working from home, Peter can be present with his father-in-law and fill a caregiving role, while also completing his work for Westview. In line with this, more survey respondents with dependents reported teleworking than did those without dependents (57% compared to 27%). An example of using telework to help manage domestic responsibilities was given by another interviewee, Eugene, a male staff-level employee who is between 50-60 years old:

The water boiler bursts and you don't expect it. So the maintenance guy is going to come in forty minutes and he's going to be here for three hours and I've got a project that's due. But I have internet connectivity at home, and I can access my files here so I can work from home.

Peter and Eugene found telework to be a useful WLB initiative in helping them manage paid employment with family/household demands. As was discussed in Chapter 5, family and home-related demands are very common personal life activities for the participants.

These comments by Peter and Eugene emphasize the importance of being productive while working from home. In further comment, Eugene suggests that when he returns to the office, he puts in extra effort to catch up:

If you can't be in the office during prime time, then you can do whatever you can do back home, but you're always gonna be a little bit behind the curve there. So the drawback is that you've got some catch up to do when you return.

This is not unlike how several other participants described teleworking. Interviewee Hailey, who is a staff-level employee in the Human Resources department, reflects on telework: "I guess as long as the work gets done, it's not an issue. You know, if work

starts falling down or deadlines don't get met, then I guess [problems] would probably come up." The emphasis on productivity conveyed in these examples was echoed more explicitly by some other participants, who spoke of working from home exclusively for the purpose of managing their paid work demands more effectively. For instance, interviewee Kate, a staff-level employee in a supervisory position at Westview in the same department as Eugene, generally described how telework is a useful option when employees feel they can still be productive in their jobs but are not able to come into the office:

Sometimes you're feeling just a little bit under the weather, or you wake up and you have that headache... or even sometimes you have so much work to do, and you know that if you come in with the telephone ringing an people coming into your door, you're like, 'I can get this done if I can just stay home for the next day or the next four hours and have no interruptions,' right? So it has been helpful to meet deadlines, and to meet any kind of responsibilities that you have.

In practice, then, telework at Westview may also be used to improve employees' performance in their employment roles, rather than to help them balance their jobs with other activities and interests. Directly to this point, Peter described how he extends teleworking options to his staff to help them meet job demands:

If [staff are] working on a project and they need some quiet time, I encourage [teleworking]. I do it myself. You know, stay home for a morning, get more done in four hours than you would in here with the door shut and the phone ringing, right?

The informal expectations around telework at Westview, in some departments and. by some managers/supervisors, may therefore encourage employees to engage in this initiative primarily for work-related reasons. Using telework in this way of course yields advantages for the organization, but may or may not help workers in managing their own work-life balance.

Because telework is a working practice, workers must negotiate with the managers/supervisors to gain access. The interviewees who have request working from home, always on an occasional basis, described feeling generally supported in doing so. However, interview findings indicate that, similar to flextime, participants do not all expect that telework is a possibility for them in their jobs. One interviewee, Bryan, is new to an administrative role in the Safety department at Westview. In our interview, he reflected that he might be able to work from home every once in a while, but that his job does not really allow for this kind of spatial flexibility:

[Telework] is possible, but not for everything. It's possible, like, I might have a day's work I could do on the computer at home, but usually it's related to things in here [in the office]. I need to be here.

Bryan's comment communicates his understanding that jobs which require employees to be present in the workplace to perform, for example, administrative work, are not really amenable to working from home. Again, Westview employees seem to understand that they may not have access to flexible working practices because of the potential drawbacks from the organizational perspective.

### ***On-site daycare***

The on-site daycare is another WLB initiative that has been used by several of the participants. This initiative is quite different than flextime and telework, because it is a program and not a working practice, and because it specifically provides a childcare service to employees. Three of the fifteen interviewees and 24% of survey respondents ( $n = 9$ ) indicated that they had used the on-site daycare at Westview. Women and men, as

well as managers/supervisors and staff-level employees, reported engaging in the on-site daycare initiative to similar degrees. Of course, all of the participants who reported having used the on-site daycare were those with dependents. Related to this, most were over the age of 41. The moderately high level of engagement in this provision is likely a reflection of the demographic sample of this study, as several participants reported having dependents and undertaking childcare as a key activity in their work-life balance.

In general, all of the Westview employees interviewed spoke highly of the on-site daycare service. Both those who have and have not used it described its advantages, such as reducing morning and evening commute times, as well its disadvantages, such as the financial cost of the service and the long waiting list. Similar pros and cons have been reported in the wider literature (Comfort et al., 2003). Bryan, an assistant in the Safety department, has a partner and a young child at home. Bryan works 37.5 hours a week, always in the office, and does not typically work overtime. He commented on how he expects the on-site daycare at Westview will be very helpful to him if he can avail of a free space. He sees the work-family spatial blurring offered by the on-site daycare as positive:

I won't have to go and drop [my daughter] off in the morning, so I won't have to take extra time, right? I won't have to run all over in the evenings with that traffic and stuff with everybody getting off work. [We] could have lunch together and whatever... that'd be great.

Bryan's comment suggests he feels there is a benefit to having his child in close proximity during the workday. The three interviewees who actually had used the childcare service also spoke of this as a perk, but more so in terms of how much easier it is to check up on or visit a child if need be when they are located so close to the office.

The three interviewees who had actually used the on-site daycare described it as helpful in managing their childcare needs. However, all three insisted that it was important to keep a distance from their child during the workday, despite being so close. Laura, a long time employee of Westview and the mother of two now older children, reflected on how having her kids so close to her office had an impact on her work:

[The daycare] was quite good. It was very convenient. It was a good service provided. It was nice to have it here in the building... but again, you kinda have to separate a little, right. Cause you could see them out there playing on the playground and you'd be looking, saying 'Gosh, he should have his hat on... oh my goodness, he's about to get hit in the head with a [toy] truck by someone else' [laughs]. But yeah that was convenient for sure, and being close to them was very helpful. But I guess the burden for me, being here, was that I was the one bringing them back and forth too, you know what I mean? That in itself is a physical demand. So, it would've been nice if it had been my husband's workplace, for sure.

Laura's comment suggests she felt that the daycare was a useful WLB initiative in helping balance paid work with her caregiving responsibilities, but that it was still a challenge to bring her children to and from the daycare, and that it had been cause for some distraction to her in her job. Similar comments were made by the other two participants who had used the on-site daycare service, Roxy, another long time employee of Westview in the Information Systems department and the mother of two, and Steve, another long time employee of Tech Inc. and Westview, who is in a management role in the Information Systems department who also has two children. These interviewees both emphasized that keeping a distance would be best for their own productivity and/or for their child's daycare experience. The on-site daycare, experienced by workers as a helpful service in managing their child care responsibilities with their paid employment, seems to be used carefully by them to ensure a distance is maintained. In practice, the participants

seem aptly aware of the possible impact of this childcare arrangement on their paid employment.

### **EAP**

The EAP is a provision used by several participants as well. Of the 15 interviewees, 2 indicated having used the EAP, and 37% of survey respondents ( $n = 14$ ) reported having used it. It is possible that more participants had used the EAP, but did not feel comfortable disclosing this information to me, given that this initiative may be used for private and/or sensitive reasons (noted in Chapter 4). Among the case study participants, no notable differences emerged in level of use between participants of various ages, and those of different workplace rank. A slightly greater percentage of the survey respondents who reported using the EAP were women (44% compared to 30% of males), though both interviewees who indicated using the EAP were men. It is notable that a few more survey respondents with dependents indicated using the EAP ( $n = 9$ ) than those without ( $n = 5$ ). Employees with dependents may be seeking greater support, as interview findings suggested caregiving is a labour-intensive and demanding role, or are perhaps availing of the childcare referral services or family counseling services involved in the EAP.

Overall, the moderate popularity of this initiative is perhaps not surprising, given that many of the participants indicated, in interviews, that health is a key part of their work-life balance and this provision is offered to address health and wellness issues. The EAP is an official policy with conditions for use that are clearly outlined. As was

mentioned in Chapter 4, the EAP is formally available to workers for any “human reasons” including a drug or alcohol problem, or any physical, mental or emotionally distressing concerns (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). Also discussed in Chapter 4, this is the only WLB initiative at Westview that is explicitly written to be available for workers whose personal issues are negatively impacting their work performance (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). Details around how the workers actually experience this provision in practice were particularly difficult to gather. The two interviewees who had used it did not speak at great length about it, except to say they had availed of some form of counseling for a short time. Neither described this service as especially useful, and both noted that the service has been further developed since then and that it is likely more effective today.

### ***Wellness program***

In contrast to the EAP, interviewees spoke at length about the wellness program. Interviewees discussed using the on-site gym facility in the mornings before work, or buying a discounted gym membership to pursue fitness outside of the office space. As well, participants spoke of attending health and wellness seminars at the office, and buying subsidized home fitness equipment. In total, seven interviewees spoke about engaging in the wellness program, including workers of various ages, different rank, and in different departments, and women and men. The moderate popularity of this WLB initiative is in line with the participants’ interest in physical fitness, as illustrated in Chapter 5: Many of the interviewees spoke at length of physical fitness as part of their

work-life balance, whether it be playing a recreational sport, jogging or walking outside, or working out at a local gym.

Most of the participants described the wellness program in positive terms, as a useful provision in helping them pursue fitness activities in particular. One interviewee who spoke of fitness as an important part of his work-life balance is Wayne, a staff-level employee in the Environmental department. He has participated in Westview-sponsored teams for recreational fitness events, and feels he is generally supported to exercise:

There is a gym here, and I partake in that as well. Most times I just use it for changing clothes and that. Like I said, I do a lot of running. I've done some of the weights and the elliptical and that. It's nice.

Others described taking advantage of the off-site physical fitness incentives. Hailey, who like Wayne, does not have any dependents, described her commitment to attending the local gym:

I go to [an external] gym. And I have a trainer... I think I'm soon going to start doing [a] 9-5 schedule, cause I'm here 'til 5 anyway. Just to make sure I get to my gym in the morning. [That's] completely okay [with my supervisor].

Hailey's discussion of working on her personal fitness suggests that she can, in addition to availing of an incentive like the discounted gym membership, also adjust her work start/stop times to pursue fitness activities. Hers and other interviewees' comments about physical fitness suggest that this is understood at Westview as a legitimate interest, an important part of healthy work-life balance. Other components of the wellness program not related to physical fitness specifically, but targeting other wellness needs, were spoken of in similarly positive terms. Interviewees described health and wellness seminars on, for example, nutrition, offered during the workdays at Westview. In another

example, interviewee Bryan reflected on how both he and his employer are advantaged by a visiting on-site health clinic:

It saves the company tons of time because you haven't got to be leaving and it only takes fifteen minutes to get [a medical test] done. If you had to leave and go somewhere to get it done, it'd take two or three hours.

In this case, the wellness service is offered on-site at Westview and during working hours.

As Bryan suggests, this may ultimately work in the favour of Westview, in that the company does not have to grant employees more time off to tend to their personal wellness activities.

Because this is a program, its different components are open to most all Westview employees without having to receive permission from supervisors/managers and without formal request. Access to the wellness program is experienced by the participants as fairly open, in practice. However, some interviewees, especially those with regular caregiving demands, indicated that they simply do not have the capacity to engage in this WLB initiative. Several employees spoke of not having time to attend wellness seminars during the day, or fitness classes after the workday. These time-strapped individuals – generally those with demanding home or personal lives, and/or busy jobs at Westview – often cannot find a way to participate in wellness initiatives. For example, Joyce, a manager in the Accounting and Finance department and a mother of two, described how she cannot find time to avail of these initiatives: "It's all there for you, if you have the time." This is in line with findings in Chapter 5 which indicate that the participants with dependents – especially the women with demanding caregiving roles at home – have less opportunities to spend time working on their fitness. In practice, then, the wellness program is

sometimes inaccessible to those employees who are simply too busy with other demands to partake in it.

As a group, the moderately popular WLB initiatives are used by the participants for a range of different reasons, including helping to juggle caregiving, education, fitness and health activities. Three of these moderately popular initiatives target specific activities – the on-site daycare, the EAP, and the wellness program. These address some of the participants' common work-life balance needs discussed in Chapter 5. Some of the workers who have had or currently have young children find the on-site daycare relevant to their childcare needs. As well, many of the participants expressed that health and wellness are key elements of their work-life balance and, as such, find the EAP and wellness programs useful. Interviewees spoke of fairly free access to these provisions, based on their own work-life balance needs. The other two initiatives that are moderately popular – flextime and telework – can be used in practice for a number of different reasons. These initiatives, because they are more open-ended, would perhaps be relevant to a larger group of workers. However, interview findings suggest that these provisions may sometimes be inaccessible in practice, based on departmental needs. Interestingly, for most of these moderately popular provisions, employees seem cognizant of the potential for negative productivity outcomes and actually engage in the WLB initiatives in ways that help to avoid these problems.

## **Least popular WLB initiatives**

In contrast to the initiatives so far described, there are some provisions at Westview that very few participants reported engaging in. These include the working practice of variable workweek, and the policies of educational leave, maternity leave, adoption leave, parental leave, work-leave integration for maternity leave, and top-up for maternity/adoption leave. None of the least popular initiatives at Westview are programs.

### ***Variable workweek***

Only a small group of participants in my study reported having used a variable workweek schedule, including four survey respondents, and just one interviewee. The interviewee described using a variable workweek schedule because he travels as part of his job with Westview. Wayne, an interviewee who travels regularly and sometimes for extended periods, tends to work longer hours extra hours on his trips than when he is in the office. He notes that a variable workweek schedule is “kind of a good thing because I always like to have a bit of time off during the weekdays.” He finds the variable workweek schedule to be useful in managing his personal activities, upon his return from work travel.

No other interviewees described using a variable workweek schedule. If engagement in this provision is tied to work-related traveling, this provision would be relevant to only a small number of case study participants, as only a few of them indicated traveling regularly for their jobs at Westview (discussed in Chapter 5). Because, for Wayne at least, use of this provision is directly linked to travel requirements, it can be

argued that Westview recognizes the toll that extensive traveling can take on work-life balance. This provision can, in this instance, be considered a measure to help Wayne regain some balance that has been lost due to his work demands.

### ***Educational leave***

Only a small number of interviewees spoke about engaging in the educational leave initiative at Westview. Two younger women without dependents, and one man in his 50s who does have dependents, described engaging in this provision. The participants spoke about using educational leave as the policy suggests, taking time off work for the purposes of studying and for writing exams. Of course, because the educational leave targets workers who are pursuing education with their full-time employment, only those who undertake this specific activity would be eligible to use this provision. As discussed in the previous chapter, a group of the participants have pursued part-time school with their employment at Westview. However, this is an activity undertaken by a fairly small group when compared to other, more commonly-reported activities, such as housework or leisure. This may help to explain the overall lower reported engagement in this provision.

The small group of interviewees who had used the one paid day of educational leave spoke positively about it. They described finding it helpful to have the opportunity to take a few hours off from work to study for or complete exams. However, in one interview, comments from the participant indicated that workplace norms around educational leave – and perhaps other types of short-term leave – in her department may discourage uptake at particular times during the year. Ivanna is in her 20s, single and does

not have dependents. Until recently, she was enrolled as a part-time student, while working full-time at Westview. She described the value of the educational leave initiative while she balanced these demanding roles, noting that it was beneficial to be able to take some time off work for school. She also spoke of how she made these decisions, taking into consideration the possible impact on her co-workers and wider department:

Sometimes we can be short-staffed, everybody is busy. So I felt that it was a little bit of pressure...like, should I take this day off to write my exam or half-time? Sometimes the timing of your day off would be... like my holidays, when I plan my holidays, I think that's just the nature of our positions, it's not necessarily the workplace. Like month-end is always busy, you don't want to be traveling... like, you can, they don't tell you not to, but you don't want to? Like, this is when my deadlines are, I don't want to leave and put it on somebody else. That's the only thing, and I mean, that's not really a complaint, but it's more the nature of the work.

Ivanna's comment suggests that she has self-regulated her use of time off from Westview. Without seeking permission to take leave from a supervisor or manager, Ivanna describes how she took it upon herself to consider her work situation and what was going on in her department, and whether her taking a day away from the office would have a negative effect. Even though, as she notes, supervisors "don't tell you not to," workers may receive other more informal communications about how they should or should not take even a short time off from their jobs. Ivanna was officially entitled to some educational leave, but workplace norms around meeting deadlines – enforced by her supervisors and peers – played an important role in how she engaged in this initiative. It is obvious that Ivanna felt her education program was important, but it was also clear that she organized this activity largely outside of her employment demands – even when major school events, such as exams, were scheduled. This echoes the common theme of workers considering

their departmental needs as priority when engaging in provisions that are meant to help with their work-life balance.

### ***Unpaid maternity, adoption and parental leaves; Work-leave integration and top-up***

Lastly, the unpaid maternity, adoption and parental leaves also have reportedly low levels of uptake by the participants in my study. No survey respondents reported having used maternity or adoption leave, and only one survey respondent reported having used parental leave at Westview. As well, 2 out of 15 interviewees – both women, of course – described using maternity leave, and none reported using adoption or parental leave.

Even though engagement in these longer-term family leave initiatives was low among the case study participants, most interviewees described their support for employees who engage in maternity, adoption, and parental leave. Many interviewees spoke of them – like bereavement leave – as “givens.” This suggests that taking time off from one’s job (and even availing of additional supports of top-up and work-leave integration) following the birth or adoption of a child is considered usual, normative, and acceptable for most workers. Of note is that interviewees did not discuss the impact of these longer-term leave initiatives on organizational productivity like they did with many of the other more popular WLB initiatives. This is somewhat surprising, as these family leaves are much more extensive than the shorter-term leaves, like family responsibility leave and educational leave, which interviewees did describe as potentially impacting workplace functioning.

The reportedly low involvement in these longer-term unpaid family leave policies at Westview may be reflective of a number of factors. Many of the participants do have children, so these provisions, like the other family-related ones, would likely be relevant to many. However, it is possible that only a small number of Westview employees have engaged in these initiatives because this leave is unpaid, and affording it may be challenging. As discussed in Chapter 4, the federal Parental Benefits Program, through which employees can receive a portion of their regular salary while they are taking time off from their jobs, may be a more attractive and suitable arrangement for most dual- or single-earner couples. Engaging in an extended unpaid leave program facilitated by the workplace would be less financially attractive, if workers qualify for the federal benefits. The unpaid maternity, adoption and parental leaves may be useful to workers if they cannot access the federal PBP program, or if both parents in the family want to take longer term leave after the birth or adoption of a child. Given these possibilities, it could be argued that this provision is applicable to a fairly small group of workers.

The low engagement in the work-leave integration for maternity leave, and in the top-up for maternity/adoption leave, is also notable. Only one survey respondent and two interviewees reported having used work-leave integration, and just two survey respondents and no interviewees indicated having availed of the top up initiative. Again, because many of the participants have children, it could be assumed that these provisions would be somewhat relevant to some workers. As well, unlike with the unpaid maternity, adoption and parental leaves at Westview, workers can still avail of the work-leave integration and top-up when engaging in the federal Parental Benefits Program. However,

low reported engagement in these provisions may be explained, at least in part, by interview findings which suggest that these provisions are not well-known to Westview employees. Additionally, the top-up initiative is fairly new at Westview, which might help to further explain why many interviewees (and possibly survey respondents as well) were uninformed and unaware of its availability.

As a group, the less popular WLB initiatives are used by (few) employees in their work-life balance to help balance paid employment with activities such as education and caregiving. Based on interview data, I would suggest that some of these provisions – specifically the variable workweek for travel and the educational leave for part-time students – are applicable or relevant to a fairly small number of workers at Westview. This may help to explain the lower take-up of these provisions by participants. This does not help to explain the low take-up of the unpaid maternity, adoption and parental leaves, though. These provisions could be relevant to any workers with children. Although these WLB initiatives recognize workers' childcare responsibilities – which many participants have (Figure 2) – they may be less popular because workers who have a newly born or adopted child would be more likely to engage in the more financially-supportive federal Parental Benefits Program, if they qualify for it. Because there is another, government-provided, program around this particular work-life balance need, workers may find less use for less financially-attractive provision offered by the employer. Lastly, the low take-up of work-leave integration on maternity leave, and the top-up for maternity/adoption leave, may reflect a lack of awareness in the workplace of these provisions, and their relative newness.

## **Informal Flexibility in the Workplace**

In addition to the formal WLB initiatives at Westview, several interviewees also commented on what is perhaps best described as informal flexibility in the workplace. To help with their work-life balance, employees engage in time flexibility provided by managers or supervisors to employees, and, in at least one case, between employees.

Many of the staff-level interviewees described how their managers or supervisors grant them time off during the workday to respond to personal demands as they arise. Employees may make that time up somewhere else, or not at all. For example, interviewee Bryan, who works in the small Safety department in an administrative assistant role, works regular full-time hours and rarely has to work overtime in his position. He spoke about his access to informal flexibility when he has personal appointments:

I don't have a real schedule done up or anything, but should I take an hour to go to a doctor's appointment or something, you know work in the hours some other time, something like that.

In this case, having the opportunity to leave work and make up the time later allows Bryan to schedule short-term personal activities during regular working hours.

Participants spoke of leaving work during the day for a short time to respond to caregiving demands, too. Stacey of the Environmental department described how her supervisor is very supportive when she needs to leave work to take care of her child:

If I get a call from daycare – ‘your little one is sick, she has a fever’ – then I just, I can go. I’ll just go in and say [to my manager], ‘she’s sick and I’ve gotta leave,’ and that’s it. It’s not questioned, of course you gotta go. That’s it. I don’t know what happens above that [laughs], if there’s a policy or anything around that sort of thing, but within our department that sort of thing is fine.

A number of other interviewees in these and other departments echoed Bryan's and Stacey's comments, noting that accessing this kind of flexibility has "never been a problem" for them. As well, some interviewees spoke of availing of informal flexibility, but not having to make up the time later. For example, interviewee Joseph works in the same department as Bryan, and puts in long hours at work. In discussing his work-life balance, he notes that he can avail of some informal flexibility in his job because he works so much uncompensated overtime. He explains:

If I need to run out for an hour, I've never had an issue... I find that really good because I think if I did have an issue, if something was ever said to me, I think it'd work in reverse. I think I'd say, 'okay, you know what? I'll be in 8 to 4. And I'll be here. And I'll put in for my time, hours banked or whatever,' right? It's give and take.

Some other interviewees similarly discussed how supervisors or managers recognize the extra time staff-level employees put in, and award them with this informal flexibility when they need it.

Those in supervisory or management positions also described availing of some informal flexibility, too. Two supervisors spoke about using informal flexibility to attend to volunteer roles outside of their jobs. Trevor, a younger staff member in a supervisory role in the Human Resources department, described how he uses informal flexibility from Westview to volunteer once a week with a local nonprofit group. One day during the week, he volunteers with this group and begins work a little later that day. Another interviewee, Steve, also described using informal flexibility to help him meet his volunteer commitments. Steve works in a supervisory position in the Information Systems department. He described how members of the leadership team at

Westview encouraged him to sit on a voluntary committee that he is personally interested in, and suggested he should not worry about making up any lost time at work.

In general, those in supervisory and/or management positions may have greater access to informal flexibility. These employees have greater autonomy in their roles and can step in and out of the workplace without seeking permission, or having to face questions from their staff. As Peter, a manager in the Safety department, noted of his work schedule:

In my role [as a manager], you have a bit more flexibility than probably the staff do. So...I'm saying I'm out of here at 2pm and no one can get me, that's just kinda, you know, it's not taking advantage but you're managing your time or whatever.

Interviewee Bryan also commented that his “supervisor is in and out, he got a lot of meetings and stuff, so I don’t really know if he’s off using flextime or if he’s in meetings or what. I don’t really ask.” Notably, because the workplace hierarchy at Westview is gendered, access to informal flexibility through workplace rank is also gendered at Westview.

Informal flexibility at Westview also emerges from employees covering for one another. Joseph describes the positive and supportive relationships between employees in his department:

We got a pretty close-knit department, which is great. If somebody goes out and they got something to do, they write it on the board and say that they’re gone, or, you know, ‘Joseph, will you follow up with so-and-so’, or you know, we are able to work, to do the other person’s work if need be.

Joseph’s comment – one of the only comments made which explicitly suggested that employees cover for one another in relation to work-life balance – suggests that there is

informal employee-to-employee support around flexibility. Workers know that if they are in a bind, with no formal flexibility available to them, assistance from co-workers may be available to ensure objectives are met. Many other interviewees described positive working relationships between their co-workers, and general workplace atmosphere of support. Unlike the formal WLB initiatives, and even the informal flexibility from managers and supervisors, this employee-to-employee support is not mandated or controlled by the organization. Because this flexibility is employee-driven, it helps workers juggle their many activities.

Informal flexibility is far-reaching, as the case study participants of various ages, positions, and departments described using informal flexibility. Evidently, informal flexibility helps them carry out activities related to caregiving, volunteering, and health. That workers are seeking additional support for these types of activities is not surprising, as they are fairly common activities for many of the participants. However, engagement in informal workplace flexibilities to help with these particular activities may indicate that there are shortcomings with the formalized provisions at Westview in addressing workers' work-life balance needs.

## **Discussion**

This chapter has explored, in great detail, participants' experiences with the many WLB initiatives at Westview. A number of key findings emerge from survey and interview data regarding how the workers actually use and experience these provisions in relation to their work-life balance. Namely, findings suggest that the WLB initiatives

align with some, but not all, of the employees' work-life balance needs, and that in practice the workplace culture around these provisions privileges organizational productivity over employee work-life balance.

First, the participants' descriptions of using WLB initiatives reveal interesting details regarding the ways that the provisions help, and do not help, in managing their actual work-life balance needs. As mentioned in Chapter 2, research on WLB initiatives has not really investigated how provisions match up with the activities workers pursue in their personal lives. Most of the provisions at Westview do target particular activities of workers. In exploring how the WLB initiatives match up with workers' work-life balance needs (as described in Chapter 5), key alignments and gaps emerge. For example, many participants cited family as a key part of their work-life balance, and several of the family-related provisions were quite popular among the participants, including family responsibility leave, bereavement leave, and the on-site daycare. Several interviewees also described using flextime, telework, and informal flexibility for helping them balance family needs, such as childcare and eldercare. Notably, none of the interviewees described using any of these provisions for reasons related to pet care, despite this also being a caregiving role that a few of them undertake in their personal lives. Many participants described the importance of health and physical fitness in their work-life balance, and interviewees described using the wellness program, EAP, and flextime schedules to help with these activities. Lastly, noted in Chapter 5, a small group of participants pursue part-time school as part of their work-life balance. In line with this,

interviewees described using the educational leave, as well as flextime schedules, to assist them in balancing paid employment with educational pursuits.

Clearly, the WLB initiatives at Westview are relevant for, and do address, some of the more and less common work-life balance needs of the participants. However, in further considering how the provisions match up with participants' lived realities of work-life balance, there are some notable gaps in support – particularly around the most commonly-reported activities of housework and leisure (Figure 2). As mentioned and explored in Chapter 5, many participants, especially women, undertake housework on a daily basis. With the exception of one interviewee discussing how he worked from home so that he could be around for repairs being made to a household appliance, there was no mention by the participants of using WLB initiatives – those related to family roles, nor the flexible working practices – for reasons relating to housework activities. Employees do not or cannot take leave from work, or adjust their work start/stop times, to cook or do laundry. This is an important finding, as housework is a very common activity among women especially, who will receive little workplace support for this part of their work-life balance.

There is a similar lack of formalized WLB initiatives to support employees in their leisure activities. Many participants described going to the movies, relaxing with a book, and spending time with friends as part of their work-life balance, but they will find no provisions at Westview to help them to pursue these activities and better balance them with paid work demands. Clearly, the WLB initiatives at Westview do not respond to some of the most commonly-reported personal life activities that these workers have.

Lastly, as discussed in Chapter 5, some of the participants have weekly volunteer roles. Like for housework and leisure, there are no WLB initiatives which acknowledge volunteering roles. Employees' desire for provision around this activity is evidenced by the use of informal flexibility to help them manage volunteering with their jobs. Ultimately, in practice, the WLB initiatives at Westview are not inclusive in the work-life balance needs they address. There are a variety of needs and activities which the provisions do not acknowledge and, as such, workers' work-life balance is not entirely supported.

Second, in practice, it is clear that there are informal workplace dynamics around the use of WLB provisions at Westview. This also impacts just how useful the initiatives are in supporting work-life balance. In terms of access, the participants described the process of engaging in the WLB initiatives in a way that aligns with official conditions (described in Chapter 4). Interview findings reveal that the employees engage in the WLB policies and programs generally according to how they are written; policy stipulations, such as the kinds of relationships eligible for bereavement leave, are upheld in practice at Westview. Most of the interviewees spoke about Westview as a fairly encouraging work environment when using these provisions, and several comments were made about individual supervisors and managers who are very understanding of the many activities that employees try to balance. Literature discussed in Chapter 2 emphasizes the importance of workers feeling supported and encouraged to actually use WLB initiatives (Allen, 2001; S. Lewis, 1997; Sempruch, 2011). Still, there were a few comments from

participants which deviate from this, suggesting that formal WLB initiatives may not always be informally supported at Westview that benefits workers.

Examples were given from participants about feeling discouraged from requesting certain provisions in the workplace. For example, some interviewees expressed their interest in using flextime or telework arrangements, but noted that these provisions were not available to them because of possible interference with the normal functioning of their departments. In contrast to this, the most popular WLB initiatives (family responsibility leave and bereavement leave) are provisions which cause very little disruption to workplace productivity. Both offering very short-term leave from employment, these provisions do not interfere with the structure of paid employment in ways that flextime or telework might. Of course, worker engagement in the different WLB initiatives is likely contingent on a number of factors beyond informal access dynamics, though it does play an important role in some cases. Limited employee engagement in some types of provisions may reflect a workplace culture in which employees are encouraged to make greater use of the WLB initiatives that pose less of a risk to disrupting workplace functioning.

This workplace culture of prioritizing organizational needs over employee needs is also evident in how the workers seem to govern their own use of WLB initiatives in the workplace. Several interviewees made comments, regarding a number of different WLB initiatives, which reflect the overarching priority given to paid employment in this workplace. For instance, interviewee Stacey described using family responsibility leave so she could take time off from work when her young child was sick. When she returned

to work, she put in long hours to catch up. With her work objectives outlined and understood, Stacey ends up devoting additional time elsewhere to make up for what she missed while on leave. This example illustrates how WLB initiatives are negotiated with the always-important goals of meeting work objectives. Another example is Ivanna, who, in considering taking educational leave to prepare for an exam, based her decision primarily on whether her time off would negatively affect the functioning of her department at that time. Likewise, a small number of the interviewees who had used the on-site daycare service cautioned that having a child in such close proximity could potentially distract workers from their job duties. In extreme cases, interviewees' described using WLB initiatives primarily or exclusively for work-related reasons, instead of for helping pursue personal life activities. An example of this is interviewee Kate, who spoke about using the telework arrangement to work from home while she was sick, in order to remain productive. In line with this, researchers Hill et al. (2010) suggest that employers may be interested in offering telework options to workers, as they may reap the rewards of longer hours and greater work performance.

These examples illustrate how employees themselves internalize the employer-perspective, taking measures to protect organizational productivity when using WLB initiatives. In practice, when using the WLB initiatives, the workers still focus on meeting their high workloads, they still work long hours, they check their emails and smartphone alerts when they are not officially working, and travel occasionally or extensively with some or little notice. Evidently, the priority of paid work remains prominent in the minds

of employees, even when they are engaging in provisions that are meant to help create a greater balance between paid work and personal life.

It is clear that the workers are cognizant of the potential organizational risks posed by these provisions, and are, above all, committed to maintaining their productivity at work. The way many interviewees' spoke about protecting organizational productivity aligns with the way they spoke about organizing their work-life balance in general (discussed in Chapter 5). As social sciences literature explains, workers may self-monitor the effects of WLB initiatives on their own or others' performance to display ideal worker status (Coltrane, 2004). They may yield positive career-building outcomes by showing they understand the employer's perspective and interests, and by organizing their use of WLB initiatives such that they can still maintain long hours and successfully manage high workloads (Peterson, 2007).

Details on the workplace norms and culture around using WLB initiatives, considered alongside the formal structure of employment at Westview and the formal WLB initiatives, helps to illustrate what these provisions do for work-life balance. In Chapter 4, I suggested that, based on historical feminist theory, the formal time, space and policy structure at Westview qualify as masculine employment structure (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2000). Rigid schedules, full-time, office-based employment at Westview influence how people can undertake their work-life balance, and what level of priority is given to different activities. Importantly, the formal provisions around work-life balance at Westview recognize that workers have some roles and responsibilities outside of their employment. This puts value on the many activities that workers have, and acknowledges

that employees are people who undertake their paid employment amongst a variety of other also important roles. While these provisions do officially recognize some personal interests and demands, the argument could be made that the WLB initiatives overall are in keeping with the demanding structure of employment at Westview. The format of these provisions – shorter paid and longer unpaid time off from work, occasional flexible time and space, and services for employees to help them find a better balance – still do align with the wider organization of paid employment at Westview, which endorses full-time, office-based work, carried out by a healthy and educated workforce. In practice, many of my participants find the different WLB initiatives useful in helping them undertake some of the activities in their personal lives. However, the workplace culture at Westview around WLB initiatives encourages workers to govern their use of provisions in a way that best serves the needs of the workplace. As such, the use of WLB initiatives at Westview by workers reflects an overarching structure in which paid work is given priority and dominates over personal life or any kind of balance.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed how Westview employees actually use and experience the WLB initiatives available in their workplace. How participants engage in each of the WLB initiatives was described, and employees' use of informal flexibility in the workplace was also described. It was argued that the WLB initiatives address some, but not all, of the workers' needs and activities. As well, the informal workplace norms which govern these provisions align with an overarching social organization that values paid

employment primarily: Workers are mindful of the possible negative impact of WLB initiatives on their work performance, and make sacrifices by not using the provisions if it will not serve the needs of the organization. These dynamics around the use of WLB initiatives at Westview limit how effective the provisions are in really supporting employee work-life balance.

The final chapter offers a number of concluding thoughts on my study of WLB initiatives. Reflecting on the literature and findings from the case study, there is a discussion of WLB initiatives, and what was learned about how provisions help or do not help with work-life balance. Lastly, recommendations for future research are outlined.

## **Chapter 7: Concluding Thoughts**

This chapter offers concluding thoughts on my exploratory and descriptive study of WLB initiatives. Reflecting on the literature and findings from my case study, there is a broad discussion of WLB initiatives and what they offer to workers in terms of managing their work-life balance. By questioning the format of these provisions, their relevance to different work-life balance needs, their accessibility to workers, and how they are supported by the workplace culture, a great deal can be learned about what WLB initiatives do for workers who are balancing paid employment with other personal life activities. This chapter concludes by outlining a number of recommendations for future research in this area.

### **Understanding WLB Initiatives and Work-Life Balance**

The current research was conducted in response to developments in recent literature which suggest that the primary purpose of WLB initiatives may not actually be to help workers to balance their many activities. To better understand what exactly WLB initiatives offer to workers, my case study examined WLB initiatives in a single workplace, exploring the provisions and how workers actually use them in the workplace. Attention was given to the formats of provisions available in the workplace, the kinds of activities acknowledged by the provisions, and the workplace culture or norms around using the provisions. Of course, the findings of my study are based in a single workplace, a professional office space in an urban Atlantic Canadian setting. Westview is a fairly large, hierarchical organization with layers of rank and many different departments. Most

of the workers in this office are in professional occupations, in a variety of different fields. It was not possible to include all Westview employees, or multiple organizations, in this particular study. Other limitations with the research approach, such as the small sample size and difficulty recruiting interviewees, should also be noted when considering the generalizability of the findings from my case study. Still, findings from my case study contribute to the wider literature in important ways. While literature on WLB initiatives is substantial and widely popular in numerous academic disciplines, there has been limited in-depth investigation of this kind. My approach has allowed for exploration of WLB initiatives in great detail, to understand what these provisions offer around employee work-life balance.

### **Summary of findings**

Most employees at Westview work full-time schedules, from Monday to Friday, in the office. Employees operate on objective-based schedules and projects, and many of them handle high workloads. Some employees put in long hours, and engage in demanding technology at work, such as email and smartphones. For a smaller group, employment at Westview involves regular or occasional travel. Expectations within this office are quite high, requiring workers to devote substantial time and energy to their jobs. Participants described meeting the many “ideal work norms” in their workplace, such as checking email while at home, or staying late to work during the evenings or on weekends (Coltrane, 2004). I argued that these features of paid employment at Westview,

both the formal features and the informal expectations, should be considered masculine working principles (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2000).

Westview employees balance their employment responsibilities with a variety of other activities, such as housework, leisure, caregiving, physical fitness, volunteering, and attending post-secondary school. While these activities are obviously highly valued by the participants, they generally treat their personal interests and demands as somewhat more flexible than their paid jobs: Workers engage in these activities in the mornings before work, at lunchtimes, in the evenings after work, and on weekends. In applying Glucksmann's TSOL framework and ideas about relationality, as well as other feminist theories about the organization of paid employment with, for example, unpaid domestic work (Waring, 1999), I argued that the way the participants in this study carry out their work-life balance reflects a social system that values and prioritizes paid employment, making it the centralizing and organizing institution around which all other activities must be scheduled and carried out. Interestingly, the pattern of prioritizing paid work emerged for women and men, managers and supervisors alike. That is, all employees generally seem to adhere to the masculine working principles identified in Westview workplace, devoting substantial time and energy to meet their employment with Westview, organizing their personal interests and responsibilities around their jobs.

Within this workplace framework, WLB initiatives were explored with regard to what they do for workers' work-life balance. In exploring the formats of provisions available to workers, the relevance of provisions in addressing particular work-life balance needs, the formal and informal accessibility of WLB initiatives in the workplace,

and the workplace norms around use of provisions in relation to business objectives, my case study findings suggest that these provisions may not necessarily help workers to actually balance their paid employment with their personal lives. In many ways, the WLB initiatives at Westview, and likely in other similar organizations, exist within a wider framework that prioritizes and values paid employment.

### ***Format of WLB initiatives***

The findings from this research reveal that WLB initiatives can take a variety of forms. Literature on WLB initiatives often does not draw distinctions between the different kinds of provisions that may be available to workers. Literature review and textual analysis of the WLB initiatives at Westview indicates that these provisions can be vastly different. In this workplace, the employer decides what kinds of provisions will be offered in the workplace, and employees themselves cannot just avail of any arrangements they feel would help them. The types of provisions offered, and not offered, by the employer raises questions about how responsive WLB initiatives can be to workers' needs.

At Westview, most of the initiatives offer short paid or longer-term unpaid time off from work, flexibility in employment time or space, and services for employees. Based on review of human resource management literature on the organizational benefits of WLB initiatives, I suggested that employers may make decisions about what kinds of WLB initiatives to offer based on the organization's bottom line (Bourhis & Mekkaoui). Only one of the WLB initiatives at Westview, the EAP policy, is explicitly written to

protect organizational interests: Employees are encouraged to use the EAP once they feel their personal issue is “adversely affecting” their work performance (Westview Policy Manual, 2012). None of the other initiatives are formally or explicitly linked to protecting employees’ work performance. However, the types of provisions offered at Westview may also be offered, perhaps somewhat more subtly, to yield business advantages. Short periods of time off from work, time schedule and workspace flexibility, and services for childcare and health/wellness do not hinder workers from performing their regular duties in their jobs, or interfere with them meeting ideal working norms at Westview of full-time employment. When workers take a day or two off from work using family responsibility leave to manage caregiving demands, or use a discounted gym membership on the weekends to improve their physical fitness, or when they move their work start/stop times up by one hour, to overarching presence of paid work in their lives has not diminished, and the features of employment that make it so dominant persist. In theory, employees can engage in these WLB initiatives and still maintain their full-time employment, and manage high workloads, put in extra hours on the job, and, for some, meet demanding expectations around technology and work travel. I argue that the WLB initiatives are therefore not really offered to make paid work less masculine and demanding as a structure.

### ***Relevance of WLB initiatives to worker’s needs***

My case study also reveals that WLB initiatives may target particular activities, instead of supporting employee work-life balance in a more holistic or comprehensive

way. Little research has been done to explore what exactly WLB initiatives aim to help workers with. The approach of identifying exactly what activities are targeted by WLB initiatives helps in exposing how Westview views employee work-life balance and what needs they recognize as legitimate. Textual analysis and interviewing workers about why they use certain WLB initiatives indicated that the provisions at Westview are offered and used in practice by employees primarily in response to some (particular) needs related to family or caregiving, physical fitness and health, and education. As well, informal flexibility is sometimes used by employees who undertake volunteer roles in the community. Again, this raises questions about the types of work-life balance needs that employers consider to be legitimate, or the needs they are interested in helping employees address.

Because these provisions target particular activities, and address certain work-life balance needs, WLB initiatives are relevant to some workers more than others. In my study, several participants indicated pursuing caregiving, physical fitness and, to a lesser degree, education and volunteering activities. However, there are other activities that Westview employees undertake which are not recognized nor supported through the provisions at Westview, including housework and leisure. Based on historical literature on workplace family-friendliness, I suggested that the many provisions for employees with family responsibilities likely reflects the origins of WLB initiatives in being responsive to employees' work-family balance needs (Yancey Martin et al., 1988). Considering human resource management literature, employers would potentially be interested in offering provisions around employee physical fitness and wider health and

wellbeing, education, and volunteering, as these activities may aid in professional development. Alternatively, Westview's lack of provisions around employees' housework and leisure activities may reflect a view that these activities do not enhance the skills of the workforce. Ultimately, the mismatch between WLB initiatives and employees' work-life balance activities reveals that these provisions are not necessarily aimed at fully supporting workers' needs.

### ***Accessibility of WLB initiatives to workers***

This research has found that workers may not be free to engage in WLB initiatives to help with their work-life balance. Textual analysis of the WLB initiatives at Westview revealed that some of the provisions are more accessible to certain employees and not others. For example, permanent and temporary employees are not granted the same amount of family responsibility leave, and men cannot engage in unpaid maternity leave. As well, interview findings suggest that employee access to working practices, such as flexitime and telework, is left to the discretion of supervisors or managers. In practice at Westview, many of the participants have what they described as "supportive" supervisors or managers, who were willing to grant access to (mostly occasional) flexitime and telework arrangements. However, some employees have limited access to these working practices because their departments/job responsibilities are not amenable varying their work start/stop times or work space.

Other researchers have studied the availability of WLB initiatives, suggesting that access to such provisions is unequal across the workforce and can vary by occupation

type and social class (Ferrer & Gagne, 2006). As a result of differential access within a single workplace, some Westview employees may not be able to access the provisions they desire. In granting greater access to WLB initiatives to some employees, and lesser to others, Westview sends implicit messages to the workforce about who is more and less deserving of WLB provisions. Making some WLB initiatives more and less accessible to workers demonstrates that WLB initiatives are not necessarily inclusive in who they support in the workplace.

### ***Workplace norms for using WLB initiatives***

My case study illustrates how workplace culture mediates employee engagement in the available provisions. The importance of organizational culture around formalized WLB initiatives has been well-documented in previous studies (Allen, 2001; Lewis, 1997). Interviewees described Westview as a “supportive” work environment for using WLB initiatives. The managers, supervisors and staff-level employees alike spoke of the value of WLB initiatives. However, often in the same breath, they emphasized the importance of maintaining productivity at work. It seems that at Westview, the workplace norms around the WLB initiatives enforce the importance of organizational objectives over work-life balance. Interviewees’ described taking measures to ensure that their engagement in WLB initiatives does not result in distraction from their jobs. For instance, participants gave examples of choosing not to take leave from work during a busy time, refraining from visiting their child in the on-site daycare during work hours, and accepting that flextime is not available to them to use because it could interfere with

departmental service delivery. The workplace culture at Westview is one which promotes the organizational bottom line above all else. Workers remain cognizant of the potential impact of WLB initiatives on their individual and departmental productivity, and engage in the provisions accordingly.

Overall, these findings from my study suggest that these provisions for employee work-life balance actually only offer certain types of provisions, in response to certain needs, for certain workers. Moreover, workers are encouraged to use these provisions for work-life balance in a way that ensures organizational productivity is protected. It can be argued that these provisions exist within and are influenced by a wider social structure that values the public sphere over the private sphere. Even when workers are using WLB initiatives that are meant to help them create a greater balance, they still must manage their work-life balance in a way that prioritizes paid work and treats their other activities as secondary. WLB initiatives are therefore limited in how useful they are in helping workers to actually create a balance between their paid work and personal lives.

The continued dominance of paid employment over personal life has implications for how workers can participate in different social institutions, as well as for their health and wellness, and their quality of life (Glucksmann, 1995; Guest, 2002, Waring 1999). Moreover, feminist scholars have insisted that this social organization has contributed to historical undervaluing of women's work and the gender inequalities that persist today (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2000). Without true support from employers to help all workers to participate in their many activities and roles and to actually balance them with less

dominant demands in paid employment, the challenges with work-life balance – and the social implications it presents – will persist.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings of my study, there are a number of recommendations for future research on WLB initiatives. To start, the findings from my study demonstrate the need for further investigation of how these WLB initiatives function, and how workers and organizations experience them. Conducting textual analysis of WLB initiatives is a useful method for exploring these workplace provisions and what they officially offer to workers. As well, through interviewing and other qualitative approaches such as participant observation, greater understanding of how formalized WLB initiatives are experienced by workers can be achieved. Future studies must build on the findings from my study and other research which questions the effectiveness of WLB initiatives in truly supporting workers to balance their many roles and responsibilities.

As well, to strengthen this field of study in Canada and Atlantic Canada, more research must be conducted in these jurisdictions. Research on WLB initiatives emerging from the United States, Australia and Europe provides useful baseline data for comparative studies in these areas. The Canadian literature would be enhanced by greater efforts to gather national data on the availability and use of these workplace provisions. There have been some large-scale quantitative studies, with longitudinal focus, that have gathered great detail on the availability of WLB initiatives in Canada, such as the Statistics Canada by Comfort, Johnson and Wallace (2003). Up to date research of this

kind is needed. Given the importance of context and the variability across studies in this field, it is recommended that future Canadian studies take different organizations, occupations, and sectors into consideration.

Finally, to enhance and complement the quantitative research on this topic, it is also recommended that more qualitative and detailed study be done on WLB initiatives. In carrying out my study, it was evident that most of the research on WLB initiatives does not closely examine these provisions. Future research would benefit from, for example, recognizing the different forms WLB initiatives can take. The findings from my study illustrate how these provisions function in different ways, by, for example, granting employees time off from work, making flexible work arrangements available, and offering services to employees. More work must be done in this area to develop a standardized working list of WLB initiatives, such that future research can be streamlined and more cross-comparisons can be conducted.

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## **Appendix A: Recruitment Email for Survey Participants**

Good day,

My name is Jenna Hawkins, and I am a Master of Arts student at Memorial University of Newfoundland. As part of my program, I am conducting a study on work-life balance and family-friendly policies and practices in your workplace.

This survey consists of questions regarding your experience of work-life balance and use/non-use of family-friendly policy and working practices within your workplace.

Follow this link to begin the survey:  
[survey link]

Please note that your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. Participants will not be asked to provide names or contact information, but will be asked to provide select demographic information (such as gender and age range). In addition, questions regarding employment details (e.g., name of department you work in) are asked but optional. For these reasons, participants will not be completely anonymous in this survey. However, please note that all data reported from the survey will be in aggregate form and measures will be taken to protect participants' identities in all written works.

All information collected from the surveys will be held in strict confidence; surveys will be seen only by me and my supervisors, Dr. Nicole Power and Dr. Linda Cullum, who have each signed confidentiality agreements.

While [Westview] has agreed to participate as the workplace of study for this research, I am an independent researcher and am in no way affiliated with [Westview]. This is not a [Westview]-administered employee survey.

Before you begin the survey, please review the attached document (consent information) to ensure your informed participation in this study.

I very much appreciate your consideration and hope you take the time to complete this survey.

Thank you,

Jenna Hawkins

## **Appendix B: Reminder Email for Survey Recruitment**

Thank you to those who have already completed the Work-life balance survey for MUN Masters student Jenna Hawkins.

Currently the response rate is 43%. If you have not already done so, your help in doing so would be very much appreciated. It's confidential and anonymous and takes about 10 minutes to complete.

Many thanks.

Follow this link to begin the survey:  
[survey link]

[Facilitator's signature]

## **Appendix C: Informed Consent Document for Survey Participants**

This document outlines all the pertinent details to ensure your informed participation in this study. Please review the information provided before completing the survey.

### **Researcher Introduction:**

My name is Jenna Hawkins, and I am a Master's student at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am conducting a study on experiences with and opinions of family-friendly workplace policy. This study is a part of the requirements for the degree program of Master of Arts at Memorial University of Newfoundland. This project is being supervised by the Department of Sociology at Memorial University. For my two-year program I have received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), and the Harris Centre-Strategic Partnership.

I am an independent researcher and am in no way affiliated with [Westview]. The information collected from this study will be used for my Master's thesis, a high-level summary report for you and your workplace, as well as academic and public talks, and presentations and publications.

### **Your Role:**

Completing this survey will involve answering a series of questions regarding your experience of work-family balance and your use/non-use of family-friendly policy and practices, in addition to some demographic questions.

### **Possible Benefits:**

Since this study explores your experiences with and opinions of work-life balance and related policy, I hope that the greatest benefit to you will be that your responses will be taken into consideration in future workplace policy development. In addition, for your own interests, I will make available to you a summary report as well as my completed thesis in Fall 2012.

### **Possible Risks:**

There is minimal risk in completing this survey, as the questions are not meant to delve too deeply into any emotional, financial, or physical issues. Still, if participating in this study strikes up any negative feelings, you are free to terminate your participation in my study at any time.

### **Time Commitment:**

Review of this information and completion of the survey is estimated to take between 15-20 minutes of your time.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to terminate your participation at any time without penalty. If you choose not to take part in the research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

**Confidentiality:**

Completed surveys will be accessible only to me, the researcher, and my two supervisors, Dr. Linda Cullum and Dr. Nicole Power, who have each signed a confidentiality agreement. The data from this survey will be reported in aggregate form.

This survey is distributed using SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey is a web-survey company that is located in the United States, and is therefore subject to U.S. laws (e.g., the U.S. Patriot Act, an act which allows authorities access to the records of internet service providers). Responses to questions in this survey will be stored and accessible in the United States. Data collected from the survey will be owned by me, data will be stored securely, and your email address will be safeguarded.

For this research, I have chosen SurveyMonkey's *secure communications* option. For more information about SurveyMonkey, please see:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/privacypolicy.aspx> and  
[http://www.surveymonkey.com/Monkey\\_Security.aspx](http://www.surveymonkey.com/Monkey_Security.aspx).

**Anonymity:**

Because I ask you to provide select demographic information in the survey and this survey has been released to a fairly small group, and because others may observe your participation in my research (e.g., if you are seen filling out the survey by a co-worker), I cannot guarantee your full anonymity in this study. However, you will not be asked to provide your name or any contact information to me in the survey. You will not be identified in my thesis, the summary report, nor any publications or publications, without explicit permission.

**Storage of data:**

All data and research materials will be securely stored in paper formats in a locked filing cabinet in my home to which only I have the key and in electronic formats on my personal computer to which only I have password information. All data will be retained for a minimum period of five years, as prescribed by Memorial University's research policy, at which point they will either be destroyed or held for a longer period, following university protocols.

Finally, if you complete this survey, you do not give up your legal rights, and do not release the researcher from their professional responsibilities.

**Your completion of this survey means that:**

- You have read the information about the research
- You have been able to ask questions in this study
- You are satisfied with the answers to all of your questions
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.

*The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICHER at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 864-2681.*

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me anytime. Any questions that cannot be answered by me, you may contact my thesis supervisors, Dr. Linda Cullum and Dr. Nicole Power, Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Contact information is provided below.

**Researcher:**

Jenna Hawkins  
Master of Arts Student  
Department of Sociology  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
[Contact information]

**Supervisors:**

Linda Cullum, PhD Department of Sociology Memorial University of Newfoundland [Contact information]	Nicole G. Power, PhD Department of Sociology Memorial University of Newfoundland [Contact information]
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Thank you in advance for your participation in this research.

## **Appendix D: Copy of Survey Questions**

1. Before proceeding to the survey, please confirm that you have read and understood the information provided to you by the researcher to ensure your informed participation in this study. Please remember that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICHER at [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) or by telephone at 864-2681.

- Yes
- No

2. Please indicate below which, if any, family-friendly policy or policies you have ever used in your workplace:

- Family responsibility leave
- Bereavement leave
- Employee assistance program (EAP)
- On-site daycare facility
- Financial top-up of 2-week waiting period for EI maternity/adoption leave benefits (to 100% of salary)
- Financial top-up for 15 weeks of EI maternity/adoption leave benefits (to 85% of salary)
- Unpaid maternity leave (up to 17 weeks) - employee must not have received EI benefits
- Unpaid adoption leave (up to 17 weeks) - employee must not have received EI benefits
- Unpaid parental leave (up to 35 weeks) - employee must not have received EI benefits
- I have not used any of these policies
- Other (please describe):

3. Please indicate which, if any, family-friendly working practices you have ever used in your workplace:

- Part-time work
- Job-sharing
- Flextime
- Compressed workweek
- Variable workweek
- Telework or work from home
- Referral service for finding childcare or eldercare

- Work-leave integration (communicating about new training and procedures while away on family-related leave)
- I have not used any of these working practices
- Other (please specify):

4. Are there any other family-friendly policies OR practices you would like to have available to you in your workplace? If yes, please describe.

- Yes
- No

[Comment box]

5. Please rate your “work-family” or “work-life” balance (select one):

- Very good
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Poor
- Very poor

6. Outside of your job, which activities/responsibilities occupy most of your time (select all that apply):

- Doing housework
- Volunteering
- Attending school
- Leisure activities
- Providing childcare/looking after children
- Providing eldercare
- Providing care to someone other than a dependent child or elder
- Other (please specify):

7. There are many possible causes of work-related stress. Please indicate from the list below which, if any, sources of stress you have experienced in the past six months (select all that apply):

- High workloads
- Unrealistic deadlines
- Lack of control over work activities
- Poor working relationships leading to a sense of isolation
- Insufficient experience or training
- Concerns about job security, lack of career opportunities, or level of pay
- Bullying or harassment

- Multiple reporting lines with each manager asking for their work to be prioritized
- Failure to be kept informed
- A poor physical working environment (example: excessive heat, noise...)
- Other (please specify):

8. Please indicate how many hours *per week* you work in this job.

- Less than 20 hours
- Between 21 and 30 hours
- Between 31-40 hours
- Between 41-50 hours
- Between 51-60 hours
- More than 60 hours

9. What is your typical schedule of work (select all that apply):

- Daytime hours (8am-4pm, or some variation)
- Evenings
- Weekends
- Shift work
- Other (please specify):

10. Which department do you work with?

[List of options provided]

11. Are you in a management position?

- Yes
- No

12. Please indicate your gender.

- Female
- Male

13. Please indicate your age (in years):

- 15-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45

- 46-50
- 51-55
- 56-60
- 61-65
- 66-70
- 71 and over

14. Please indicate your relationship status:

- Single
- In a relationship and living apart
- In a relationship and co-habiting
- Legally married
- Married and separated
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Other (please specify):

15. Please indicate the number of dependents you have, if any.

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 or more

16. Please indicate the number of children you have aged 18 or younger:

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 or more

## **Appendix E: Recruitment Email for Interview Participants**

Good day,

To follow up the survey administered last week, I am conducting one-on-one, in-person interviews to get more detailed responses to questions regarding work-life balance and family-friendly workplace benefits. Those who use AND do not use family-friendly benefits are invited to participate.

Please respond to my email address to indicate your interest in participating. We can set up a date, time and place at your convenience. Interviews should not take longer than 30 minutes (but I am available to speak with you for as long as you would like).

Please remember that while [Westview] has agreed to be the workplace of study in this research, I am an independent researcher and am in no way affiliated with [Westview]. As well, please keep in mind that your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this project!

Sincerely,

Jenna Hawkins

## **Appendix F: Reminder Email for Interview Recruitment**

Hello all,

I hope you all had a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Thank you to those who have participated in interviews for my research on work-life balance and family-friendly workplace policies. To date I have completed four interviews, and hope to conduct 12 more this month to complete my data collection.

I am interested in interviewing employees of various positions, and those who use and do NOT use family-friendly policies and working practices.

Please respond to [jahawkins@mun.ca](mailto:jahawkins@mun.ca) to indicate your interest in participating. We can set up a date, time and place at your convenience. Interviews can be completed within 30 minutes (but I am available to speak with you for as long as you would like).

Please remember that while Westview has agreed to be the workplace of study in this research, I am an independent researcher and am in no way affiliated with Westview. As well, please keep in mind that your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Many thanks.

Sincerely,  
Jenna Hawkins

## **Appendix G: Information on Research for Interview Participants**

My name is Jenna Hawkins, and I am a Master's student at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am conducting a study on experiences with and opinions on family-friendly workplace policy in your workplace. This study is a part of the requirements for the degree program of Master of Arts at Memorial University of Newfoundland. This project is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Harris Centre-Strategic Partnership Graduate Research Fellowship. This project is supervised by the Department of Sociology at Memorial University.

If you are willing, I would like to conduct a one-on-one interview with you, to ask some detailed questions about your experiences with and opinions on family-friendly workplace policy. In the interview, I will ask you a series of questions about your background information (e.g., gender, age range, work hours), your work-family balance, your use or non-use of family-friendly workplace policy, your experiences with working within a "family-friendly" workplace, and your experiences with and opinions of the benefits and challenges of family-friendly workplace policy. If you are interested in participating in an interview, we can set up a time, date, and place at your convenience. The interview should take between 30 and 60 minutes of your time.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to end the interview and/or your participation in my research at any time without penalty. You may refuse to answer any question without explanation. All information you provide will be held in strict confidence and your name will not be released to any organization or appear in any report. To the best of my ability, I will not link your name or other revealing information to data in my thesis, the report for the workplace, and any presentations/publications. The information you provide will be audio recorded, and electronically transcribed after the interview. I will refer to these audio and typed files for my data analysis. The information collected from this study will be used for my Master's thesis, a report for the workplace, and academic and public talks, presentations and publications.

If you have any questions or concerns that cannot be answered by me, you may contact my thesis supervisors, Dr. Linda Cullum, Department of Sociology or Dr. Nicole Power. The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICHER at [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) or by telephone at 864-2681.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Jenna Hawkins

## **Appendix H: Consent Form for Interview Participants**

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled “Supporting Work-Life Balance in the Workplace: Refocusing on Gender Equality.”

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any information given to you by the researcher.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in the research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

**Introduction:** This project is an exploration of the processes of family-friendly workplace benefits and any outcomes on employees, the workplace, and gender equality.

**Purpose of study:** The purpose of this study is to investigate multiple perspectives regarding family-friendly policy in the workplace: how and why policy is used, how employees’ experience the use of policy, how policy use is managed, and which needs (individual or workplace) are or are not being met. Ultimately, this research will offer a balanced overview of family-friendly policies in response to a variety of employee and workplace needs.

**What you will do in this study:** For this in-person interview, I will ask you a series of questions regarding your background information (gender, age range, job description), your experience managing work with other responsibilities (family, leisure time, school, etc.), and your experiences with and opinions regarding family-friendly workplace benefits.

**Length of time:** At a time and place of your convenience, this interview should take between 30 to 60 minutes of your time.

**Possible benefits:** Since this study explores your experiences with and opinion on work-life balance and current related policy, I hope that the greatest benefit to you will be that your responses will be taken into consideration in future workplace policy development. In addition, for your own interests, I will make available to you a summary report as well as my completed thesis in Fall 2012.

**Possible risks:** While the study deals with potentially sensitive material such as personal experiences of managing work and family, your thoughts and opinions on workplace policies, it is not meant to delve too deeply into any emotional or physical issues. Still, if

any part of our interview strikes up any negative feelings, you can pass on any question(s) and/or stop the interview or your participation in the study at any time.

**Confidentiality:** Our interview (in audio and transcribed formats) will be accessible only to me and my project supervisors, Dr. Linda Cullum and Dr. Nicole Power, who have each signed a confidentiality agreement. All interview data will be stored in a secure location to which only I have access. I will audio record our interview for the purpose of data analysis to complete my Master's thesis and the report for the workplace. The data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences and meetings; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although I will report direct quotations from our interview, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information (e.g., your exact age, your specific employment title, etc.) will be removed from all written works. Still, because the participants for this research project have been selected from a small group of people, all of whom may be known to each other, it is possible that you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of what you have said.

**Anonymity:** Because we will have a one-on-one interview, you will not be anonymous to me. In addition, as others may observe your participation in my research (e.g., if we are seen by others during the interview), I cannot guarantee your anonymity. Still, you will not be identified in any reports and/or publications without explicit permission.

**Recording of data:** I will, with your informed consent, use a digital audio recorder for our interview for my own use to help with my final report.

**Reporting of results:** The data collected will be used in a thesis that I will submit to the Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland and to the Harris Centre-Strategic Partnership in Fall 2012. Data will also be used for a report I will prepare for the workplace, and in any presentations and/or publications. The data gathered from interviews will be reported by the use of direct quotations, and in an aggregate form. Data collected from this interview may be used by me in other, future works not associated with my thesis.

**Storage of data:** All data and research materials will be securely stored in paper formats in a locked filing cabinet in my home to which only I have the key and in electronic formats on my personal computer to which only I have password information. All data will be retained for a minimum period of five years, as prescribed by Memorial University's research policy, at which point they will either be destroyed or held for a longer period, following university protocols.

In case of withdrawal from study:

If I withdraw from the study the researcher may:

Keep and use all information collected

Destroy all information collected

**Questions:** You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICHER at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 864-2681.

**Consent:**

Your signature on this form means that:

You have read the information about the research

You have been able to ask questions in this study

You are satisfied with the answers to all of your questions

You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing

You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights, and do not release the researcher from their professional responsibilities.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form for your records.

Your signature:

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

---

Signature of participant

---

Date

Researcher's signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave my answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

---

Signature of investigator

---

Date

## **Interview I: Copy of Interview Questions, All Participants**

### A. Work-Family Management

1. How would you describe your work-family or work-life balance?
2. What have you experienced to be the biggest challenges in managing your work with other roles/responsibilities?
3. Please describe your demands outside of your paid employment and (generally) how much time you spend on the major activities.
4. [If participant has a live-in spouse] Please describe how you and your spouse divide or share household chores and (if applicable) childcare.
5. How would you describe your workplace with regard to “family-friendliness”?

### B. Use of Family-Friendly Benefits

6. Do you use any family-friendly benefits in your workplace? [If no, proceed to question 8.]
  - 6.1 If yes, which policies and/or working practices?
  - 6.2 How did you gain access to the policy/policies?
  - 6.3 Can you describe your use of each policy (e.g., how long have you used each policy, is your use regular or irregular)
  - 6.4 Can you describe the reasons why you use each policy?
  - 6.5 How do you feel your family-friendly benefit use is perceived by your manager and/or co-workers?

### C. Experiences with Benefits

7. Can you describe how using each policy and/or working practice impacts your management of work and family?
  - 7.1 How would you describe the impact of family-friendly benefits on your family? Can you give an example?
  - 7.2 How would you describe the impact of family-friendly benefits in your work? Can you give an example?
8. What would you say are the benefits/drawbacks of using each benefit?

9. Can you describe any impact that your co-workers' use of formal family-friendly benefits has had on you or your work? Can you give an example?
10. What would you say are the benefits of working in an organization that offers family-friendly benefits?
- 10.1    Drawbacks?
11. Can you comment to any informal family-friendliness of your workplace? Can you give an example?
- D. Recommendations**
12. In general, what would make your management of work and family/life easier?
13. What, if any, recommendations would you make to your workplace in responding to employee work-family needs?
14. Do you have any further comments about anything we have or have not discussed here?

## **Appendix J: Copy of Additional Interview Questions,**

### **Supervisors/Managers**

#### A. Managing Policy Use

1. Can you please describe your approach to family-friendliness in your workplace?
2. Please describe how you manage employees' use of formal family-friendly policy and/or working practices.
  - 2.1 What are the challenges of managing 'family-friendliness'?
  - 2.2 What are the benefits?

#### B. Effectiveness of Policy

3. In your experience, which policies work and do not work?
  - 3.1 In your experience, how would you describe the impact of family-friendly workplace benefits on:
    - Employee recruitment
    - Retention
    - Well-being
    - Satisfaction
    - Productivity
    - Efficiency
    - Tardiness, absenteeism
    - Any other outcomes?

#### C. Recommendations

4. In general, could your management of family-friendly workplace benefits be improved? If so, how?
5. Do you have any further comments about anything we have or have not discussed here?

## **Appendix K: Copy of Demographic Interview Questions, All Interviewees**

1. Please indicate which age range (in years) you fall into:

- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46-50
- 51-55
- 56-60
- 61-65
- 66-70
- 71 and over

2. How would you describe your relationship status?

- Single
- In a relationship and living apart
- In a relationship and co-habiting
- Legally married
- Married and separated
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Other (please describe)

3. Can you describe, in general terms, the duties involved in your job?

3.1     How long have you held this position?

4. How many hours per week do you usually work?

5. Do you have any dependents? Please describe (e.g., aging parents, children, disabled family member, etc.; conditions of care).

6. Can you please provide a pseudonym (a fake name) for yourself for this study?