WORKPLACE EQUITY VOLUNTARY PRACTICE DISCUSSION

Discussion Topic: What are the differing perspectives on ensuring workplace equity and what are the latest on outcomes for employers that strive to create equitable workplaces?

Speakers:

- Lois Backon, Vice-President, Families and Work Institute
- Dr. Ellen Daniel, scientist, speaker, writer of *Every Other Thursday, Stories and Strategies From Successful Women Scientists*
- Lisa Hershman, Global Vice-President of Operational Excellence and Quality and first Chairwoman of Avnet's global Executive Women's Forum, Avnet, Inc. (FORTUNE 500 Company)

The synthesized version of the discussion which follows the abstracts is based on notes taken during the three table discussions on this topic as well as insights offered during informal discussions throughout the day. The summaries may or may not reflect the views of all of those who participated at a given table during the course of the day.

ABSTRACTS

ABSTRACT A

Families and Work Institute
Transitioning into the 21st Century Workplace Presentation
Prepared By: Lois Backon, Vice-President, Families and Work Institute

Section 1: Overview of Topic/Research

The workforce is changing:
- It is more ethnically diverse.
- It has aged.
- Women are an increasingly vital part of the workforce.

The workplace is changing:
- We live in a 24-7 global economy and the work hours have increased
- Technologies—such as voicemail, email, and beepers—are blurring the lines between when people are at work and when they're not.
- Overwork in America is prevalent.
- There is increasing job mobility and insecurity.

Family life is changing:
- There is an increase in dual-earner couples.
- The division of household chores is changing.
- Fathers are spending more time caring for their children.

This is not your father's (or mother's) workforce. We are transitioning from the workforce and workplace of the 20th century to the workforce and workplace of the 21st century. Two competing trends are at work: an increase in the demands on employees, and an increase in employee's focus on family and/or personal lives.

Section 2: Clarify implications for employers, stressing any return on investment implications

Today in the U.S.:
- 39% of employees are not fully engaged in their jobs
- 54% are less than fully satisfied with their jobs
- 38% are somewhat or very likely to make a concerted effort to find a new job in the coming year
- 33% are exhibiting one or more symptoms of clinical depression

Families and Work Institute has identified workplace flexibility as one of 6 research-based criteria for an effective workplace:
- Providing job autonomy
- Creating learning opportunities and challenges on the job — where employees can grow, learn, and advance
- Developing environments where supervisors support employees in being successful on the job
- Developing environments where coworkers support each other for job success
- Involving employees in management decision-making
- Creating flexible workplaces

What is the business impact of providing workplace flexibility?

mployees with more access to flexible work arrangements are more engaged in their jobs, committed to their current employers, and are willing to work harder than required to help their employers succeed. In organizations with high levels of workplace flexibility, employees are more:

- Engaged: 66% of employees report high levels of job engagement and commitment in organizations with high levels of workplace flexibility, versus 56% in organizations with low levels of flexibility.
- Satisfied with their jobs: 67% of employees report high levels of job satisfaction in organizations with high levels of workplace flexibility, versus 23% in organizations with low levels of flexibility.
- Stay with their employers: 72% of employees plan to remain with their employers for the next year in organizations with high levels of workplace flexibility, versus 49% of organizations with low levels of flexibility.
- Have good mental health: 35% of employee's exhibit high levels of mental health in organizations with high levels of workplace flexibility, versus 19% in organizations with low levels of flexibility.

Section 3: Clarify implications, if applicable, for employees/workingwomen or policymakers

- The workforce is becoming more family focused, particularly among Gen-X and Y workers.
- The way employees work today is affecting their ambition. Among college-educated women, in 1992- 57% wanted to move into jobs with more responsibility. In 2002 -36% wanted to move into jobs with more responsibility; a decline of 21%.
- Women have achieved higher educational levels than men: 31% of women have 4 years of college or more versus 27% of men
- Women are more likely to be managers and professionals than men: 38% versus 28%
- Women's annual earnings are still significantly less than men's by about $12,000
- Women are more likely than men to have part-time positions
- Women are significantly less likely than men to hold *clout* titles including CEO, Chair, Vice Chair, President, COO, SVP, EVP. In 2005, in Fortune 500 companies, only 9.4% of the clout titles were held by women.
- Employed mothers are still working a second shift:
- 77% of women in dual-earner couples with children take greater responsibility for cooking.
- 78% take greater responsibility for cleaning.
- 70% take greater responsibility for everyday child care.
- In 1977, 78% of mothers claimed greater responsibility for taking time off of work to stay home or do something with children. In 2002, 72% of mothers claimed greater responsibility.

Section 4: What roles can or have researchers, policymakers, employers or employees played in this area/topic?

The role of research has been to inform decision-making and shape the national dialogue around this mismatch and the media's portrayal so that it is no longer seen as an "individual problem" but a larger social issue with larger solutions. Employers are finding new ways of making work "work" for business and employees. Workplace flexibility is a critical ingredient in creating flexible workplaces. It can be a strategic no- or low-cost business tool to address the mismatches between the needs of employers and employees and to create the workplace of the 21st century. There are still a number of issues around flexibility:

- 37% of employees say it is hard to take time off during work when personal or family issues arise
- 39% of employees report that using flexibility jeopardizes their advancement
- 54% of employed parents say they can't take time off for sick children without losing pay, using vacation days, or making up an excuse

But we are seeing a change. Families and Work Institute data shows that employers are maintaining or increasing their commitment to flexible time policies. Flexibility is increasingly not seen as a perk for employees, but as a strategic business tool to make work "work" for employers and employees.

Section 5: Discussion Starter Questions

- What does workplace equity mean?
- Is workplace equity a women's issue?
- Should employers create specific programs or policies to enhance workplace equity?
- What programs, policies or culture practices enhance workplace equity?
- Do workplace equity programs, policies, or practices have an affect on ROI?
- Does media coverage affect the perception of workplace equity issues? If so, how?
- Will Generation X and Y's values and perceptions on work and family begin to close the gender gap on workplace equity issues?

ABSTRACT B

Every Other Thursday: Stories and Strategies From Successful Women Scientists
Prepared By: Dr. Ellen Daniell, scientist, speaker, writer of *Every Other Thursday, Stories and Strategies From Successful Women Scientists*

Section 1: Overview of Topic/Research

I have been a member of a professional problem-solving group, composed of women scientists, for almost thirty years. During those years, I have been variously a university faculty member, a businesswoman in biotechnology, and a writer and consultant. My book "Every Other Thursday: Stories and Strategies from Successful Women Scientists" describes how this group works and details a number of the recurring themes in our work. My focus is to encourage people to form groups around areas of professional interest and challenge.

Groups may be especially useful for those women or men who feel themselves isolated or marginalized, but I recommend them just as emphatically to anyone who is enthusiastic about discussing and working through issues with others. A group may provide a place to practice skills such as determining and asking for exactly what you need/want to do your job.

In writing the book, and in discussions with women in academia and business I have learned that many of the stereotypes and perceptions that were prevalent thirty years ago persist and still hamper the full participation of women in many professions. Changing those perceptions must be a major part of efforts on behalf of women. Solutions devised by a group may not only help the individual survive and prosper, but also enrich (and gradually alter) the workplace environment.

Section 2: Clarify implications for employers, stressing any return on investment implications

- Women are often particularly effective in communication and support. We must believe and demonstrate that intimacy and reliance on others for encouragement and advice is a source of empowerment not a sign of weakness.
- Changes in the workplace and in measures of success that increase flexibility should not be viewed as "accommodations for women with families." These changes are generally also positive for men (or employees of either sex with our without families). Flexibility encourages creativity and fresh thinking.
- We may need to consider our perceptions of what constitutes a successful career. Productivity should not be confused with single-minded fanaticism nor with hours worked. We need to focus on results, not window-dressing.
- Women are discouraged from entering certain careers because of subtle (or not-so-subtle) discrimination. These professions suffer from the loss of available talent, and possibly loss of unique and fresh approaches to the issues of the profession. Peer support and counseling may provide an antidote to the feelings of isolation that result from entering a field with a distinct gender imbalance.

Section 3: Discussion starter questions

- Can you think of a time or specific event in your career when you would have benefited from describing a workplace issue, in confidence, to a group of people who were not involved in the outcome, but might have relevant insights and experiences?
- If you wanted to establish a professional problem-solving group, do you envision finding members within your own organization, or would you want to make contact with people outside your organization but who would understand your issues? Think of some advantages and disadvantages of the two approaches.
- As an employer, do you see problems with having a group of coworkers discussing their personal professional challenges in a forum that did not necessarily pass those concerns up the "chain of responsibility"?

- As an employer, does it make sense for you to encourage the formation of such peer-counseling or problem-solving groups within the organization? For employees—would it feel either more or less empowering if your employer facilitated the formation of the group?

Discussion Synthesis: WORKPLACE EQUITY VOLUNTARY PRACTICE

Trends

Equitable workplaces offer equal opportunities for advancement, professional development, and wages as well as unbiased measures of performance and worth for all employees.

For the purposes of the 2006 National Employer Summit, workplace equity discussions focused primarily on workplace and societal barriers that undermine the ability of workingwomen to participate fully and equitably in the workplace. Participants noted, however, that while issues of equity and the biases that can undercut workplace equity are keenly felt by workingwomen , they are also felt by all employees with family responsibilities, employees with disabilities, or other diverse or minority employees.

To some Summit participants, it appears that the use of "discouraging" speech continues and terms such as "doing women a favor" continue to hamper workplace equity efforts. A bias against women and/or those with family responsibilities has caused motherhood to be termed the "baby gamble." Caregivers, in general, are learning to cope with something now being called family responsibilities discrimination, which is discrimination against employees based on their responsibilities as caregivers[47]. As stereotypes linger about women's commitment to their jobs, participants noted that they continue to hamper women's full and equitable participation in the workplace. Complementary stereotypes about the "appropriate" role of men in care giving are also hampering the ability of male workers to access family leave and other benefits often provided to their female counterparts.

The workforce is changing to include more ethnicities, age groups, and women giving workplace equity issues resonance among many different types of workers. Both, workingwomen and men live in a 24-7 global economy and their work hours have increased. Women's average annual work hours were up by 15 percent between 1976 and 1993 and men's by 3 percent.[48] Technologies—such as voicemail, e-mail, and beepers—are blurring the lines between when people are at work and when they're not. Additionally, it seems that overwork, job mobility, and insecurity are prevalent in the U.S. The resulting workplace stress is taking a toll on workers. One U.S. employer found that 19 percent of its male workers and 15 percent of its female employees suffered from major depression[49]. Twenty-eight percent of employees in another study reported feeling "overworked" often or very often within the prior three months, reported the Families and Work Institute in 2001[50].

This is not your parents' workforce. Family life is changing, and this is shown by an increase in dual-earner couples—nearly 70 percent of children under the age of 18 have either both parents or their only resident parent in the workforce[51]. Divisions in care giving responsibilities are shifting and fathers are more likely to be significantly involved in caring for their children. An increase in working grandparents raising young grandchildren is also on the rise. The United States is transitioning from between the workforce and workplace of the 20th century to that of the 21st century. Two competing trends are at work in this transition—the increased demands on employees and the increased focus by many employees on family responsibilities and personal goals.

Future progress in workplace equity appears to be less about focusing on characteristics of individual workers and more dependent upon:

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[47] "Model Policy for Employers." WorkLifeLaw. <www.uchastings.edu/site_files/WLL/modelpolicyforemployers.pdf>

[48] Bureau of Labor Statistics. <www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/opbils10.pdf>

[49] Sederer, Lloyd, M.D., and Norman A. Clemens. "Economic Grand Rounds: The Business Case for High-Quality Mental Health Care." American Psychiatric Association-Psychiatric Services Online. 2000. <http://psychservices.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/53/2/143.>These were not the actual statistics reference in the discussion which referenced the percentage of employees who reported feeling mentally healthy. BPW staff synthesizing the discussion summary was unable to locate this specific statistic. However, the statistics provided support the overall flow and intent of the discussion.

[50] Galinsky, Ellen; Stacy S. Kim, James T. Bond. "Feeling Overworked: When Work Becomes Too Much." Families and Work Institute. 2001. <www.familiesandwork.org> ; BPW staff synthesizing the discussion summary was unable to locate this specific statistic. However, the statistics provided support the overall flow and intent of the discussion.

[51] "Poverty and Income: Financial Support and Parental Employment." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2002. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/02trends/ES3/pdf>

- Removing concepts of favoritism or accommodation from work design options and refocusing measures of productivity on results rather than on time spent in the physical office
- Reducing the negative aspects to isolation (for example being only one of the few women working in a field, institution, or department) by offering peer counseling, mentoring, or membership in affinity networks.
- Creating a culture of acceptance that offers employees support against bias.

Workplace flexibility is one tool that proponents feel can help achieve workplace equity. Flexibility initiatives redesign the workplace by compelling employers to focus on how work gets done and the resulting changes in productivity rather than on requiring employees to make themselves available at specific points in the workplace. Some flexible workplace proponents feel that results-based measures help focus employers on getting work done rather than on the personal characteristics of the person doing the work, and therefore they embrace less biased measures for determining career mobility or pay which can benefit workingwomen, people with disabilities, maturing workers, etc.

A shift in the work paradigm related to flexibility is occurring on some levels because technology makes it possible for more workers to work from home, for example. But proponents also observe that the efficacy, equity, or desirability of this practice depends upon where one is within labor and management and within one's career. While workers with family responsibilities or other outside obligations may view the ability to blend life and work more closely as desirable, there are some workers—often in younger age groups—who want a clearer delineation between work and life.

Yet other conversations held at the Summit contended that there is also evidence that younger workers are actually driving conversations around work-life in many workplaces because they are perceived as "working to live and not living to work." They are pushing employers to offer flexible options to a broader array of employees—for example, to those who may want to pursue educational or life goals not related to specific care giving roles.

Interesting questions arose out of the overall discussions that could not be addressed within the scope of the day's activities but that bear further consideration: Is workplace equity or flexibility a right, a privilege, or an earned benefit? Is it an accommodation or simply a tool for reshaping work design and productivity? Under what circumstances can it be viewed as a right—such as offering paid sick leave—and at what point does it become an earned benefit based upon performance—telecommuting?

Broader societal changes will finally drive the changes in the structure of work and will ultimately remove the final barriers to equity. Some of these changes include:

- Changing measurements of work to those based on done to results instead of hours worked at a specific business location
- Realization by "corporate America" that it needs to have a way to bring back highly-skilled women who off-ramp
- Removing the mindset that if working at home is not working

Common Ground

The anticipated shift in the work paradigm from measuring face-time as an indicator of productivity to measuring work accomplished is more prognostication than fact. The 2005 Annual Benefits Survey of the Society for Human Resource Management revealed that only 19 percent of companies offer job sharing, 33 percent compressed work weeks, 56 percent flex time, and 37 percent telecommuting [52]. While proponents espouse workplace flexibility as an effective tool for designing more equitable workplaces, the real and ongoing trend is that most workplaces do not offer formal workplace flexibility programs or policies. Several reasons exist for this lack of broad-based adoption. First, managers may feel that flexible work options constrain their ability to manage the workforce. Managers are responsible for meeting production goals, and flexibility can present another layer of administration that adds more to their workload than it offsets in increased production and employee engagement. Secondly, employees are often reluctant to make use of flexible programs when they are offered because they fear a potential backlash. The latter reason indicates that creating a culture of flexibility is much more complex than simply offering a program. It involves a demonstration of commitment throughout the organization including the modeling of workplace flexibility by senior leadership and examples of advancement by employees who have

[52] "Annual Benefits Survey." Society for Human Resource Management. 2005. <www.shrm.org>

utilized the programs. There is an aspect of bias avoidance in the case of workplace equity. It is reflected in the fear of asking for something special because workers don't want a bias to emerge against them. This, say proponents of workplace equity, makes it not only a woman's issue but a workforce issue because it is something that impacts a broad range of employees from entry-level workers, to people with disabilities, to those in well-delineated advancement tracks, to lower-wage workers, and so on.

As more employers are asked by employees to adopt flexible-work programs, it becomes clear that there is often a narrow understanding of flexibility which can stymie its progress. Flexibility is often thought of as being different permutations of very structured part-time schedules. In reality, flexibility can exist within a broad spectrum of options ranging from the basic ability to address intermittent needs for time off, to flexible start and end times, and on into more structured arrangements such as job-sharing or part-time career paths[53].

Flexibility is a work design tool that can support more equitable workplaces—but it is only a tool. How measures be substantiated in a way that satisfies both employers and employees? Measuring productivity within flexible work environments is not without precedent. Examples, such as retailer Best Buy's adoption of a results only work environment, exist for measuring productivity based on merit; these measurements focus on business outcomes and, by their nature, both subtly and overtly support flexibility[54].

An interesting spin on the workplace equity issued emerged as discussions progressed. Equity, from both a business and employee perspective, is not only about offering programs and policies that provide equitable opportunities for all employees related to advancement, wages, work design options, etc, but also involves offering any benefits or work design options (such as flexible workplaces) in ways that are equitable for all employees.

Expectations about work availability, for example, can trump policies and procedures. Executive or professional staff may feel pressed to be available 24/7 because of the availability of technologies that allow them to access e-mail, phone, and computers from off-site. In this instance, employees with more structured work schedules and definite in and out times may have an easier time turning off the switch when they leave the workplace. Some employers are dealing with these types of equity issues by harnessing technology in benign ways and encouraging innovation in scheduling. For example, some employers set up e-mail alerts that automatically turn on for all employees after the end of the official business day. These e-mails alert recipients that the business is officially closed for the day and that their e-mail will be responded to the next business day. Others ensure that all employees make full use of holiday times by shutting down offices for an entire holiday period, such as the last week of the year before the Western New Year's Day.

Getting a handle on the current state of workplace equity varies based on the criterion examined: age, work-type, sex, parental status. Because issues of equity can be difficult to assess in today's workplaces where employees' demographic characteristics merge and alter over-time, equity has a long way to go before it is placed at the top of the business agenda. Witnessing the effects of inequity in research studies will not be enough to persuade executives to change their workplace cultures. It will require experiencing the effects of inequity on productivity and the loss of highly-skilled workers to more supportive work environments … that is most likely to fuel changes.

A crucial step in the creation of equitable workplaces, say proponents, is having support among upper management especially among senior-level males[55]. Anecdotal evidence seems to support the idea that men are often "converted" to supporting initiatives to achieve workplace equity when they have professional daughters. Generational differences also play a role in how likely equity issues are to remain on the business agenda. Millennial's, the generation coming of age at the start of the 21st Century, often do not think inequity remains in the workplace. This is because, say Summit discussants, the glass ceiling becomes more apparent to women in later stages of their career

[53] "Workplace Flexibility: Definition." Workplace Flexibility 2010. < http://www.law.georgetown.edu/workplaceflexibility2010/definition/index.cfm>

[54] Gans, Stefanie. "Flexing Your Workplace Muscles." Business Woman Magazine. 2007. <www.bpwusa.org>; Also see: Jodie Levin-Epstein. "Responsive Workplaces; the business case for employment that values families. MotherLoad ,a special report in the American Prospect. 2007. <www.clasp.org>

[55] Gans, Stefanie. "Mentoring: A Workplace Best Practice." BusinessWoman Magazine. 2007. <www.businesswomanmagazine.org>

Actionable Strategies

Actionable strategies in this realm focused on examples of current initiatives that fueled organizational or societal change. Societal changes are targeted as the key to creating real change. "If we just keep working on shifting policies, it won't be enough. We have to stop devaluing family care," stated a participant.

An ongoing change project being funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation called the Business Opportunities for Leadership Diversity (BOLD) Initiative supports a team-based approach to designing flexible work options that supports both employees' needs for supportive work environments and employers' needs for a productive workforce. Demonstration projects already conducted by the BOLD Initiative indicate those employers that allow working teams to schedule their own time showed an increase in productivity levels[56].

Business imperatives are driving some workplace changes, although the word is out on whether they can create sustainable change. For example, some companies are addressing knowledge and experience gaps in their organizations by bringing back retired staff and meeting their needs for more flexible work schedules[57].

Cultural change can also occur by creating new connections among employees that break down walls between departments as well as individual employees. Creating affinity groups inside and outside the workplace reduces the sense of marginalization and isolation that can be felt by women (or others). These affinity groups provide a place to practice skills, to learn to ask for exactly what they want and need on the job, and to find mentors as well as to mentor others. Peer-counseling or peer-mentoring across genders is a key strategy for building a personal network that helps equalize access to valued positions and experiences. Women's networks—as well as other affinity groups—teach participants to be proactive in seeking mentors above them and across departments as well as how to be mentors[58]. Selecting both male and female mentors and mentees is critical to breaking down barriers, gaining insights into the workplace, and learning how different people navigate the workplace[59]. While this solution to marginalization is being adopted by an increasing number of larger workplaces, tracking the return on investment for employers is a relatively new area of research. Current assumptions based on this strategy are that affinity groups will encourage and sustain more candidates in the succession pipeline, strengthen leadership skills, and streamline communications among different departments or divisions.

As flexibility advances as a strategy to equalize opportunities within companies, the need to move the justification for flexibility away from personal needs or characteristics becomes increasingly important. Employers, such as The New York Times, do not ask employees to disclose their reasons for requesting flexible schedules. This reason-neutral practice removes the burden (and potential liability) from employers for deciding which personal reasons are more worthy than others of flex-options. This prevents employees from revealing personal information that may inadvertently trigger bias. Shifts in workplace consciousness such as this help transfer workplace flexibility out of the benefit package and into the employer's tool kit. Under those circumstances in which employers do require an employee to offer a reason for needing flex-time, some Summit discussants suggested that workingwomen learn from their male counterparts who are more likely to talk about using leave time for professional development or educational opportunities rather than for needing time off to be with the family.

Conscious efforts are encouraged to harness technology to support workplace strategies aimed at creating equitable and flexible work environments rather than allowing emerging technologies to haphazardly drive workplace change. Some strategies being used by employers to support flexible workplaces include specially designed software that allows shift workers to mark times in and times out throughout the day versus start and end times, using internet technology to allow employees to create team schedules or swap schedules, and telecommuting[60].

Research will play a significant role determining the future availability of flexibility. Ideas for future research included:

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[56] BOLD Initiative.<http://www.sloan.org/report/2004/workplace.shtml>

[57] Hutchens, Robert. "Phased Retirement: Problems and Prospects." Center for Retirement Research at Boston College. 2007. <www.bc.edu/crr/>

[58] Hollis, Robin. "Women's Networks: A Primer." Audio conference summary. Business and Professional Women's Foundation. 2006. < http://www.bpwusa.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=5066>; Also see: "Women's Network: A Promising Practice in Diversity."BusinessWoman Magazine. 2007. www.businesswomanmagazine.org.

[59] "On Target: Nancy Jackson." BusinessWoman Magazine. 2007. <www.businesswomanmagazine.org>

[60] Workplace Flexibility for Lower Wage Workers. Corporate Voices for Working Families. 2006. <www.cvwf.org>

- Capturing effective employer practices among those who have equalized the availability of benefit options for all employees
- Gathering data on how employers in different sectors may experience different constraints on their ability to offer flexibility such as government employers versus private employers or large employers versus small employers
- Learning how small employers deal with a 24/7 marketplace and how that affects work-life options for all employees
- Answering the tough questions about the impacts of workplace flexibility on employees such as how does workplace flexibility affect the traditional career trajectories of workingwomen and men—How is it reflected in different fields?
- Uncovering what environmental factors influence the availability and use of flexible workplaces … such as exploring if FORTUNE 500 Companies with female CEOS have different/better/worse policies than those without

Workplace Equity Policy Discussion

Discussion Topic: What is government's role in supporting workplace equity efforts for workingwomen, in theory and in practice? What does this mean for employers and the workplace?

Speakers:

- Heather Boushey, Senior Economist, Center for Economic and Policy Research
- Shirley Clark, Founding Partner, Choose 2 Lead Women's Foundation
- Judith Finer-Freedman, Founder, WorkLife Juggle

The synthesized version of the discussion which follows the abstracts is based on notes taken during the three table discussions on this topic as well as insights offered during informal discussions throughout the day. The summaries may or may not reflect the views of all of those who participated at a given table during the course of the day.

ABSTRACTS

ABSTRACT A

Choose 2 Lead Women's Foundation
Workplace Equity and Inequity Presentation
Prepared By: Shirley Clark, Director and Co-Founding Partner, Choose 2 Lead Women's Foundation

Section 1: Overview of Topic/Research

The saying goes "it's not what you know, but who you know." Workplace research has shown this to be the case in organizations around the country. So how does a workplace even begin to achieve equity when many decisions and promotions are not based on merit? In an ideal workplace no opportunity would deny an employee based on anything other than ability. The diversity of the workforce and their many individual requirements add complications to an issue that is already wrought with challenge. We will explore at this table what role government can or has played in supporting workplace equity efforts.

While the wage gap is the most-often-discussed statistic, this forum will take a brief look at various forms of workplace equity and inequity. While part-time workers, contractors, and sub-contractors all have concerns, in our session we will concentrate on issues most relevant to women's career advancement.

It is also important that we understand what lies behind the statistics, how the economic aspects and implications factor in and how cultural differences – gender, ethnicity and tradition play a role. The discussion on workplace equity will focus on three critical areas: the causes of discrimination in the workplace; what should be done about it; and what is currently being done about it.

Section 2: Clarify implications for employers, stressing any return on investment implications

Studies have shown the association between retaining or bringing back experienced, career-minded individuals and positive bottom-line results (100 Best from *FORTUNE's* list outperformed S&P 100 in 2005: 14.75% to 4.81% ROI – Great Place to Work Institute). Conversely research has shown that dissatisfaction with the job and the workplace environment (HBR study, C2L research) is a major factor in an employees' employment decision process. The causes of workplace dissatisfaction are often the same issues that create potential inequity within the workplace.

Employers need to be concerned about these practices to ensure they are optimizing their human resources investment dollars:

- Leadership style(s) and resulting workplace culture
- Tolerance for any form of discrimination – including marginalization for using flexible offerings
- Promotions not rewarded on merit, or criteria not well-defined
- Disregard for employees working non-traditional schedule
- History/Tradition – looking at the workforce through the eyes of a 1960's manager
- Lack of options and/or opportunities for those requiring family time
- One-size-fits-all positions
- Jobs for less-than-full-time don't exist or limit upward mobility
- Poor management training

Employers would do well to understand the correlation between workplace equity and retention figures. Additional to hiring and training costs, losing experienced talent can translate into lost opportunity.

Section 3: Clarify implications, if applicable, for employees/workingwomen or policymakers

- Women often leave the workplace because they cannot find a job that suits their needs. The workplace has not kept up with the changing demographics of the last 40 years and still caters to a dual-parent, single-earner model. Even if an employer pays men and women equally when they get out of school, circumstances for women often dictate career interruptions that throw them behind the earning curve, off the promotion ladder or

even out of the game. Women don't even need to leave the workforce to begin to fall behind if the only upward options available to them require more of a "non-controlled" time commitment than they can provide.

- These tough decisions and time away from work can cause substantial implications to a woman's life-long earning power (HBR stats, other) as well as challenges for upward mobility. Unless positions are created to ensure that their intellect and experienced is capitalized upon, they will often choose to work in more meaningful positions - sometimes in the non-profit sector (almost always less money) or smaller companies where they have more control (less money and/or benefits). In any of these choices, women:
    - Lose short-term earnings
    - Lose long-term earning power
    - Lose opportunity to attain position of greater influence
    - Effect their life-long financial stability

Section 4: What roles can or have researchers, policymakers, employers or employees played in this area/topic?

- As we strive for equity in the workplace, it is important to understand the issues, the statistics and how we each can play a role in moving this agenda forward.
- Policymakers cannot write legislation that can change the daily management of organizations throughout the country. However, that does not mean there is not a legislative role. There must be caution exerted when attempting to legislate oversight because budgetary issues and implementation uncertainties may delay or eliminate the desired effect.
- A collaborative effort between business, legislatures and employees must occur. Researchers can provide valuable data and statistics, and can help establish on-going metrics to ensure comparative measurements are presenting a full and accurate story so that policymakers and organizational leaders can determine specific points of action to improve the situation. Long-term non-partisan objectives should be firmly established on a national basis.

Section 5: Discussion Starter Questions

- What specific issues or concerns come to mind when you hear "workplace equity"?
- Where are the areas of greatest concern when you think about government engagement in supporting workplace equity? Why?
- Is it idealistic to think that everyone in the workplace can participate equitably?
- How much has been achieved? Where does it need to go?
- What barriers exist to greater equity? What are some of the causes of inequity?
- What is required to move forward (from employers, workingwomen, government)?
- What are the short-term implications of inequity? To employers? To employees?
- What are the long-term implications?
- Do you believe inequity has an affect on U.S. competitiveness? If so, how? If not, why not?

DISCUSSION SYNTHESIS: WORKPLACE EQUITY POLICY

Trends

"The causes of workplace dissatisfaction are often the same issues that create potential inequity in the workplace," reported one participant.

Is creating workplace equity something better achieved through market-driven solutions or government supported options? What are the combined and separate roles for government and private industry? When discussing public policy and workplace equity, these questions underlie most conflicts that arise during debates about how to address inequities in the workplace. Understanding the ideologies that shape the decision-making processes of employers, policymakers, and their constituents is a critical step in developing win-win voluntary or public-policy solutions.

This leads to the question when discussing workplace flexibility: Is it a right, a privilege, a benefit, a workplace tool, or a combination of all of the above? This seems to be a critical question needing an answer as possible policy solutions for supporting equity and flexibility are debated including expanded paid sick leave, paid family medical leave, and a right-to-ask for flexibility.

If all types of flexibility are to be equally available to all workers regardless of output, it can threaten the ability of employers to design workplaces that maximize profits or achieve organization missions. Still, are there some types of "flexibility" on the spectrum of flexible work options that should be acknowledged within the 21st Century as a right or at least as a necessity for all workers such as paid sick leave?

Limits on employer discretion in offering flexible work options can create an all or nothing feeling to offering such options for employers.

In larger organizations, discussants felt that inequity often is felt in the hiring and career mobility options of women:

- The need to enter and exit the workforce throughout her career is one of the greatest inhibitors to a woman's career mobility. Women who off-ramp or periodically exit out of the labor force even for a short-time are perceived as experiencing a nearly irretrievable loss of skills and networks[61].
- The lack of portability in key workplace benefits such as insurance reduces caregivers' ability to move between jobs as well as undercuts their ability to negotiate within the workplace.

Other aspects of equity deal with designing work so that it meets 21st Century employees where they are. How work gets done and the supports that are available to aid employees in getting work done often still cater to a dual-parent, single-earner family model for employees[62]. Today's workplaces have not come to terms with the changing realities of the American family and the lives experienced by their employees. This is reflected in the design of schedules, the allocation of work assignments, available benefits, hiring, and advancement practices that favor employees who can be available during traditional work hours or that can be on call 24-7. By maintaining old assumptions, employers are unintentionally creating workplaces that are structurally inequitable even if the stated intent of management is to be equitable. When modern workers do not fit into workplace structures built to maximize the capacity of 1950s workers (workers with at-home spouses, etc.), dissonance occurs.

Employees, including workingwomen, who do not fit into this stylized structure, often face real challenges within workplaces. To ensure access to highly skilled and experienced workers at all levels and in all industries, employers are faced with redesigning work to open the workplace to a larger work force and tap into all available resources. The economic implications for having a fully-engaged and productive workforce as the century advances will have a profound impact on everyone involved. This reality alone requires the attention of policymakers, if not their action.

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[61] The Hidden Brain Drain. Harvard Business Review Research Report. 2005. < http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu>

[62] Boushey, Heather. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Hearing. Written testimony. Center for Economic and Policy Research. April 17, 2007. <http://www.eeoc.gov/abouteeoc/meetings/4-17-07/index.html>

Solutions to removing the structural and cultural barriers that stall women's full and equitable participation in the workplace necessitates the collaboration of policymakers, employers, and workingwomen and requires a combination of public policy and voluntary practice-based solutions.

This issue is significant because workplace biases against women continue to stymie their ability to obtain workplace positions that allow them to acquire the needed leadership experience, networks, and visibility to maximize career mobility. Inequity affects both short and long-term earnings and eventually it is reflected in a poverty rate which is higher for elderly women than for men[63].

The type of work assignments allotted to employees can go a long way to establishing equitable opportunities for advancement and wage equity. Prior to the 2005 National Employer Summit, a survey of Summit registrants revealed that even among these early adopters of forward-thinking workplace policies, the majority reported that women in their companies were more likely to be in "soft" positions such as communications or human resources which did not have easy ways to measure their departments' impact on the bottom-line rather than "hard" or operational positions that have clear bottom-line implications and are more often associated with upward mobility.

Bias plays other subtle and unsubtle roles in women's career mobility. If a woman doesn't conform to the traditional workplace (read male-focused) model, it shows up in performance reviews. Dress codes are one example of how this bias plays out. A woman dressing casually may find this factor playing against her during a performance review. Winning acceptance for bias training can be challenging but may be a necessary tool in developing equitable workplaces. Both government and private industry studies that reviewed their organization's performance appraisal practices found that hidden biases often crept in to the process and that few standards existed to help supervisors apply workplace standards equitably[64].

Inequity that impacts workingwomen is not simply something that affects women versus men. Women often have to stay in the workplace past 65, which individually impacts pension and social security. Because women (and often men) have to stay in the workplace longer to offset smaller retirement savings, it is affecting the availability of opportunities for younger workers. In the last economic recovery, older workers took almost all the new jobs[65]. So there is a tension between the large, new generation and the semi-retired boomers.

"If there was more open thinking, you'd have a bigger workforce that taps all resources," said one Summit participant.

There is an increasing sense that the days of gleaning the workforce for employees who best fit the standardized workplace design is gone even if the mindset that perpetuates that work design isn't. But a critical question when dealing with public policy is: Can changing cultural bias be legislated?

To ensure access to highly skilled and experienced workers at all levels in the 21st Century workplace, discussants predicted that employers would need to redesign work in order to open up workplaces to a more inclusive workforce. Public policy can help employers address this need by supporting initiatives that can level the playing field for employers while this transition is taking place.

For example, policy can help meet the needs of employees and employers where they are by:

- Offering more portability in critical benefits such as health insurance: expanding access to medical insurance in a way that takes some of the burden off of employers and allowing employees greater portability with less risk of loss of benefits across the lifespan.
- Providing employees with tools to address the realities of more subtle forms of discrimination which can show up, for example, in types of work assignments, and providing employers greater guidance in the responsibilities and rights under current legislation.

[63] Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement. <http://www.wiser.heinz.org/portal/>

[64] Hewlit, Sylvia Ann; Carolyn Buck Luce, Cornel West. "Leadership in Your Midst: Tapping the Hidden Strengths of Minority Executives." Harvard Business Review. 2005.; Also see: Press Release. Center for WorkLife Policy. <http://www.worklifepolicy.org/documents/Hidden%20Bias%20Press%20Release.pdf>

[65] Boushey, Heather. "Gender Bias in the Current Economic Recovery: Declining Employment Rates for Women in the 21st Century." Center for Economic and Policy Research. <www.cepr.org>

Common Ground

"The causes of workplace dissatisfaction are often the same issues that create potential inequity within the workplace," explained a Summit participant. Workplace equity generally relates to providing equal pay and advancement opportunities for workingwomen and minorities.

A national trend in policy, say discussants, is to downplay family life issues even though polls show that the American public cares about these issues[66]. It appears that national leaders rarely translate these issues (i.e. insurance, workplace equity, work-life balance) into legislation, and reporters don't report on it because it is not compelling enough.

The continued valuing of employee face-time over the results generated by work is a disincentive for the spread of flexible work options. Workplace flexibility, say proponents, is a workplace design tool that holds the potential to open up the workplace to many different employee-groups (i.e. maturing workers, entry-level, caregivers, people with disabilities) and thereby expands the available labor pool for employers. Still, managers are struggling to manage alternative work styles. Support for managers through training programs within employers and in business schools on how to manage employees in a flexible work environment are critical to breaking down barriers and supporting managers.

Driving change around equitable workplaces and providing flexible work options that can empower more equitable practices requires a better understanding of the full spectrum of flexibility that is desired. For example, workers are not necessarily expecting that more part-time options are made available, per se, but would welcome even having the flexibility to come in an hour earlier or later and to adjust their schedule accordingly. Still, proactive workplaces will design their workplaces to meet the needs of the demographically altering labor force and an increasing number of workers—such as those nearing retirement will desire richer part-time opportunities that provide some kind of benefit parity with full-time work. It is also critical that advocates expand people's understanding that in some cases, the "part-time" that someone is negotiating for may be a 50-hour work week rather than an 80-hour one.

Actionable Strategies

To be viable in the 21st Century, policy needs to support the ability of employers to be flexible and adaptable and to be risk takers with innovative work design options. Policy and government (local, state, or federal) can take the long-term view when developing workplace solutions to inequity. It becomes critical when looking at supporting innovation in work design to remove barriers and disincentives to flexible work options. It is also important to offer policy solutions that generally strengthen the ability of both employers and employees to adapt to a rapidly changing global marketplace and to workplaces undergoing constant transformation because of technological and demographic forces. Actionable strategies outlined for supporting workplace equity included an overview of current examples of policy as well as areas for expanded policy development that appear to have the promise to drive change or support innovation.

- Exploring the development of policy that can encourage voluntary adoption of flexible work options such as the United Kingdom's 'soft-touch' right-to-request flexibility law
- Expanding the FMLA, which was a huge policy shift when it was originally enacted, but has become, it was felt by some in the discussion, a ceiling for workplace flexibility options rather than the floor it was meant to be; this view observes that many employers have taken FMLA as the maximum that is required of them when dealing with employees needing extended leave. In practice, the legislation only covers about half of employees in the U.S. [67]
- Providing incentives to universities and business certificate programs to incorporate management techniques for managing within flexible work environments
- Offering workforce development options that identify industries needing workers and offering training to refit them for new jobs

[66] Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research. <http://www.ciser.cornell.edu/info/polls.shtml>
[67] Library: Family and Medical Leave. National Partnership for Women & Families. 2007. <www.nationalpartnership.org>

- Supporting the development of clearinghouses of local information on work-life balance policies and options and capturing promising practices
- Supporting the Department of Labor-Women's Bureau's work in nurturing and capturing examples of the development of successful, innovative workplace practices in small and medium-size businesses through its workplace flexibility project[68]
- Funding the coordination for providing direction for employers and employees on how to create flexible work options that are win-win solutions for both; for example, provide checklist(s) for people who want to telecommute or have flexible work options explaining what to ask for, examples of flexible options, and ideas on how to redesign their work options

Discussants also outlined the need for policies that allow greater portability of benefits such as insurance or 401 (K) plans that could make a big difference in the bargaining options for employees and remove some costs from employers. Their ideas included:

- Opening up Medicare to anyone could even the playing field between small and large business in terms of benefits offered to employees; many smaller employees are eliminating health insurance as a benefit because of its high costs; also, the individual insurance market is expensive and nearly impossible to get coverage for a person with a disability; off-and-on ramping workers could benefit from medical coverage that can be maintained via Medicare
- Allowing social security to accrue during time off to raise a family or while helping with eldercare
- Developing portable pension legislation such as that proposed in Washington State would set up a 401(K) benefit plan which citizens could buy into and which would follow them from job to job[69]

[68] Department of Labor-Women's Bureau. <http://www.dol.gov/wb/>
[69] "Washington Voluntary Accounts." Economic Opportunity Institute. <www.eoionline.org/Policy_WVA.htm>