

## Conversations with the Experts

### The State of Work-Life 2010



Jan Civian

**Bio:** Jan Civian has been with WFD Consulting for 20 years focusing on assessment and work-life strategy, including dependent care, child care center feasibility, flexible work schedules, retention, diversity, and employee engagement. A survey research specialist, Jan has expertise in study design, questionnaire construction, and data analysis and presentation. Jan has particular expertise in women's advancement measurement and strategy, and has developed a mentoring curriculum for early career women. She has been the primary researcher for numerous client projects including Aventis, Boehringer Ingelheim, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Cummins PGBU, DePaul University, Dow Corning, DuPont, IBM, MIT, University of Georgia, University of Kentucky, and the University of Richmond.

Jan has conducted national research on business travel, and she co-authored "The New Career Paradigm: Attracting and Retaining Critical Talent," a 2006 national study of employee career patterns and preferences. She is also the co-editor of the May 2008 special issue of *Community, Work & Family*, featuring papers that draw on WFD's database to examine workplace flexibility. Jan has conducted on-site research in the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, India, Italy, the Philippines, South Korea and the UK. She holds a bachelor's degree with honors from Wellesley College, a master's from Stanford University, and a doctorate from Harvard University.

*An Interview with Jan Civian  
by Judi Casey*

### Can you tell me about the survey that you conducted about the state of work-life in 2010?

WFD wanted to take the pulse of the work-life field to understand a number of areas of interest to the industry such as the reporting lines for work-life programs, the complement of programs under the work-life umbrella, the effect of the recession on staffing and budgets, and the most pressing workforce issues as identified by work-life professionals. [AWLP](#) partnered with us on the corporate survey, and the College and [University Work/Family Association \(CUWFA\)](#) partnered with us on a higher education survey.

### Who participated in the survey?

We used the WFD database to identify organizations to participate in the corporate survey, and we invited each CUWFA member organization to participate in the higher education survey. For both groups, we sent the invitation to the senior work-life professional or the senior HR leader. We had 55 corporate respondents and 43 higher education respondents. So, we heard from almost 100 work-life professionals about their organizations. While it wasn't a random sample, we think the data are extremely useful, and we saw a great deal of consistency between the corporate and higher education samples.

The WFD database tends to include larger organizations as does the CUWFA membership, so it was no surprise that 55% of corporate respondents were from organizations with 5,000 or more employees and 57% of

higher education respondents were from institutions with 5,000 or more faculty and staff.

**We tend to be most familiar with work-life practices from our own organization's perspective. What trends or patterns did you find in how work-life is approached?**

Our corporate respondents reported that work-life tends to reside in employee benefits or as a separate function in HR. For universities, work-life is most commonly a separate function in HR. Many other arrangements exist, however. Several corporate and higher education respondents identified reporting into such areas as health/wellness/medical, diversity and inclusion, organizational development, and C-Suite/Senior Officer. It was very interesting to see the diversity of reporting relationships and realize how adaptable—and, to some extent, “homegrown”—the field is.

Given the diversity of reporting relationships, we wanted to know how work-life professionals would characterize the focus of their programs. We offered three descriptions: a *traditional* approach (e.g., focus on dependent care, resource and referral, and flexible work arrangements), an expanded approach into related areas (e.g., engagement, wellness, resilience, energy, workload, work redesign), and an expanded approach into less *related* areas (e.g., employee recognition, mentoring, coaching, career management). About half of respondents indicated a traditional approach and about a third reported expansion to related areas. About one in six reported expansion into *less related* areas. So, along with a diversity of reporting relationships, we see a good deal of diversity in the programs that fall into the work-life purview. This would seem to bode well for the future of the field. It suggests that work-life professionals in some cases are moving beyond the basics to support employees in a more robust definition of work-life management that takes into account the changing needs of the workforce and the changing needs of organizations.

**You mentioned that you were investigating the effects of the recession. What did you turn up?**

We wanted to understand how the recession had affected work-life commitment, staffing, and budgets. I think these were among our most interesting findings, and our corporate and higher education respondents answered in nearly identical patterns. We asked if work-life FTEs [full-time equivalents] had increased, decreased, or remained the same over the last 3 years. For two-thirds of respondents, staffing had remained the same, and for 21%, staffing had actually increased. Staffing decreased for only about one in seven respondents. We next asked about budgets—specifically, how 2010 work-life budgets compared to 2009 budgets. For 8 in 10 respondents, budgets remained the same or increased, and for 2 in 10, budgets decreased. Finally, we asked about senior leadership commitment and the results were very positive: 83% of respondents said that senior leadership commitment had remained the same or increased, with only 17% reporting a decrease. Again, we think these are positive signs about the value and viability of work-life in a recessionary economy.

**What issues are on the minds of work-life professionals, and what are they doing to address them?**

We provided a list of workforce issues and asked respondents to indicate the two most serious issues facing their organization. Workload and stress/burnout were the top issues identified by both corporate and higher education organizations. A third issue for corporations was engagement/commitment, while higher education found morale to be a serious problem.

Next we asked respondents to tell us which issues they expected to address in 2010. Some of the anticipated actions lined up with the problems identified, but others did not. About half of respondents expected to focus on wellness/resilience/energy. Although few identified this as a problem area, the wellness focus is certainly linked to the issue of stress and burnout. Half of corporate respondents said they expected to address engagement/commitment, consistent with this area of concern. Similarly, higher education respondents expected to address morale—again, consistent with this area of concern.

What we found surprising was that workload was identified as one of the most serious issues facing these organizations, and while there were some organizations that expected to address it, workload was much farther down the list for action than several areas that were not identified as among the most serious. For example, 64% of higher education institutions were planning to address dependent care issues when only 18% indicated

that dependent care was one of the most serious issues facing their organization. On the corporate side, 48% expected to address career management issues while only 15% had identified this as a serious problem.

We understand that workload is a tough issue to tackle. But to ignore it may be to ignore the root cause of many of the other issues identified, such as stress/burnout, engagement/commitment, and morale. WFD conducted another study this year that looked specifically at workload, the drivers of excessive workload, and actions being taken by organizations. Summaries of both of these studies—the State of Work-Life and Workload in America 2010—can be downloaded from WFD’s website at [wfd.com](http://wfd.com).

### **What do you think your findings mean for the future of the work-life field?**

The findings seem to be optimistic for the future of the field in the U.S. The diversity of reporting relationships, the expansive nature of programs in the work-life portfolio, stable staffing and budgets, and especially, sustained and even increased senior leadership support, all are signs that work-life is alive and well in 2010. The workload trend is worrisome, however. Work-life professionals are called upon to help manage the fallout when employees are faced with excessive workloads over a prolonged period of time. We have a lot of tools in our arsenal to address the symptoms of the problem, and they are helpful in the short-run. To really improve employees’ ability to manage their work and personal responsibilities, however, work-life professionals need to participate in identifying solutions that will address the drivers of ever-escalating workload.

**The Sloan Work and Family Research Network appreciates the extensive support we have received from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the Boston College community.**

E-mail: [wfnetwork@bc.edu](mailto:wfnetwork@bc.edu) - Phone: 617-552-1708 - Fax: 617-552-9202



[www.bc.edu](http://www.bc.edu)

*The Sloan Work and Family Research Network is funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation*