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# “Do you not know what happens to Mothers in America?”

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# “Do you not know what happens to Mothers in America?”



Angela Santopietro  
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HPR 401 - Senior Thesis

## **Abstract**

Joan Kofodimos, author of, *Balancing Act: How Managers Can Integrate Successful Careers and Fulfilling Personal Lives* (1993), defines work-family integration as, “Having a satisfying, healthy, and productive life that includes work, play, and love; that integrates a range of life activities with attention to self and to personal and spiritual development; and that expresses a person’s unique wishes, interests, and values.” It is particularly important to help working mothers gain work-family integration, also known as work-family balance, because of the effects on family, work, and society. The burden of work and family often falls disproportionately on the shoulders of working mothers. Although there is no such a thing as an ideal job when it comes to work and life integration, there are plenty of solutions practicing professionals and companies can initiate in order to make the balance easier.

In this paper, I will describe the scholarly research on: the reasons why work-family balance concerns are important, how working mothers experience it (or the lack thereof), and then potential solutions (individual, organizational, and government solutions). In addition, the results of a panel discussion held in early November 2007 at the University of Rhode Island, of the experiences of three working mothers will be presented. Lastly, I will draw general conclusions of how practicing professionals and managers may better manage work-family balance and integration.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Work and family life integration is different for each individual with their distinct personal priorities and life styles. There is no correct balance an individual should strive for, but there are many ways women can handle being both mothers and workers in contemporary U.S. society. This balance is particularly difficult for working mothers, often resulting in stress, part time work, or even women opting out of the work force altogether.

Although there are ways of managing the boundary between work and family, it is difficult for working mothers to meet both personal and company expectations. Work-family balance involves questioning the ways work is structured, employees are managed, and career and success are defined. Joan Kofodimos, author of, *Balancing Act: How Managers Can Integrate Successful Careers and Fulfilling Personal Lives* (1993), defines work-family integration as, “Having a satisfying, healthy, and productive life that includes work, play, and love; that integrates a range of life activities with attention to self and to personal and spiritual development; and that expresses a person’s unique wishes, interests, and values.” (cited in Smith, 2000)

Many psychologists also use the border theory to define work-family balance. The central focus of this theory is that the relationship between work and family borders must be managed appropriately, according to each individual situation, in order to create and maintain balance. (Lambert, 2006) The effects of borders are impacted by the perceived importance employees place in their work. For example, studies indicate that a high degree of separation may be desired by people who feel that their work is unimportant. Women who view their jobs this way are more likely to take more time out

of work in order to raise their children and be less concerned with the work-family balance. On the other hand, women who view their work as highly important are more likely to work more hours and take less time off, if any, after having a baby. These types of women feel that work-family integration is necessary to live a happy and fulfilling life. (Lambert, 2006)

No matter how one defines work-family balance, there are two societal trends that will shape the challenges employers and employees will face in U.S. business organizations with concern to this important topic. The two societal trends include: Americans use of personal electronic devices and the growing awareness of issues concerning work-family balance among younger generations of workers. (Moberg, 2004) These two trends affect the way people think about work and family, and then as a result, will affect how we experience work and organize work.

In the eyes of employers, the popularity of cell phones, PDAs, and personal computers makes possible balance and integration between work and family life. Although this is true, mothers are constantly connected to their employers every demand making it extremely difficult to spend time with their children and families while escaping work. In the traditional days of working, organizations supported and encouraged the separation between work and family. (Smith, 2000) At the present, the new work environment allows employers to take advantage of these highly developed technologies which results in work spilling over into home life and mothers negatively experiencing work-family integration. (Moberg, 2004)

The second changing societal trend that will affect the work-family balance is that younger generations are more attuned to work and life integration issues than any other

generation. This is possibly because they witnessed first hand the difficulties their parents faced. (Moberg, 2004) Younger generations have the ability to have a great deal of influence over whether employers develop additional and improved programs. If the workers are not applying for jobs due to the lack of family-friendly policies, employers will be forced to modify the workplace. These two societal trends will shape how employers and employees understand and design the work environment to suit working mothers.

It is particularly important to help working mothers gain work-family integration, also known as work-family balance, because of the effects on family, work, and society. In the sections that follow, I will describe the scholarly research on: the reasons why work-family balance concerns are important, how working mothers experience it (or the lack thereof), and then potential solutions (individual, organizational, and government solutions). In addition, the results of a panel discussion held in early November 2007 at the University of Rhode Island, of the experiences of three working mothers will be presented. Lastly, I will draw general conclusions of how practicing professionals and managers may better manage work-family balance and integration.

## **II. Reasons why Work-Family Balance Concerns are Important**

In this section I am going to discuss the laws, social movements, and other women's experiences that have contributed to work-family balance concerns being an important issue for working mothers. There is a rich history of social movements and laws that have helped women enter and progress in the workplace all while raising a family at home. For example, the women's movement had an immense impact on the need for a balance between work and family. This movement consisted of a series of

campaigns on issues such as maternity leave, domestic violence, reproductive rights, equal pay, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.

Until 1855, universities and colleges were strictly for men, when The University of Iowa became the first state school to admit women. (US Dept. of Labor, 2007) This was the start of women preparing for entrance into fields other than nursing and teaching. Up until this point in time women were expected to get married, have children, and take care of their families. It was unheard of to have women in fields such as law, medicine, engineering, and business.

Many legal changes also helped women gain entrance into the workplace and made work-family balance issues an important concern for working mothers. The following federal laws were intended to make it easier for women to have a family while still competing in the corporate setting. The results of these laws are best shown through statistics: in 1960 only twenty-five percent of mothers worked; in 2004 seventy-four percent of mothers worked. (Steiner, 2006)

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was formed in 1964. This regulatory agency develops federal laws prohibiting job discrimination. Two federal laws that were created to protect discrimination against women were the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The purpose of the Equal Pay Act is to protect men and women who perform equal work in the same establishment from sex-based wage discrimination. Sex-based wage discrimination reinforces the idea that men should be the breadwinners and women should raise the family. Title VII is another federal law that prohibits employee discrimination based on sex, race, color, religion, or national origin. (Federal EEO Laws, 2007)



In 1978, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act was established. The purpose of this act is to prohibit employment discrimination based on pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. The Pregnancy Discrimination Act protects women in two distinct ways. First, if a woman is able to work she cannot be forced to resign or go on leave for any pregnancy-related condition. This includes having an abortion. Secondly, it protects women who are unable to work. Under this act, employers must try modifying a woman's work assignments or grant leave with or without pay before firing her. (Steiner, 2006) By preventing discrimination against working mothers and protecting mothers who are unable to work, it allows women to keep their jobs while raising a family.

A fourth law, The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), was the first piece of legislation President Clinton signed into law during his presidency. The intention of this act is to enable workers to take up to twelve weeks unpaid leave to care for a new baby or ailing family member without jeopardizing their job. If an employee is eligible for this act, an employer may not deny this employee family and/or medical leave. In order to be qualified, employees must meet two requirements. First, employees must have worked for their employer for at least twelve months, and have worked for at least 1,250 hours over the previous twelve months. Secondly, they must also work at a location where at least fifty employees are working within seventy-five miles. (US Dept. of Labor, 2007)

Although this act was well-intentioned, there are loopholes employers are able to take advantage of to avoid the provisions of the law. For example, technology is a central concern of any major corporation. In order to be successful, companies need to be on top of the latest technology and computer software. Growing trade and communication between the US and other countries has made computerized informational systems the

center of technology. If a woman decides to take the allotted twelve weeks out of work to raise a child, it is likely an employer will not be able to hire her back without sufficient training in the technical skills she has missed. Because of this, women who decided to find a balance between work and family after taking some time off are often given a job that pays less money and has fewer responsibilities. (Federal EEO Laws, 2007)

Even though there are some flaws, these federal laws have allowed women to reach new heights that were at one point unforeseeable. In 1910 only twenty-one percent of women were employed; currently sixty percent of all women work, of which make up forty-seven percent of the labor force. (Steiner, 2006) The increased number and variety of employment opportunities afforded by the laws and better educational opportunities have created many different experiences for working mothers in their integration of work and family life. These experiences will be described in detail in the following section.

### **III. The Experience of Work-Family Balance among Working Mothers**

Research shows that working mothers often experience work and family imbalances such as stress, fatigue, not having enough time to do all this is required in both domains, and difficulties in handling emergencies or unexpected challenges. Individuals and family members, who do not attain a balance between work and family, have been found to suffer a number of effects. Examples of personal effects include increased levels of stress-related illness, lower life satisfaction, higher rates of family strife, domestic violence, and divorce.

Some evidence also indicates that these individuals suffer from rising incidences of substances abuse and parenting difficulties. Organizations are extremely concerned about this phenomenon because employee satisfaction is critical in the health of any

organization. The personal effects described often result in negative affects on organizations. A research study conducted found that high levels of interference from one's family can result in a dissonant state where dysfunctional behaviors such as absenteeism, tardiness, leaving work early, and personal use of the work phone will occur. (Lambert, 2006) Some of these negative experiences lead to consequences of the lack of work-family balance that will be described in the following section.

### **A. The Consequences of Lack of Work-Family Balance**

There are a number of consequences of the lack of work-family balance. These consequences fall into three main categories that include women opting out of work in various ways, maternal profiling, and opting out of family life. These are not the only consequences of lack of work-family balance; however, these will be the three I will be focusing on.

On average, about 37% of women opt out of the workforce for about 2.2 years for family related reasons. When they decide to return only 73% land jobs, while 24% are forced to take part-time jobs for financial reasons. (Hymowitz, 2007) Many companies that provide jobs that require 60-plus hour workweek and 24/7 attention to clients do not realize the relationship problems with spouses and children that are caused.

Childbirth, children in the home, and children entering school play a major role regarding if and when women decide to opt out of working. Concerning gender differences, women are less likely to be in paid work, earn lower wages, and tend to work shorter hours as compared to men. For instance, the average wage for women is 92% of the average wage for men prior to children. The average wage for women falls to 66% as compared to men after they have had children. This statistic shows that it is extremely

difficult for women to get back into the business world after having children at the level they would have been if they had not left. Some mothers may return to work and decide it is not what is best for themselves and their families, and thus decide to “opt out” for a period of time. (Paull, 2006)

There are many different opinions on why more women are not at the top of companies, but many of the reasons relate to work-family balance. Sylvia Ann Hewlett, founder and president of the Center for Work-Life Policy, surveyed approximately 2,500 women and 650 men. Throughout her study, she found that most women take some time off work or intentionally avoid advancing for a while so they have time to take care of their children. The amount of time they decide to take off work varies depending on the family situation.

A second outcome of lack of work-family balance is maternal profiling. Maternal profiling is using information about a woman’s status as a parent to make managerial decisions, such as whether to hire her and how much to pay her. (Momsrising.org) Because the majority of organizations have not yet implemented enough mother friendly programs, many studies indicate that a woman’s status as a mother negatively affects her at work. For instance, although this type of discrimination is illegal, mothers are less likely to be hired, will make less money, and are more scrutinized for wrongdoing than either single women or men. (Jesella, 2007) Because organizations are not always supporting women in finding a balance between work and family life, employers are maternally profiling and losing potential assets to the company.

A third consequence due to lack of work-family integration is time away from family and friends. In a sense, instead of opting out of work, this consequence can be

understood as opting out of a family and personal life. Some women decide to hire others to watch the children (nannies and babysitters) and take care of the home (maids and housekeepers, allowing these women to continue working full time. This consequence is often referred to in the research literature as time-based conflicts. Time-based conflicts occur when the time demands of one role make it extremely difficult or even impossible to participate fully in another role. (Smith, 2000)

For example, parents are often forced to work separate shifts in order to afford or avoid the costs of daycare. Daycare costs approximately \$10,000-\$15,000 a year per child, which is often unfeasible for working parents. Concerning preschoolers with working mothers, approximately one-third are enrolled in childcare centers, about 15% are in family daycare homes, 48% are under the care of a relative, and 5% are cared for by nannies. (Strober, 2003) The cost of daycare is causing families to work difficult hours and have minimal down time with each other or with friends.

In order to alleviate the negative experiences of trying to achieve work-family balance individual, organizational, and government solutions have been proposed to help working mothers. The following section will describe these solutions and explain further the need for family-friendly work policies.

#### **IV. Solutions for Achieving Work-Family Balance**

Some possible solutions in balancing work and family include implementing programs such as organizational daycare centers, flex-hours, four day work weeks, universal health care for children, and virtual workplaces. These programs would allow more mothers to continue working after having a baby and also provide them with the

necessary work-family balance. They would also increase women's job satisfaction because working mothers would not feel the need to choose between work and family.

In general, women have higher turnover and absenteeism than men because of limited legal protections and work-family programs. By creating the programs aforementioned, it will strengthen businesses by lowering costs of recruiting, turnover, absenteeism, and lawsuits. It will also minimize frustration and raise both tenure and productivity while preventing discrimination charges among working mothers. (Steiner, 2006)

Some organizations are concerned about employees fulfilling their work responsibilities and home responsibilities in a way that meets the employee's and the manager's standards. In order to assist in this process, companies are also rescheduling the workday around heavy commutes and organizing carpools in order to make commuting less stressful.

Another new approach companies are using to incorporate work-family balance issues involves hiring two adult members of a family as a unit. The company asks the family members to work a total of a 60-hour week, dividing their hours as either 30/30 or 40/20. This allows parents to provide the time and attention their children need and both be an equal part of their children's lives and have a fulfilling work life too. This also benefits the parents as it creates greater intimacy between parents and closer bonding to children than if one parent stayed at home or both parents worked full time. Even though this might seem like an ideal solution, most married couples in the United States do not have the same college degrees. This makes them unable to perform the same job at

different hours of the day. Because of this, only a small part of the population is able to benefit from this type of program.

Companies have developed programs geared towards retaining women, such as the one's previously mentioned including Lehman Brothers, Ernst & Young, Goldman Sachs, and Citigroup. (Hymowitz, 2007) These companies often survey their working mother employees and ask them what they are looking for to attain a healthy balance between work and family. Managers then institute these programs, such as in-house daycare centers and the four day workweek, in order to keep their employees healthier and happier.

An additional solution that some countries are using is providing parents with paid leave of up to one year to care for newborns. The United States is currently the only major industrialized nation that does not provide such paid leave. However, some organizations do provide some paid leave.

Many working mothers feel the United States should also provide universal health care coverage in order to help solve some of the problems with work-family integration. (Jesella, 2007) The U.S. remains the only Western nation without universal health insurance coverage. Between 1981 and 2001 there has been a 2,300 percent increase in medical related bankruptcy filings, whereas only 8 percent of bankruptcies were medical related in 1982. Seventy-six percent of those who went bankrupt had health insurance. (Momsrising.org)

Families with health care coverage often face unaffordable co-payments, deductibles, and bills for uncovered items such as physical therapy, psychiatric care, and prescription drugs. These costs are forcing working mothers to work unreasonable hours

and in jobs that provide little to no life satisfaction, which makes it difficult to achieve work-family balance. Dr. David Himmelstein, the lead author of the study of medical bankruptcies and an associate professor of medicine at Harvard in a Harvard Medical School Office of Public Affairs stated, “Our study is frightening. Unless you’re Bill Gates, you’re just one serious illness away from bankruptcy.” (momsrising.org)

An example of a company which took the idea of balancing work and family into consideration is Starbucks. Starbucks recently made an announcement that it would provide healthcare benefits to its part-time workers in order to solve some of the problems stated previously. This action does not only benefit its employees, but the company will also flourish as it gains more respect from society and attracts and retains dedicated employees. As of 2007, Starbucks was listed as one of the top one-hundred companies to work for by *Fortune Magazine*, which recognized Starbucks’ concerns for its employees on a job related level but also on a family related level.

Universal child care, maternity and paternity leave, and workplace discrimination against mothers are all topics that have become of importance in American society. (Jesella, 2007) In order to discuss these issues and start developing solutions, many women have joined the mother’s advocacy organization named MomsRising.org. The goal of this organization is to build a family-friendly America, while framing its concerns as family and economic issues. Organizations such as this allow mothers to read stories about what other American working mothers are experiencing and doing with regard to managing work and family issues. It provides them with a social network and advice on how to properly integrate work and family life.



To get a better understanding of potential solutions for working mothers, The Families and Work Institute surveyed a number of Fortune 500 companies to determine what they were doing to help employees maintain work-family integration. (Cited in Smith, 2000) The top ten solutions, ranked in order are shown below:

1. Part-time schedules
2. Employee assistance programs
3. Personal days
4. Flextime
5. Personal leaves of absence
6. Child care resource and referral
7. Spouse employment assistance
8. Dependent care assistance plans
9. Job Sharing
10. Flexplace (forms of telecommuting)

These ten solutions are the starting point for creating family-friendly companies where workers can find a balance between work and family. (Smith, 2000) In order to get a better grasp on the experiences of working mothers, I decided to host a panel discussion on the integration of work and family. This case study will be examined in the following section and will provide experiences, advice, and additional potential solutions from three panel members who are currently balancing both work and family life.

## **V. Case Studies of Working Mothers Balancing Work and Family: Panel Discussion**

On November 7, 2007 a panel was held at the University of Rhode Island on three women's perspectives on balancing work and family. The first panel member, who we will call Sara, currently is a 90% stay at home Mom with a three and two year old. Sara graduated with her MBA from Cornell University and worked at many large corporations in human resources and organizational development prior to having children. For about eight years she traveled 90% of the time and worked approximately 90 hours per week.

Sara started a Ph.D. program at URI in Organizational Development and later married, became pregnant, and temporarily had to stop her course work. She is currently working as a part time executive director of a non-profit organization.

The second panel member, who we will call Jen, just went back to school to get her Masters degree and her teaching certification. Prior to returning to school, she worked for thirteen years at a bank, and had two children who are now nine and seven years old. About a year ago, she decided to pursue teaching because it was flexible and it fit into her schedule well.

The third panel member, who we will call Janice, is a part time instructor and works for a society of feminist sociologists. She is a married mother of two, whose children are five and three. Before her children were born, she earned her Ph.D. in sociology.

After asking a series of seven questions, three major points were made by the panelists. These points included feelings of guilt, major compromises made to balance work and family, and maternal profiling. All three points will be discussed in detail on the following pages.

#### **A. Guilty when you are at work, Guilty when you are not at work:**

Attempting to balance work and family often causes working women to make a vast amount of choices and compromises. These choices often cause a struggle with regard to how to fulfill all of the roles one has. The panel members explained that when you start a career, people need to realize that they are going to have to make choices because there is no way of doing it all. Even when you think you made the right choice,

there are often times when you will change your mind. These choices and feelings of guilt often lead to compromises and consequences.

## **B. Compromises**

The three panel members discussed three major compromises they made with concern to work family balance: limited travel, limited time with friends, and the concept of birth timing.

1. **Limited travel** – Having a child severely sets limits on the amount of time you can travel for leisure or for your job. The panel members discussed having a “granny nanny” which allows them to go to work and not worry about their kids; but it also forces them to live in the same state as their parents or in-laws, which limits their employment opportunities.
2. **Limited time with friends** – Because there is a finite amount of time you have during the week, often your friend network is limited. Working mothers cannot always go out for a girl’s night because they have not had enough time to spend with their family.
3. **Birth timing** – Having a baby is not only financially difficult but it is also extremely time consuming. By being strategic on when to have a baby and why, women will be more successful in the integration of work and family life.

## **C. Maternal Profiling:**

All three members have encountered some sort of maternal profiling, whether it was positive or negative. For instance, when Sara first interviewed for a job after having children the organization was thrilled she had young children and wanted a flexible job. This particular company was looking for an employee who could be supple and work different hours each week.

On the negative side, Sara has also seen many women in large companies hide their pregnancies because their perceptions were that their bosses would not appreciate their pregnancies. She told the story of knowing a woman who went into labor at her

desk, stayed on a conference call, gave birth to her child at the hospital, and was back on the phone in the hospital room the next day. This woman took these actions because she was afraid she would not continue up the corporate ladder if she didn't.

In the organization that Jen worked for, there was a corporate takeover and her department was being re-located to New York. At the time, Jen had one child and was hoping to have a second. When she was called into the director's office, she was told that although she had been a high performing employee she was going to be severed because the boss knew she wanted to have another child. Although this reasoning is illegal, and made Jen feel extremely uncomfortable, it worked in her benefit. This is because she wouldn't be severed for another nine months. With this time line she was able to carry the baby for the nine months and then had a year severance to spend at home with her daughter. She then went back to work after a year to keep her seniority.

Because the panel members experienced first hand the difficulties in balancing work and family life, they were able to offer some possible solutions for other women. These solutions include individual, societal, organizational, and governmental solutions.

### **C. Work-Family Balance Solutions Offered by the Panel**

Why leave the workforce you ask, because "work and family are incompatible," states Janice. Although this is true, many women cannot afford to leave the workforce for any period of time. The panel members offered seven possible solutions that organizations and working mothers could use in integrating work and family lives:

1. Working three days a week, 10-12 hours a day (compressed work week).
2. Putting more women in the boardroom. Diversity in the boardroom might result in selecting different kinds of CEO's and will change how companies view things. This might also be true with regard to getting more women in top management jobs.

3. Companies becoming for flexible – e.g., working at home, flex hours, splitting a management job between two employees, etc.
4. Using HROPTIN.COM to find opportunities for working mothers. This newly developed company looks around the country to hire women human resources workers. It acts as a networking agent and finds significantly flexible jobs for working mothers.
5. Dedicating a minimum of two days a week to doing serious “kid stuff.” This way mothers will not feel guilty about working at home or at the office when the have to.
6. Starting public school at a younger age. For example, France starts public schools at age three, not age five.
7. Providing universal health and child care

## **VI. Conclusion: Integrating the Research and the Panel Findings**

If more managers understood the phenomenon of work-family balance, they would be able to address it better and help create more satisfying work environments for employees. They would also perhaps increase the number and contentment of working mothers, therefore increasing often valuable human assets in the company. Because of these reasons work-family balance should be a top priority of contemporary United States business and society.

Work-family integration is important for companies to research because of potential loss of valuable human capital, decreases in productivity, and possible lawsuits and discrimination charges. Practicing managers and professionals need to take into consideration the perceptions of women in the business setting, the difficulties women have in balancing demands from work and home, and the kinds of workplace programs women find valuable in creating work-family balance in order to avoid these negative consequences.

By not helping women find an appropriate balance between work and family companies could be losing valuable human capital. Women today are graduating in just as high numbers from colleges such as Yale, Berkeley, and Columbia as compared to men. This is magnificent although that they are described as, “starting strong out of the gate, and then suddenly stopping.” (Belkin, 2003) Women have broken through the glass ceiling, but are now facing the obstacles of work and family integration. Currently, two-thirds of mothers work part time, and only five percent of mothers work 50 or more hours a week. (Belkin, 2003)

Productivity losses from family care-giving needs are estimated at \$11 billion per year. (Steiner, 2006) This proves how costly it is to lose valuable employees. Proper diversity management with regard to working mothers will not only decrease this cost, but it also will increase business success and motivation. If employees are leaving and having a hard time coming back to the workplace, it may indicate that companies need to expand their philosophy and practices even more. In order to do this, corporations might consider seminars or classes regarding attracting, managing, and retaining diverse employees who are not like the traditional work force.

Work-family policies and practices are offered in the hope that they will help retain women and parents with young children. Managers and professionals need to realize that discrimination against mothers, or any employees with family issues, is illegal. If an employee is not hired because her resume shows she is a member of her child’s PTA or because she is wearing a wedding ring, that is gender discrimination and could bring potential lawsuits against the company.

Discriminating against mothers is not only illegal, but it also forces companies to overlook valuable assets to the company. By tailoring opportunities to each working mother, with specific work-family needs, organizations will be able to motivate their employees while becoming more successful. Both the research and the panel members described potential solutions that would make the integration between work and family a lot less stressful. These solutions avoided discrimination against mothers and created a healthier work life at home and in the office. The ideas are there, we now need actions to implement them.

While this information could be very beneficial to practicing managers and professionals, one must realize that the burden of work and family often falls disproportionately on the shoulders of working mothers. Although there is no such a thing as an ideal job when it comes to work and life integration, there are plenty of solutions practicing professionals and companies can initiate in order to make the balance easier. Whether a company exercises family-responsive human resource policies and practices, flex time, work at home options, virtual workplaces, or the four day workweek each step will benefit working mothers and the organization itself.

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