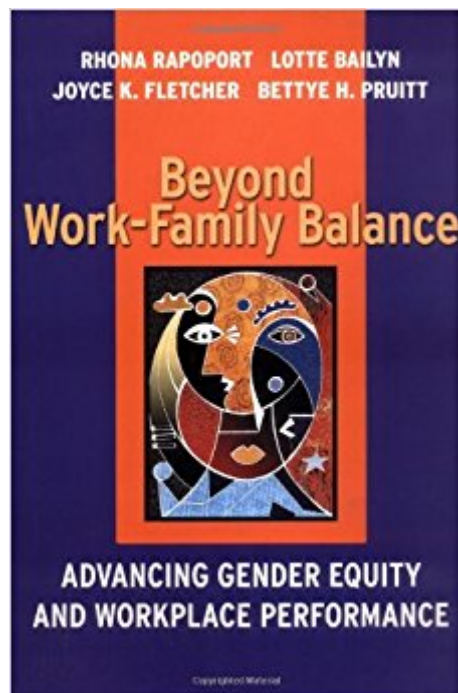




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Beyond Work-Family Balance: Advancing Gender Equity And Workplace Performance



Synopsis

Everyone who struggles to meet the demands of work and personal-life responsibilities knows how tough it is to do so. This bold new book shows that it is the deeply engrained separation of work and personal life that has limited our ability to deal effectively with the conflict between them. Beyond Work-Family Balance demonstrates why the image of "balance" is outmoded and why a new approach -- work-personal life integration -- offers greater promise for meaningful change.

Providing many examples from action research projects in more than a dozen organizations of different kinds, the authors show how using their method of integrating rather than separating personal-life considerations from the workplace can achieve positive outcomes, not only for workers but also for the work. The method offers a way of looking deeply into the work culture to find inequitable and ineffective work practices that are so embedded and routine that no one thinks to question them -- they are just the way things get done. Once identified, these work practices can be changed to achieve what the authors call a Dual Agenda: a more equitable workplace where both men and women can achieve their full potential and a more effective workplace where the needs of the work, rather than gendered and outmoded assumptions, determine what gets done and how.

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Customer Reviews

Beyond Work-Family Balance, by academic researchers Rhona Rapoport, Lotte Bailyn, Joyce K. Fletcher, and Bettye H. Pruitt, grew out of a decade-long search for ways to restructure business life that would "enhance organizational effectiveness while making the workplace more equitable and

improving the quality of working people's lives." While few would oppose such goals at face value, their full attainment has nonetheless remained elusive as business pressures increase and unrealistic gender assumptions--like institutional refusal to acknowledge the increasing emergence of women as primary breadwinners--remain entrenched in our corporate cultures, structures, and practices. This book advances a conceptual framework for appropriate organizational change that is tied directly to the dual agenda spelled out in the two-pronged premise of its subtitle: Advancing Gender Equity and Workplace Performance. With no one-size-fits-all solution possible for such complex issues, the authors draw on related studies in a dozen different workplace settings to instead present a starting point "so that organizations so inclined and the people in them can embark on a similar journey" of exploration and solution. The result will be of interest to anyone who agrees that such change is badly needed and long overdue. --Howard Rothman

A welcome contribution to theory and practice, this volume describes a program developed by the authors (academics and professionals experienced in the work/family and organizational behavior fields) to create a more equitable and satisfying workplace. Their program is different in that it attempts to tie together two organizational goals usually tackled separately: improving the bottom line and improving employees' ability to manage their work and personal lives. The authors' underlying beliefs that work and family life should be integrated and that when it is, gender and diversity issues will be addressed and employees will be more effective contributors to their organizations. When it is not integrated, management often experiences costs without productivity gains, while employees often feel work/family initiatives have not been successful. The authors detail actions taken in several consulting assignments with various companies, sharing surveys and meeting agendas. They describe a process that includes many discussions, frequent feedback, and reevaluation. Problems and failures as well as successes are reported. Clients are assisted in understanding assumptions associated with work needs, personal requirements, communication methods, outcome measurements, and rewards. The ideas presented in this volume are provocative and the suggestions realistically appraised. Recommended for graduate, research, and professional collections. -- F. Reitman, Pace University

The long-awaited, "Beyond Work-Family Balance," is finally out! Many of us have been waiting for the better part of a decade for a full treatment of the work/life integration experiments at Xerox and elsewhere, and this is it! If you are looking for a book to get you charged up about the business case for work/life programs, go elsewhere. If you want the most honest, detailed account of attempts to

make the business case successful in practice, this is the book for you. The basic argument starts with integration: we cannot improve things unless and until we are willing to bring the public sphere of employment and the private sphere of home together, a process that can range from embarrassing to painful. The second ingredient is the dual agenda of improving business performance and gender equity. The tightrope involved in carrying this dual agenda into the workplace is what makes the book interesting, powerful, and realistic. The authors argue that an interactive research approach is required to make the dual agenda work, with the researchers listening and learning almost as much as the participants in the business world, a process that requires constant feedback, reflection, and communication. Indeed, an entire chapter is devoted to lessons for research teams wishing to pursue research while applying a dual agenda to themselves. Sometimes the dual agenda succeeds, and employees and managers learn how to improve the functioning of workplaces for all participants (yes, stockholders even benefit). But the fundamental honesty of the authors leaves us wondering: is it worth it? Fortunately, I think the answer is yes, but the authors leave us in no doubt as to the incredible amount of work required. The one question left hanging concerns unions, since the parallels between many labor-management cooperation initiatives and the integration approach are multiple (if not perfect), but unions are not mentioned. Well, that leaves something for the next book. Incredibly well-written, brutally honest, and extremely insightful! A must-read for academics and practitioners alike.

This is a book we have all been waiting for. After decades of reflection and debate about how best to develop innovative, high performance organisations, on the one hand, and how to enhance gender equity and work-personal life integration on the other hand, this book tells us that the two are not only compatible, but mutually dependent. Written in a non technical and thoroughly engaging style, the book argues that work practices and norms which are inequitable are also ineffective. The authors have the rare knack of presenting a deep and thoughtful analysis in such a clear way that their argument seems simple and obvious. The heart of the problem lies in the gendered assumptions that underpin many everyday working practices. The authors point out that assumptions based on traditional masculine values and life situations include the defining of commitment in terms of long working hours that preclude time for family or personal life, and the valuing of stereotypical male competencies, such as heroic action and firefighting, above interpersonal and other competencies regarded as more "feminine". Drawing on action research in a range of organisations they demonstrate how these assumptions and the practices that follow from them, undermine effective performance, but are so taken-for-granted that

we rarely question them. What really distinguishes this book is that the authors go beyond identifying problems to provide a well tried method for bringing about meaningful change. It does not offer one size fits all solutions but does provide a process for reaching tailor made solutions. Their method of Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR) includes examining working practice and the assumptions that sustain ineffective practices and gender inequity and then thinking collaboratively with work teams to come up with innovative solutions to what they call the "dual agenda". The case studies used throughout the book are based on experience in a wide range of organisations so that everybody should be able to identify with at least some of the situations described. This should leave limited room for the traditional cry of "it won't work here". For all those readers who are interested in organisational performance and change and in gender equity, whether or not they have already made the connections between the two, this book will make compulsive reading. Even the most cynical will find it difficult to totally disregard the central message that gender equity and effective performance go hand in hand.

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