Contributions of Work-Life and Resilience Initiatives
to the Individual/Organisation Relationship

Ariane OLLIER-MALATERRE
Associate Professor, Rouen Business School
aom@rouenbs.fr

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Abstract:
Despite much research, it remains unclear whether and how organisational work-life and resilience initiatives (WLRI) enhance employee commitment. To open this black box, this theory-building research analyses 73 in-depth interviews in a multinational pharmaceutical company. WLRI foster desirable outcomes for almost two-thirds of the sample (loyalty, pride, calculated appreciation and use as management tools), yet may have negative outcomes (disappointment, obligation to stay) or no outcome (indifference). To understand the processes implied, this research analyses employees’ awareness, need, access and judgment of the initiatives. A decision tree is built. Key success conditions lie in three layers of context: personal, work environment and national. This article argues for a new theoretical foundation of work-life research, combining classic individual-centred perspectives with relational theories, which remain under-investigated in work-life research.

Keywords: Commitment, Engagement, Individual/Organisation relationship, Perceived Organizational Support, Relational perspective, Resilience, Work-family, Work-life

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Biographical note: Ariane Ollier-Malaterre is an Associate Professor of Management at
Rouen Business School, an Associate Member of the LISE-CNRS Research Laboratory,
CNAM University, Paris and an Affiliate of the Sloan Center on Aging and Work at Boston
College. Her research interests include the Individual/Organisation relationship, work-life and
flexible working, aging and the lifecycle, protean careers, and qualitative methodologies. She
has recently published “Organizational Work-Life initiatives: Context matters. France compared to
the UK and the US” in Community, Work and Family (2009) and “How do employers manage the
non-work life of their employees? A comparison of two models, the French and the Anglo-American"

Practitioners and researchers strive to establish the business case for work-life and resilience
initiatives (WLRI). However, this case remains under-demonstrated both theoretically and
empirically. Do these initiatives really foster desirable outcomes for the
Individual/Organisation (I/O) relationship? If so, then how, and in which context? Given the
lack of clarity despite decades of research, this paper takes a theory building stance to uncover
the range of outcomes, understood as incremental contributions to the I/O relationship that is
also shaped by other antecedents such as pay and career development. It explores the
processes and key context elements explaining these outcomes, contributing to the theoretical
integration of various perspectives mobilized in work-life research.

WLRI stem from the late 1970s’ acknowledgement that the separation of the work and non-
work domains is largely a myth (Kanter, 1977). Organisations experimented with a number of
formal policies, informal arrangements and cultural change efforts, to support their employees
as whole persons engaged in both domains (Bailyn, 1993; Lewis, 1997; Thévenet, 2001).
Involvement in different domains of life may lead people to experience conflict (Greenhaus &
Beutell, 1985) and enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), the two constructs being
orthogonal (Rothbard, 2001). Work-life initiatives such as flexible working arrangements and
childcare and eldercare resources aim at reducing conflict and fostering enrichment (Ollier-
Employers still experiment with work-life initiatives, but health and wellness have now triggered their interest in employees’ psychological capital and especially their resilience (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Resilience originally defined the capacity of a metal to recover its initial shape after, for instance, thermal stress. Resilience was first used in developmental psychology (Rutter, 1985), then in management to describe the “surviving” employees after corporate restructuring (Doherty, Bank & Vinnicombe, 1996). Luthans (2002:702) defines resilience as the “positive psychological capacity to rebound or ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility”. Resilience programs, mostly based on training, encompass work-life, health and wellness and interpersonal relationships.

Has a solid business case for WLRI been established? Proponents of work-life initiatives have built strong arguments in the past thirty years, noting that these initiatives can potentially enhance employees’ commitment, satisfaction and performance at work, and their control over work and overall well-being (Hall, 1990; Kirchmeyer, 1995). Major studies, by, for example, the Families and Work Institute, have focused on the business case (Bond, Galinsky, Kim & Brownfield, 2005). However, the empirical studies yield divergent results, as several literature reviews underline (Allen, 2001; Glass & Finley, 2002; Kelly et al., 2008; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999). Work-life initiatives are both positively and negatively correlated with these outcomes, and sometimes not significantly correlated at all. This is no surprise, since the utilisation of work-life initiatives remains low (Hochschild, 1997), and career penalties for users (Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999), and backlashes within teams (Hayashi, 2001), are possible side effects. Resilience interventions are newer at the workplace, and research is insufficient to assess their outcomes.

No overarching theoretical perspective can account for these contrasting findings. However, perceived organisational support (POS) (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1996) is explanatorily powerful. POS is based on social exchange theories (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960): employees need to know whether the organisation values their contributions and cares about them. POS relates to all three dimensions of commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990): when they feel supported by their employer, they can identify with the organisation (affective commitment), rest assured that their effort will be rewarded (continuance commitment) and feel obliged to reciprocate (normative commitment). A close but distinct construct is perceived supervisor support (PSS) (Allen, 2001). Some of these initiatives, such as FWA, are less an entitlement for all employees than a reward (Lewis
& Smithson, 2001). They signal that the organisation and supervisor value the individual, which triggers POS and PSS. Becker’s side bets theory (1960) may account for more negative outcomes. Side bets are exogenous consequences of a behaviour, such as enrolling a child in the corporate day-care centre, that entail persistent obligations. Hence, employees who feel obligated to stay with their current employer because of a policy or benefit they would not have elsewhere may feel trapped and resent it.

Other theoretical perspectives that have been far less articulated in work-life research shed a different light on the contributions of WLRI to the I/O relationship. These perspectives are relational, in Emirbayer’s (1997) sense. They conceive of the social world as consisting in dynamic processes, not static substances, and posit that continuously unfolding relationships with other individuals and social groups shape individual attitudes and behaviour. In particular, the organisational justice (Grandey, 2001; Leventhal, Karuza & Fry, 1980) and social information processing (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) theories study how individuals compare themselves with significant others in the workplace or elsewhere. Also focusing on comparisons, the organisational image (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994; Fuller, Hester, Barnett, Frey, Relyea & Beu, 2006) and perceived external prestige (Carmeli, 2005) frameworks help understand how feelings of pride triggered by the employer’s initiatives contribute positively to the I/O relationship. Including relationships in the analysis implies paying attention to the processes and to the context, which work-life research has yet to investigate thoroughly.

This research takes an inductive theory-building stance, based on an in-depth case study in a multinational pharmaceutical company. It is driven by two main questions: (1) Do WLRI really foster desirable outcomes for the I/O relationship? (2) Which processes lead to these outcomes, and in which context do they work well, or not?

**METHODS AND CONTEXT**

Data for this research was gathered in a leading multinational pharmaceutical company, in the US and the UK. “Pharma” employs 100,000 people in the world. The pharmaceutical industry is extremely competitive globally, and it currently faces both increasing regulations and decreasing margins. Knowledge work, notably in Research & Development, is essential. To Pharma, intellectual capital consists of both competence and engagement. Constant and fast-paced change is the norm, as a result of the demands of the environment and a history of
successive mergers. Pharma’s values give an accurate sense of the organisation’s “signature” 
(Erickson & Gratton, 2007): performance, passion, entrepreneurship, innovation and sense of 
urgency. This signature is audible in the employees’ proud discourse on the company’s 
mission to improve health and save lives, and perceptible in the workplace. Seventeen percent 
of British employees are unionised, but only about two hundred in the US.

Pharma has been a pioneer of work-life initiatives since the mid-1980s, beginning with 
Resource and Referral programs and onsite day-care centres. A full-time work-life officer 
position, and formal flexible working policies, have existed since the late 1990s. These 
elaborate policies, owned by HR, include decision-making processes for the employee and the 
manager, and grievance processes. Most policies are available to all employees, but some 
differ according to the business unit: production workers or account managers, for instance, 
cannot work from home. Yet creative solutions have been found, as when two account 
managers job-share a compressed workweek, and are available to doctors and hospitals 
throughout the week. The legal and regulatory contexts also entail differences between the 
UK and the US (notably regarding leave). Besides FWA, Pharma provides a broad range of 
work-life support: family and personal leave, a widely used EAP, dependent care resources, 
tuition assistance and employees’ support groups. Pharma has also been awarded for its health 
and wellness self-assessments, on-site preventive actions, and Lunch & Learn seminars. More 
recently, HR has developed personal and team resilience programs that encompass work-life 
and health, but are framed in terms of enabling employees to cope with pressure and fast-
paced change in a way that is sustainable for their well-being and for the organisation’s 
performance.

I conducted a case study within Pharma over three years. I collected data through 7 site visits, 
25 informal conversations within HR, a survey with 5160 respondents and 73 in-depth semi-
structured interviews with employees. In this article, I focus on the 73 interviews, although I 
use the other data as contextual information to analyse this material. The sample is contrasted 
in terms of nationality, gender, age, tenure, business unit and position, as illustrated in table 1. 
The interviewees worked in the 4 major business units, in 9 different locations including the 
UK and US headquarters and a field-based sales team.

=== Insert Table 1 about here ===
Unlike Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) original grounded theory approach, which commanded ignoring all literature to avoid contaminating the data, but like the later work of Strauss and Corbin (1990), which used theoretical constructs to structure empirical observations (Kelle, 1997), my initial literature review provided the skeleton of the interview guide and coding structure. The interviews were conducted from January to September 2006, with employee respondents recruited after I attended workshops, or through a letter introducing my work. Some managers also asked their subordinates to participate. I introduced myself as an independent researcher at a University in Paris, and started the interviews by asking general questions about the person’s position, what he/she liked or disliked at work, what made him/her stay with Pharma. Then I asked questions about WLRI that the person knew of, needed or used, how he/she perceived them, and what impact, if any, they had on his/her relationship with Pharma. I also asked to what extent this type of support was legitimate, and expected from the employer. The complete interview guide is available from the author upon request. The interviews lasted on average 36 minutes, and ranged from 20 to 90 minutes. A native-speaker transcribed them.

I applied Miles and Huberman’s (1994) methods to code and analyse the content, first horizontally, to understand the patterns and the underlying logic of each interview separately, then vertically, by comparing and contrasting the patterns. I went back and forth between the data and the literature when coding and revising the codes. I used two sets of codes, one for the outcomes of WLRI, the other for the key factors explaining these outcomes. A double coding procedure was performed on the first ten interviews, with 82 percent intercoder reliability. Although the actual process was very iterative and implied successive code revisions, I followed three main steps. First, I coded each interview and wrote a memo right away, following Eisenhardt’s “24 hours rule” (1989:547). I structured the memos to provide me with insights into the processes that led each person to think and feel as they did about the initiatives. Second, I compared and contrasted cases, to draft a detailed process for each outcome identified. Third, I summarised the content of a 2000-cells Excel file into a new file, to view the big picture of the different groups. I used Excel’s sort and filter functions to view codes and interview sentences for specific sub-groups of the sample, to compare the characteristics of all persons with a specific code, and to match empirical and theoretical memos and codes.

Two sets of findings emerged: (1) A typology of seven different outcomes and (2) The processes explaining these outcomes, and three layers of context that influence them.
RESULTS

These 73 employees told very different stories. Far from all converging on one positive process leading to commitment, I found that WLRI yielded seven distinct outcomes. These outcomes are ideal types in Weber’s (1997) sense: empirically, some employees belong to a primary and a secondary group. For clarity purposes, this article focuses on employees’ primary group, while acknowledging equifinality. I will briefly present the seven outcomes and then introduce real persons, whose names have been modified for reasons of confidentiality, to explain each of them. The seven outcomes are organized in Figure 1 along two dimensions: the positive versus negative direction of the outcome (horizontal axis), and the affective versus cognitive logic that supports them (vertical axis).

Positively, these initiatives foster loyalty, pride, calculated appreciation or use as management tools, for 43 persons. They also foster negative outcomes, such as disappointment/resentment or obligation to stay, for 11 persons. 18 persons remain mostly indifferent. The affective and cognitive logics are balanced: 28 and 26 persons, respectively, excluding 18 Indifferents. This totals 72 and not 73, because one manager expressed a unique outcome: he was concerned by production being outsourced, and read the upholding of WLRI as management’s intention to keep the plant running, whereas discontinuing some services, such as no longer having an on-site nurse, signalled management’s intention to close the plant.

Each group has consistent patterns of individual and work environment characteristics, illustrated in table 2.

The need for the initiatives is a key factor. The first two outcomes to emerge in those needing them are loyalty and disappointment/resentment. They are characterised by an affect-loaded language.

Sophia – When WLRI create loyalty
Sophia has been with Pharma for 14 years, in a semi-skilled position in a manufacturing site, where some of her family also work. She began work young, Pharma being her first employer. Sophia describes her relationship with her employer as “passionate”, but she does not feel supported by her supervisor. She had not given much thought to WLRI before a “crisis” in her life made her consult the nurse. This was critical in her recovery, and in her decision to stay with Pharma. Sophia is typical of the “loyalty” that these initiatives can create or reinforce, other things being equal.

“DO YOU FEEL SUPPORTED BY PHARMA AS A COMPANY? WE’RE NOT TALKING MANAGEMENT OR…” “Yes the level of support that I got from the nurse and the doctor, it kept my faith in Pharma which I’ve had for a very long time. (…) If it wasn’t for that support network that I got there, then I wouldn’t have had the same level of faith in Pharma as I do now.” “FAITH IS A VERY STRONG WORD.” “It’s a very strong word, yes.” “SO IT DOES BUILD A STRONGER BOND TO THE COMPANY?” “That’s correct yes. I think because when I was feeling stressed I was obviously even considering leaving the company and for somebody who has been here that long and been so loyal that’s the wrong thing to do really and if it wasn’t for the nurse and the doctor I probably would have gone by now or would have been looking to go by now.”

Sophia knew that support was available on work-life and resilience and she needed it. The resources she was able to access to were not mere benefits but strengthened her positive relationship with the organisation. This pattern holds for 15 other people in the sample of 73, for whom loyalty is the main outcome of WLRI. Common traits in their language are its distinct affective connotation, and spontaneous references to personal life events. When asked why, in their view, Pharma is adopting these initiatives, they mention that they “care about their staff”, “check that everybody is OK”. They consider WLRI to be legitimate on the part of the employer, and interpret them in social terms much more than economically or legally. Their judgment on their employer is very positive.

Rachel – When WLRI yield disappointment

________________________________________

1 My questions or comments are in upper case.
Rachel works in the same manufacturing site as Sophia, with the same supervisor and colleagues. She too was hired through a family member. She is in her mid-forties and has three years of tenure. She leads a team and feels much challenged by the pace of work and the “demands on your time”. She is almost “strained” and could use work-life support. She is ambivalent towards her employer’s initiatives. She hopes for support, but does not receive enough:

“I do think they do want to contribute but I also think it’s almost … it is a good selling point, you run these programs, but I still think if you’re out there in the thick of it, that you don’t necessarily get the support … (…) The people running the program believe in them, but there is some people within the management on a site that don’t.”

Rachel’s expectations had been raised by the initiatives, and her disappointment stems from the discrepancy between the “good selling point” and the actual unavailability of support. She suspects that these programs may benefit the organisation from a public relations standpoint, although management does not actually embrace them. She also resents the inconsistency between supportive policies, on the one hand, and a heavy workload that prevents employees from accessing the policies, on the other hand. Her disappointment has a clear negative impact on her relationship with Pharma:

“My view is that companies at the end of the day are there to make money and although if they can make your daily life better, you know that they can let you down just as much as you can let them down, at the end of the day. You know, sometimes, when it matters, it doesn’t matter how much support there is, you still feel let down.”

Although Rachel shares with Sophia the awareness of, and need for, support, her need revolves around work-life balance, whereas Sophia’s need was primarily related to psychological counselling. Rachel has difficulties accessing support because of the work-life culture (Thompson et al., 1999) at this plant. Other employees are disappointed because of the discrepancy between WLRI and rumours of off-shoring that trigger job insecurity. In the sample, seven employees are primarily disappointed by, or even resentful towards, these initiatives. Experiencing lack of support, many of them consider that balance and well-being
are a personal, rather than organisational, responsibility. They tend to protect their personal life from work spillover. Unlike the loyalty group, they view these initiatives as motivated by business or compliance reasons. As one account manager puts it,

“I suppose my initial thought was utter scepticism, in that the company are trying to create a team of people who are more resilient; so they can get us to do more and not be upset about it, (…) so that they can throw more stuff at us.”

The affective stance in these loyalty and disappointment groups is distinct from two other groups’ more cognitive assessment of the initiatives: calculated appreciation, and obligation to stay.

Glenn – A calculated view of WLRI

Glenn is a young researcher who transitioned three years ago from a university to Pharma. He had just married, and felt he would have greater job security with Pharma than chasing grant after grant in academia. Becoming a father changed his work behaviour, and he appreciates flexibility and the benefits pertaining to children, such as leave and childcare schemes. Unlike Sophia, he separates work and non-work, and keeps his distance from his employer. He likes his work but feels no personal ties to this “huge corporation”: “they pay my salary but they don’t know my name”. WLRI are just one of his criteria for staying with Pharma, and he might leave for a competitor who offered a better package:

“If I were to move, obviously I would look at what sort of package they offered me, it wouldn’t necessarily make me stay, it would just have to be part of the decision making process.”

Seven persons in the sample share this calculating mindset. Most of them work at headquarters, where WLRI are most developed. They know these initiatives well and use them. Their needs are less crucial than those of the loyalty and disappointment groups: they pertain to sports, lifestyle or financial planning, rather than to children (except for Glenn). Their understanding of these initiatives is clearly economic, not social:
“It's a business, they need to do whatever it takes to retain people.” (R&D middle manager)

Gabriella – Would rather leave but stays because of the initiatives

The first thing Gabriella says in the interview is that she has two young children, and has become a new person since they were born. She has worked with Pharma for nine years, in R&D. She has perhaps the most accurate knowledge of WLRI in the sample. She used the on-site day-care provided by Pharma, but now uses one closer to her home. She is grateful for the “complete gift” of these policies, but resents her manager for not allowing her to work from home, unlike other team members. She resents HR giving her incomplete advice after maternity leave, resulting in her temporarily losing health insurance benefits. She is blunt about her reasons for remaining with Pharma:

“So what are the primary reasons why you stay with Pharma now?” “The flexibility. The hours are less than if I had to work a full-time job somewhere else, 35 hours a week rather than 40, the ability to work extra hours to have a day off when I need it, obviously the income, and that’s about it. (…) I consider the flexibility of the life-work to be a greater value here that I perhaps couldn’t get somewhere else.”

Gabriella plans to stop working if denied part-time when her children go to school. WLRI make her stay, even though she is not particularly committed to her employer, her manager or her work. The mother identity of all four persons in this group is important. They use flexibility to spend time with their children: unpaid leave during school holidays, the compressed workweek and a gradual return to work after maternity leave. They are very sensitive to procedural justice. Unlike the disappointment group, they can access the initiatives. Unlike the loyalty and calculated appreciation groups, flexibility is not just important, it is crucial. It overrides most other criteria in their decision to remain with the organisation. This outcome stems from work-life initiatives, not from resilience training.
In these four cases, loyalty, disappointment, calculated appreciation and obligation to stay, employees are aware of WLRI and have great need of them. However, not everyone knows the initiatives as well as this. Also, not everyone needs or desires flexibility, or support for the non-work part of life.

Mike – When the initiatives do not have any impact on the I/O relationship

Mike is an account manager. He visits general practitioners and hospitals in a set geographic territory and spends much time in the field. He obviously thrives in his job, is very resilient to pressure, and regrets that his female co-workers who are mothers seem less organised than him. He is in his mid-thirties, has no children and does not mention a partner. Although he has used the EAP to obtain legal advice and gladly participates in health programs, he does not see the WLRI as having any impact on his relationship towards Pharma.

“Have you come across Madlo’s Hierarchical Pyramid? For me there are certain hygiene factors, there are factors that you have to have. And some of the employee health things that we have done for me are not ‘have to have’ hygiene factors…. they are very nice to have and I recognise the value of them, but if they were taken away they wouldn’t make a difference. And it doesn’t affect my loyalty or otherwise to the company.”

Mike is aware of some initiatives and uses them. Most persons in his group, however, are simply indifferent to WLRI: some have no need for them; some are “happy workaholics”, as Friedman and Lobel (2003) termed them; and some are concerned above all with pay because they are the main or sole contributor to their household. This group is numerically important (18 persons).

Oddly enough, indifference is not the most common outcome for people who do not need WLRI, or use them personally. Even for these persons, the initiatives can also yield positive outcomes, either because they appreciate the demonstration of supportiveness on the part of the organisation, or because they use these initiatives for the persons they manage.
Wanda – Proud of working here, because of WLRI

Wanda is in her early thirties, married with a young daughter. She began as an administrative assistant nine years ago, and has risen to a supervisory position in a call centre. Work and career are very salient for her, even though she feels guilty about it, and sets up her Lotus Notes calendar so as to remember to go home at night.

“I love working for the company. I think it’s a fabulous company to work for. For me it’s been a great opportunity, having a chance to learn a lot, to develop myself. The benefits are fantastic. I know of very few companies that offer the level of benefits that Pharma does.”

She has compared her employment terms with those of her family members, and is especially proud of the flexible hours, maternity leave, and health insurance – her husband works in a small business:

“I'm the insurance for the family (…) I respect what the company is offering. I really admire and respect the fact that we are lucky.”

Wanda’s logic is more cognitive than Sophia’s. She speaks pragmatically of “a total package”. Flexibility and benefits increase her pride in her employer and her own self-esteem, but they do not create an affective tie to the organisation, or an obligation to reciprocate:

“The extra effort, it’s not just because of the benefits, it also comes from inside regardless of where you’re working, it’s an obligation to give 100 percent.”

In the sample, five persons express pride directly related to WLRI. They share a good knowledge of these initiatives, although they do not use them much: Wanda has stopped going to fitness and lunch-on seminars since becoming a mother. The majority of them would probably recognise themselves as “happy workaholics”. Unlike the Indifferents, they see the value in offering WLRI, because other employees might need them, and because they want to
work for an employer of choice. Several of them describe Pharma as “proactive” towards business and regulation issues.

Mitch – WLRI as management tools

Mitch illustrates another type of positive outcome in a person who does not need or use the initiatives for himself. Mitch, a middle manager in a plant, has now been working for 30 years, and 8 years with Pharma. He worked in a smaller pharmaceutical company and has experienced several plant closures and relocations. He has no family where he works now, and socialises mostly with his colleagues. He appreciates the benefits at Pharma, which are “much, much better” than in his previous company. He does not need them personally but has several times used resilience workshops, the EAP and flexible working options, such as shift swapping, to help his subordinates resolve their personal issues and focus better at work:

“We do a lot of documentation here. There is a lot of hand-written entries and some checks we do every 5 minutes, some we do every 20 minutes—and if people are distracted, they tend to make more errors. We’re judged on the not-right-first-time errors. So we like our people to be focused, and it’s easier for those folks to focus if some other problems at home are being handled.”

“I’ve had people from all different shifts that have maybe an illness or a substance abuse problem with a family member, and I’ve always recommended that they call the Employee Assistance Program. And they’ve come back to me and actually said, ‘You know, that really helped.’ A lot of people just need direction. If they get somebody that can actually tell them what they need to do from that point forward, like with an EAP person, then that takes a lot of the pressure off them.”

The motivation of these fifteen persons to use WLRI as management tools include enhancing performance and creativity, reducing pressure, retaining their staff, improving their personal image as managers. Other managers appreciate the fact that these initiatives enable them to manage their teams according to their own values:
“I just don’t know that I could work in, for lack of a better expression, I say a slave shop. Forget what effect it would have on me! I chose to work here, it would be my choice. But then for me to put the rules in place and standards in place that would echo that negative, well I believe it would be a very negative feature on my part. I couldn’t do it.”

DISCUSSION

The in-depth analysis of the 73 semi-structured interviews with US and UK employees of a multinational pharmaceutical company uncovers seven contrasting outcomes of work-life and resilience initiatives (WLRI). Regarding my first research question—“Do these initiatives really foster desirable outcomes for the I/O relationship?”—positive outcomes prevail (43 persons), not only for people who need and use them for themselves (loyalty), but also for people who simply know of them to some degree (pride, calculated appreciation and use as management tools). This provides an explanation of the counter-intuitive findings in earlier studies: that knowledge of work-family programs is correlated with affective commitment, while perceived value is not always, and utilisation is not (Haar & Spell, 2004); and that perceived support is more important than, and somewhat disconnected from, the mere availability of the initiatives (Lambert, 2000; Thompson, Jahn, Kopelman & Prottas, 2004). However, negative outcomes such as disappointment/resentment or an obligation to stay (stemming specifically from unpaid leaves, FWA and the corporate day-care centre) are found for 11 persons. 18 persons remain mostly indifferent to these initiatives.

Let me now explore the second research question, “Which processes lead to these outcomes, and in which context do they work well or less well?”

Processes and key success conditions

To understand how the same organisational set of WLRI yields such distinct outcomes, I first analyse the processes, then explain them in light of the context that shapes them. From the seven groups I outlined, I derived seven detailed processes. I then merged them into one decision tree, illustrated in Figure 2.

=== Insert Figure 2 about here ===
Reading the tree from left to right, it is articulated by four factors. The first is awareness: unaware persons are indifferent, as illustrated by Mike’s vignette (first process at the bottom of the Figure). The three other factors combine themselves. They are the need for these initiatives, access to them and judgment on the employer. Judgment on the employer includes comparisons with previous employers, experiences of procedural justice and assessment of the employer’s motivations in promoting the initiatives (social, economic, compliance). When the need for these initiatives is weak (processes in the middle of the Figure), a very positive and affective judgment of the employer leads to pride (Wanda), while a moderately positive and cognitive judgment leads to calculated appreciation (Glenn). An absence of judgment combined with a weak need is another path leading to indifference. When the need exists and is mainly for self (processes at the top of the Figure), good access to the initiatives and a positive judgment of the employer lead to loyalty (Sofia). Good access to the initiatives and the strong importance of these initiatives (childcare, unpaid leave during school holidays, as in Gabriella’s vignette) lead to an obligation to stay, as does the combination of good access to the initiatives and a negative judgment of the employer. Lack of access to the initiatives leads to disappointment, or even to resentment (Rachel). Lastly, when the need exists and is mainly for one’s team (first process at the top), these initiatives are valued as management tools (Mitch).

Three layers of context shape awareness, need, access and judgment: the personal context, the work environment context and the national context. At the personal level, these initiatives have the strongest impact on employees who have a personal need for them (mostly women), and who prefer to integrate work and non-work. At the work environment level, the initiatives produce desirable outcomes when employees can actually access them without being penalised, and when they perceive them as consistent with the general working conditions (such as job security). At the national level, the initiatives have more positive outcomes in the deregulated context of the US, where employees’ sense of entitlement to work-life support (Lewis & Smithson, 2001) is weaker, and where the initiatives are clearly identified as the employer’s discretionary effort rather than a legal entitlement.

Let us explore each of these three levels. Some employees in this sample work in the same team with the same supervisor, and clearly the discriminating context is on the personal side. The strongest impact is on employees who have a personal need for them, as informed by gender and care configuration, age and health, and events in the employee’s life. These “personal” needs are also socially constructed, as is the case for gender norms that influence
one’s perceptions of work-life needs, or age norms that may differ across countries. In this sample, men make up more than two-thirds of the groups indifference and use as management tools. Women, by contrast, make up more than two-thirds of the groups loyalty, calculated appreciation, obligation to stay and disappointment/resentment. These patterns are stronger for employees over 35, while indifferents are mostly under 35. Previous exposure to WLRI, as well as individual preference for the integration rather than separation of these spheres also increase WLRI’s impact.

Other employees in this sample share the same pattern of needs and preferences on the personal side, thus the work environment explains the difference in outcomes. In this sample, certain jobs (sales force, manufacturing environment), locations (smaller sites), and hierarchical positions characterised by heavy workloads (middle management) entail lower access to the initiatives. This is consistent with previous research (Eaton, 2003). Supervisor support makes a world of difference, since a trusting relationship facilitates supervisor’s approval of formal FWA as well as informal flexibility. Supervisor support has consistently been identified as a key factor (Allen, 2001; Lee, MacDermid, Williams, Buck & Leiba-O’Sullivan, 2002). Experiences of unfairness cause disappointment and resentment, if one of the six rules of procedural justice is broken (Leventhal et al., 1980). Lastly, the perceived discrepancy between WLRI on the one hand, and an outsourcing strategy threatening job security for some plants and some departments such as IT, accounting, or HR, on the other, leads employees to resent the initiatives as not authentically supportive.

The personal and the work environment contexts combine themselves. For instance, it is the interactions of age and gender, and access to the initiatives and procedural justice that differentiate the outcomes in the group of women between 35 and 44 years who have great need of the initiatives. Some of these women become more loyal towards their employers after gaining access to the initiatives and using them, while others end up disappointed or resentful.

The national context is the third layer of context that this research was able to analyse. In both the UK and the US, these initiatives were perceived as legitimate, and employees’ sense of entitlement to work-life support to was relatively weak. Most employees stated that this type of support was legitimate because it was beneficial for the organisation as well, and that they would not expect support in the absence of a business rationale. This is a striking difference with other national contexts, such as France, where employees’ sense of entitlement is much more disconnected from the business case (Ollier-Malaterre, 2009). In the UK, where public
provision and, in particular, leave and child care schemes are more generous than in the US, some employees compared Pharma’s policies with the legal dispositions. This clearly heightened their expectations and reduced the positive impact of WLRI:

“Yes it helps, but these are things I expect more or less anyway. The childcare is part of a national scheme. If [Pharma] wasn't participating I would ask why.”

Others were unsure whether the leave and childcare programs were a discretionary and unique initiative by their employer, in contrast with a widely provided good practice or a legal entitlement. This also reduced the initiatives’ impact. In the US, on the contrary, one argument in favour of the employer’s providing work-life and resilience support was that government intervention was rejected:

“The only way to make something worse is to get the government involved. You know, we’re not very good at governing. (…) It’s a thankless job that attracts probably the worst kind.”

Integrating individual-centred and relational perspectives

Some of the seven outcomes, such as the obligation to stay, loyalty and disappointment, fit well with individual-centred theoretical perspectives that have already been helpful in the work-life field. Others however, such as pride, calculated appreciation and use as management tools, call for a broadening of the theories in work-life research so as to integrate the relational perspective.

Within the individual-centred perspectives, Becker’s side bets theory (1960), whose premise is the self-subsistent rational individual, provides a straightforward explanation of the obligation to stay outcome. At Pharma, the unpaid summer leave policy and the corporate day-care centre are indeed benefits that create material obligations and make some people stay. This converges with Kossek and Nichol (1992), who observed that corporate day-care centres help retain people, but do not reduce absenteeism. This outcome is negative to the extent that a continuance commitment, such as this one, has been found to be negatively
correlated with job satisfaction (Haar & Spell, 2004). Indeed, individuals who are highly
dependent on their employer are more prone to being frustrated (Leavitt & Homa, 1958).

Research on individual desires in terms of balance (Friedman & Lobel, 2003), and personal
preference for the separation or integration of the spheres (Rothbard, Philips & Dumas, 2005),
shed light on the indifference outcome. An insistent and universal promotion of these
initiatives might upset some employees, rather than make them feel supported. Happy
workaholics, in particular, may find these initiatives too normative.

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) account for
the loyalty created by these initiatives, and its opposite side, disappointment. POS has been
found to be correlated with affective and continuance commitment, innovation, extra effort
and organisational citizenship behaviour (Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-Lamastro, 1990), and
even to mediate the relationship between work experiences and commitment (Rhoades,
Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001). Orthner and Pittman (1986) and Allen (2001) have already
applied the POS concept to the work-life field. Because WLRI provide tangible (instrumental)
as well as intangible (emotional) support (Thompson et al., 2004), they may foster loyalty,
other things being equal. Lack of POS and lack of PSS explain disappointment: insufficient
access to initiatives is viewed as a personal and negative signal. Also, inconsistent messages
sent by the organisation damage its predictability (for instance, when a gap exists between
rhetoric and actual policies, between POS and PSS, or between successive supervisors’
attitudes). POS, and even PSS, are mainly individual-centred concepts, insofar as they focus
on the exchange between the individual and the organisation/the supervisor, independently of
relationships with co-workers and social groups such as teams. POS, however, is somewhat
dynamic, to the extent that the individual’s attitudes and behaviour are transformed by the
level of support perceived, which in turn impacts on the organisation.

A second set of outcomes—pride, calculated appreciation and use as management tools—is
clearly relational, and calls for new theoretical foundations. Instead of considering individuals
as preformed entities whose identities, interests and goals are not internally modified by their
interactions with others and with social groups, the relational perspective integrates
intersubjectivity (Kyriakidou & Özbilgin, 2006). Because this research took steps to analyse
detailed processes, it has uncovered the relational dynamics that shape individuals’ reactions
to the initiatives. These dynamics include comparisons with other significant individuals
within teams or broader networks, inside and outside the organisation. The pride outcome, to
begin with, is not grounded in personal use of the initiatives (individual-centred analysis) but
in the employee’s perception that these initiatives enhance the organisation’s status and prestige, compared to other organisations that are less benevolent or proactive. No research, to my knowledge, has ever studied WLRI in light of the organisational image (Dutton et al., 1994; Fuller et al., 2006) and perceived external prestige (Carmeli, 2005). However these perspectives add a lot to our understanding of pride. Insofar as the initiatives position the employer as a good place to work, or even a pioneer, they contribute to a strong organisational image, strengthen the employee’s social status and facilitate his or her identification with the organisation. Interviewees recall boasting, in social interactions outside work, about the level of support they receive. While organisational image focuses on the way the organisation is perceived by outsiders, perceived external prestige refers to insiders’ beliefs on the organisation’s reputation. When employees mention Pharma's involvement in philanthropic programs, and connect what the organisation does for the community with what it does for its employees, both the organisational image and the perceived external prestige (in its social dimension) help to explain the positive contribution to the I/O relationship.

Social information processing (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) is another enlightening theory, from a relational perspective. It has not been investigated much in the context of WLRI. Social information processing underlines the fact that employees not only assess the way they personally are treated by the organisation, but also take into consideration the way others are treated, using all the “social information” at their disposal. This gives insights into pride, as well as two other more cognitive logics: employees assess whether their employer is “benevolent” and “caring” (Grover & Crooker, 1995:284; Scandura & Lankau, 1997:380) by comparing them with previous employers and other known work environments, and also by comparing what they have and what they think they are entitled to.

Lastly, organisational justice theories, which are relational in nature and remain underutilised in work-life research, provide subtle conceptual tools to understand the importance of work experiences concerning others in the organisation: unfair decisions by my employer regarding someone else may or may not undermine my relationship with my employer (Shore & Shore, 1995); generous policies initiated by my employer, too, may or may not increase my POS. Organisational justice theories explain the disappointment outcome. The feeling of unfairness arises, as Grandey (2001) noted, from comparisons: with others in the team, as when co-workers are allowed to telework or compress their week, and between one’s needs and one’s access to an initiative.
Given the importance of situated and dynamic relationships in explaining some of the seven outcomes, I argue for a new theoretical foundation of work-life research, one that integrates individual-centred and relationship-centred perspectives. The latter perspective has clearly been under-mobilised, and it has great potential to advance our understanding of the outcomes of organisational WLRI.

Contributions, limitations and future research

In the context of recent and unsettling literature reviews highlighting the uncertain business case for WLRI (notably Kelly et al., 2008), this article makes important theoretical and methodological contributions by setting new directions for research. To fully assess the outcomes of these initiatives, we need to phrase research hypotheses in a more encompassing way: this research demonstrates that we should expect not only positive outcomes, but also negative outcomes and, for some employees, an absence of outcomes. We need to pay attention to the complex mechanisms leading to these outcomes: this article provides a detailed decision tree articulated by four factors: awareness, need, access and judgment on the employer. We need to conduct multi-level research that includes the three layers of context shaping these outcomes: (1) personal context such as gender, (2) work environment context such as the nature of the work and the location, and more relational factors, such as supervisor support and experiences of fairness, and (3) the national context. Lastly, this article calls for a broadening of the theoretical frameworks that work-life researchers typically mobilise. Beyond the individual-centred perspectives that focus on the individual and the organisation as static entities, work-life research must integrate a relational perspective. This implies modifying the research design and the methodology to ensure that the different layers of context are not only added up, but fully articulated, to unveil the way in which each layer shapes the others. It also implies mobilising theories whose relational premises shed a powerful new light. In particular, the social information processing and organisational justice perspectives explain outcomes through the comparisons that employees make with significant others, both in the workplace and outside the workplace. Organisational image and perceived external prestige should also be considered in future research, for their insights on how initiatives generate employees’ pride.
From a managerial perspective, three key aspects of this research may help supervisors and HR practitioners to understand and predict better the outcomes of WLRI. The first is the decision tree illustrated in Figure 2, illustrated by real-life examples. Practitioners may not yet have encountered all of these outcomes (in particular, pride and use of WLRI as management tools are newer findings). The decision tree provides a structured methodology by which to assess an employee’s perception of the initiatives. It can be a useful tool that enables HR officers to “sell the issue” (Dutton & Ashford, 1993) to supervisors, upper management and other stakeholders who may not be familiar with it. As such, this article may foster organisational change efforts that pave the way for a more positive use of WLRI. Second, this article highlights success conditions on which supervisors and HR practitioners can act, as follows: (1) provide a vast array of initiatives that addresses the range of needs, and ensures a supportive work-life culture, so that employees actually access the initiatives and are not penalised; (2) ensure consistency between these initiatives and the general working conditions (such as job security), and the consistency of the initiatives over time. HR officers should also make sure that employees identify those of the organisation’s policies that are discretionary efforts that go beyond legal requirements; (3) managers should be aware that women in this fast-paced environment are clearly more responsive to WLRI (more likely to feel loyal when effectively supported, and disappointed otherwise). Organisations should remain very careful not to reinforce gender stereotypes, however: this research still shows that consistent and relevant WLRI have positive outcomes for men as well as women.

Several limitations should be noted. First, all the interviews took place in the same multinational organisation. This organisation is fairly representative of large organisations operating in an Anglo-Saxon environment. However, some outcomes may be more important in Pharma than in other companies. Pride, in particular, is extremely strong among Pharma’s employees, due to its drug discovery mission. Disappointment may also be more prevalent in Pharma and in organisations with a heavy workload and an intense work pace, compared to other organisations where work-life arrangements are more attainable. One way to try to falsify the theory built in this article would be to replicate this research in other organisations with comparable and different sets of WLRI. A further test might include the three layers of context previously discussed: a multi-level research comparing employees’ perception of the initiatives in several organisations located in at least two different countries. These countries should ideally reflect different Welfare State regimes.
A second limitation is that volunteer interviewees may tend to be either the most enthusiastic about these initiatives, or the most critical of them. Although the self-selection bias is reduced by the fact that two whole teams in the sample were asked by their manager to “volunteer,” future research should strive to reduce this bias further. A third limitation is that the collaborative approach developed with Pharma entailed a focus on corporate initiatives, rather than on work-life integration from an individual perspective. This led me to avoid personal questions unless the persons themselves raised these topics. In future research, additional data on the family context, care configuration, the support network outside work and the professional history of each person would generate useful information. A fourth limitation pertains to writing up the data analysis. The need to classify and organise a vast set of information into a simple typology and decision tree leads to the oversimplification of a more subtle and ambivalent reality. As a result, the fact that employees often belonged to several groups, and the equifinality that characterises the decision tree, have not been developed here. Individual case studies could complement the typology findings presented in this article.

In conclusion, this article provides clear avenues for future research, in terms of theoretical framework (integrate individual-centred and relational perspectives), research design (expect negative outcomes and an absence of outcomes as well as positive outcomes; conduct multi-level research by articulating the personal, work environment and national contexts) and methodology (pay attention to the processes leading to distinct outcomes). Only by including more shades of gray and broadening our perspectives will we be able to assess fully the contributions of organisational work-life and resilience initiatives to the Individual/Organisation relationship.

REFERENCES


TABLE 1

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<td>Top management</td>
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73 interviews in the UK and the US

Distribution of the sample
TABLE 2

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<tr>
<th>Seven outcomes on the I/O relationship</th>
<th>Group size</th>
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<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11 women</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>15 above 35 years, 10 with more than 10 years of tenure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly manufacturing and support functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Only 1 top level manager</td>
</tr>
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<td>Disappointment/Resentment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6 women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 above 35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 middle managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 without frequent computer access (sales, manufacturing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculated appreciation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5 women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 working in the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Several employers: 5 above 35 years, 6 with less than 10 years tenure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 in R&amp;D and support functions, mainly employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation to stay</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All women, mothers of young children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R&amp;D and the salesforce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 under 35 years, 14 with less than 10 years of tenure</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Mainly no children</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Mainly early career positions</td>
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<td>Pride</td>
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<td>2 men and 3 women</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All above 35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All middle and top managers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use as management tools</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11 men</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13 above 35 years, 7 above 45 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9 top level managers, all business units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>More childless persons</td>
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Seven different outcomes with distinct personal and work environment contexts.
FIGURE 1

Outcomes of work-life and resilience initiatives
A decision tree
A theoretical integration of perspectives explaining the diverse outcomes of WLRI