

Faculty Work-Life Boundary Management, Inclusion, and Women's Career Well-being in the Always-On Workplace: A National Survey

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Although work-life demands are a critical barrier to women's career equality, leadership advancement, retention, and inclusion and a growing concern for U.S. faculty and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) scientists, they remain a critical understudied research area. The failure to address these issues may harm the U.S. economy and lead to STEM skills shortages across many industries. There is a scholarly and practical national need to incorporate new workforce understanding of supportive work-life workplaces as our U.S. workforce generally and STEM, in particular, needs to work longer – otherwise we will not have enough skilled workers to pay into social security and other pension programs. Our economy and GDP growth rate will also stall, should the U.S. move into a low fertility economy like Korea, Italy or Japan.

This project involved a national survey of U.S. STEM and non-STEM faculty at the 94 research 1 universities. Academia is an occupation that on paper can look flexible in terms of the ability to sometimes work virtually, for example. Yet regarding career trajectories and workload, and professional norms of overwork, it is in reality, for many faculty experienced as not very work-life supportive as work-life boundaries can become blurred leading to intensification in both work and nonwork roles. This is particularly the case for faculty in academic STEM who are actively managing child or elder care or mental health demands for their families or themselves while working. This study integrated theory on work-life boundary management, gender and diversity and inclusion, which is under-synthesized, which may be holding back workplace innovation. This gap may be holding back workplace innovation in fostering work-life inclusive workplaces, as we understand little about how work-life issues intersect with other aspects of identity to determine career trajectories, such as job attraction and turnover.

The study investigated the characteristics of a work life inclusive workplace, which we defined as the degree that members' perceive that they fully belong and thrive while synthesizing work and nonwork roles in ways that do not sacrifice their nonwork identities while performing their jobs. Our integration of work-life boundary management theory and inclusion research offers a novel way to understand how faculty boundary approaches and perceptions of departmental climates interact to affect women's career well-being outcomes in contrast to men's. In order to improve the career experiences of women faculty, an enhanced understanding of the characteristics of work-life inclusive contexts (comparing STEM and non-STEM departments) and their relation to blurring boundary management pressures is needed.

The first study aim was to identify the characteristics associated with work-life inclusive climates. Results identified three dimensions: diversity fairness of support, leader and organizational work-life support, and avoiding overwork ideal worker cultures.. The

characteristics of a work-life inclusive climate are consideration of an individual as a whole person who has identities and life roles outside of work. The work-life inclusive climate allows individuals to retain these identities in the work role by creating an environment where these identities and roles do not conflict with either one's ability to perform their job or perceptions of others regarding one's ability to perform their jobs.

The second aim was to examine how work-life inclusive climates related to work boundaries. We found that individual perceptions of control over the work boundary was negatively related to equality of support for women and positively to equitable employment practices. Both boundary and schedule control were related to leader practices for improving work-life inclusiveness. These results show that work-life boundary management is about more than the instrumental management of time and resources, it is also about feeling included in a department, which involves other aspects of one's identity.

A third aim was to examine whether there is variation in disciplinary (e.g., STEM & Non-STEM) and departmental work-life inclusion climate. Results show that the gender is associated with substantial differences in perceptions of work-life inclusion climate characteristics, with non-men perceiving less inclusive climates on all variables. The gender difference is similar in both STEM and non-STEM fields, suggesting that the gender penalty in perception of work-life inclusivity is not discipline dependent. We also created individual profiles that had three types: work life inclusive, not inclusive, and backlash, which predicted individual turnover intentions, psychological distress and work-life balance. This project shows that work-life inclusion profiles vary depending on individual faculty demographics and identities and different groups of employees perceive work-life climates very differently even if they are in the same department or discipline. The STEM and non-STEM workforce will decline in the representation of women over time, if work-life inclusion in the future is not considered as an important workplace climate dimension for organizations to support structurally and culturally.