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Empowering individuals to integrate work and life: insights for management development

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Empowering individuals to integrate work and life: insights for management development

Empowering
individuals
to integrate
work and life

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Abstract

Purpose – In efforts to improve employee recruitment and retention and enhance productivity and morale, organizations have implemented policies and practices (e.g. flextime, telework to address employee work-life concerns). However, there is mixed evidence regarding their effectiveness. The purpose of this paper is to complement work-life policies, initiatives aimed at empowering employees with the knowledge and skills to manage multiple life roles may be valuable. Little information is available regarding the nature or effectiveness of such initiatives. Through an in-depth analysis of one initiative, Total Leadership, the authors provide insights that can be used in the selection, design, implementation, and evaluation of work-life empowerment efforts.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors use a mixed methods approach to explore the experiences of 316 participants in the Total Leadership program. Self-assessments (pre and post) were analyzed using quantitative methods (e.g. Cohen's *d*-value). Inductive and iterative qualitative methods were employed to understand the types of experiments participants created as part of the program.

Findings – The authors found that participants reported significant increases in satisfaction and performance in all domains of life (work, home, community, and self). Further, the authors identified nine types of experiments that individuals used to enhance performance in all life domains. Implications for management development specialists are provided.

Originality/value – This study provides unique and valuable insight for those interested in supporting employee work-life development, leadership, and performance in all domains of life. It represents one of the first efforts to provide evidence-based guidance for the design and implementation of such initiatives.

Keywords Leadership development, Self-development, Qualitative analysis, Work-life balance

Paper type Research paper

In the last 20 years, organizations have increasingly recognized the importance of addressing employee work-life needs as a strategy for recruiting and retaining high-talent employees and managing employee stress and morale (e.g. Amstad *et al.*, 2011; Bloom *et al.*, 2011; Hoobler *et al.*, 2010; Kelly *et al.*, 2008; Shockley and Singla, 2011). Further, work-life initiatives that were once only implemented to accommodate unique circumstances (e.g. reduced-load work, telework) are now common place (Lee *et al.*, 2000). Indeed, in the USA in 2008, 79 percent of employers allowed flextime, 50 percent allowed telecommuting, and 41 percent allowed reduced-load work arrangements (for at least some employees; Galinsky *et al.*, 2008).

To date, the research on work-life initiatives has focussed primarily on organizational policies designed to provide employees with flexibility and support (also referred to as



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“structural work-life support”; Kelly *et al.*, 2008; Kossek *et al.*, 2010). Although such policies may provide value to both individuals and organizations, there is evidence that such policies may not be universally available and/or beneficial (e.g. when there is a lack of cultural or supervisor support; Eaton, 2003; Kelly *et al.*, 2008; Kossek *et al.*, 2010; Shockley and Allen, 2007).

Indeed, there is a growing recognition that empowering individuals to manage work and life may provide a valuable supplement to more traditional work-life policies (Kossek *et al.*, 2011). In other words, directing organizational resources to educating and developing employees who have the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage multiple life roles may be a fruitful avenue for research and practice (Kossek *et al.*, 2011; Kelly *et al.*, 2008). Such initiatives may include workshops, seminars, and web-based programs designed to empower individuals more effectively manage their multiple life roles. This broad category of work-life initiatives will hereafter be referred to as “empowerment initiatives” (EIs).

Galinsky *et al.* (2008) found that 21 percent of employers in the USA offered “workshops or seminars on parenting, child development, care of the elderly or work family problems” (46 percent among larger employers; p. 24). Yet, we know very little about the nature of such EIs or their effectiveness (Hammer *et al.*, 2011; Kossek *et al.*, 2011). The existing (albeit limited) research that addresses individual-level strategies for managing multiple life roles focusses almost exclusively on coping with work-family conflict (e.g. Baltes *et al.*, 2011; Rantanen *et al.*, 2011; Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2012). However, such research rarely explores the extent to which such strategies are trainable and, if so, the effectiveness of work-place interventions (Kossek *et al.*, 2011). The purpose of this paper is to address the lack of knowledge and evidence regarding EIs. We begin with an overview of the potential benefits of including EIs as a complement to traditional work-life policies. We then provide an in-depth investigation of a popular EI, Total Leadership, and utilize our findings to provide valuable insights for those individuals involved in the selection, design, and implementation of work-life and performance initiatives.

Note that the responsibility for work-life empowerment and employee performance may be shared by a variety of individuals with varying titles and locations within the organization. This may include (but is certainly not limited to) human resource managers, training and development directors, talent management specialists, instructional designers, internal or external consultants, supervisors and senior leaders. Thus, the insight we provide is relevant for anyone who plays a role in empowering individuals to be effective performers in all areas of their lives. For the purpose of this paper, we refer to this broad range of individuals as “management development specialists.”

Benefits of work-life EIs

As noted above, traditional work-life policies may not be available or beneficial for all employees (Kelly *et al.*, 2008). Thus, EIs may complement traditional policies by providing employees with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about policy utilization and implementation. For example, EIs may teach employees how to recognize whether a particular work-life policy is appropriate or teach them skills for effectively utilizing policies (e.g. boundary management strategies for teleworkers). Additionally, for employees who do not use traditional policies, there may be strategies and skills that they can learn to more effectively manage multiple life roles in their existing work context (e.g. how to effectively discuss work-life issues with supervisors).

It is important to note here that we (the authors) believe that EIs should complement, rather than replace, organizational-level initiatives. Following Friedman and Greenhaus (2000), we believe that organizations should adopt a multi-pronged approach to employee work-life integration. We believe that individual efforts will be most effective within the context of a supportive organizational environment and that organizational-level efforts will be most effective when employees have the necessary knowledge and skills to implement policies/practices appropriately. One concern of work-life researchers and practitioners is that an individual empowerment approach to work-life issues will result in “victim-blaming,” in which employers come to believe that individuals are solely responsible for their work-life challenges (McLeroy *et al.*, 1987). Despite a similar concern in the health promotion field, there is a growing acknowledgment that “practitioners should consider using comprehensive approaches that address individual, psychosocial, environmental and organizational factors, as well as broader policy issues that affect occupational health” (Baker *et al.*, 1996, p. 179). In a similar vein, we argue that EIs will benefit both employers and employees as long as these initiatives do not take the place of organizational-level policies/practices.

While many organizations are already implementing EIs, there is little existing guidance for individuals who support employee work-life wellness and performance as they design and implement such programs. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to provide practical guidance for management development specialists who currently or hope to offer EIs in their organization. The findings herein shed light onto critical features of EIs and strategies for effective implementation. Further, this paper lays a foundation for future empirical research on individual-level organizational initiatives in the work-life arena. In the next section, we describe a popular EI called Total Leadership. We discuss the nature of the initiative and describe our findings from an investigation into its effectiveness. We then build upon our findings to form a set of recommendations for management development specialists involved in the development and implementation of EIs.

Overview of Total Leadership

We now present a review of one popular work-life EI: Total Leadership (as described in the best-selling book, *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life* (Friedman, 2008). This program has been implemented in over 100 companies and well as offered in a course for executive MBAs, MBAs, and undergraduates at a top business school. We chose to focus our investigation of EIs on the Total Leadership program for several reasons. First, the Total Leadership program is unique in that focusses on leadership in all areas of life. In other words, it integrates leadership development and work-life training to generate improved performance in both work and non-work domains. Second, while we are aware that many organizations offer supportive programming for employee work-life balance, there is little information available regarding the nature, content, and administration of these programs. Finally, as with much of the training and development field, the evaluation of program effectiveness is often limited, inconsistent, and not collected both before and after implementation (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). Therefore, the evaluation data we accessed for this study exceeds what is typically available.

We have chosen to focus our study on the central component of the Total Leadership program called experimentation (see Friedman, 2006, for a complete description of the program). The term experimentation refers to a critical component of the experiential learning process in which individuals proactively attempt to do things

in a new way (Kolb and Kolb, 2005; Van Velsor and McCauley, 2004). The bodies of literature on experiential learning, action learning, and leadership development all provide evidence that experimentation is a key mechanism for employee learning in organizations (e.g. McCall, 2004). Other important components of the Total Leadership program (e.g. stakeholder dialogues, discussions with peers, leadership vision, and core values) support the development and implementation of and reflection upon of experiments. Throughout this paper, we supplement our analyses with quotes from Total Leadership participants regarding their experiences with this program.

In the Total Leadership program, individuals design and implement experiments intended to improve performance at work (or school), at home, in the community, and in themselves (called the “self” domain; i.e. mind, body, and spirit) by finding mutual value among them. Participants design between one and three different experiments that have intended benefits in all life domains; what Friedman calls “four-way wins.” In other words, experiments cannot improve one life domain at the sake of another.

The natures of participants’ experiments are informed by self-assessments (described below). Participants are assigned to triads to provide support in the development, design, implementation, and evaluation of experiments throughout the program. These discussions takes place both face-to-face and virtually. Along with experiments, action plans for their implementation and metrics for tracking progress are also created. The experiments are then implemented over a four to eight-week period. Self-assessments at the end of the program are also utilized for reflection and opportunities for additional growth.

Methods

The following section describes the sample, measures, and methods that were used to collect and analyze the data.

Participants

Our analyses and recommendations are drawn from a systematic review of the experiences of 316 participants who completed the Total Leadership program for elective course credit toward their degree in a business school over a three-year period (from a total of 379 participants, 57 did not provide a written description of at least one experiment). Participants provided consent for their work to be used for research purposes. 39.9 percent of these participants were female. Totally, 42.1 percent ($n = 133$) of participants were executive MBAs, 19.3 percent ($n = 61$) were part-time undergraduates, 15.2 percent ($n = 48$) were traditional undergraduates, and the remaining students 23.4 percent ($n = 74$) of students were other types of students (e.g. law students, MBAs, technology-focussed MBAs). Despite differences between EIs implemented in business schools and those in organizations, we nonetheless feel that there are commonalities between these two groups and that management development specialists can learn valuable lessons from an EI implemented within an academic environment. Indeed, the principles and practices of identifying “four-way wins,” as well as specific techniques for implementing and evaluating such efforts are applicable to all individuals who manage multiple life roles. By virtue of the demanding nature of a prestigious business school degree, we contend that these participants, in many ways, face the same obstacles to managing multiple life domains as their counterparts who participate as part of a corporate initiative.

Note that while participants receive course credit for their participation, evaluation for student performance is not related to the outcome of experiments but is, rather,

based on the quality and depth of the analyses done in exercises throughout the course and on contribution to class discussion. Thus, there is little incentive for students to adjust their writing for the purposes of achieving a particular course grade. Furthermore, compared to Total Leadership initiatives designed and implemented in organizations (which can vary in terms of course length, number of participants, optional vs prescribed participation, etc.) there is much greater consistency in Total Leadership as administered in the academic environment. This allows for the consolidation of data to generate a much larger sample size.

Procedures

We adopt a mixed methods approach (both quantitative and qualitative) to explore the nature of participants' experiences and extract valuable insights and recommendations. We utilized the participants' self-assessments completed in the first week of the program (Time 1) and again in the last week of the program (Time 2; between 12 and 15 weeks later). In the self-assessment, participants rated their satisfaction with each domain (work, home, community, self) on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (fully satisfied). They also rated their performance in meeting key stakeholder expectations at work, at home, in the community, and those that they hold of themselves from 1 (never meeting expectations) to 10 (always meeting expectations).

During the program, participants submitted a description of their experiments (including action plans and metrics, hereafter referred to as "experiment descriptions").

The qualitative data analysis described here follows Creswell's (2002) coding process for inductive analysis to create a scheme for categorizing the types of experiments that participants engaged in. First, the principal investigator (originator and instructor of the Total Leadership program) reviewed participant descriptions of the experiments that they engaged in. Based on this initial read through of the text data, a list of nine initial categories (or experiment types) was created (Creswell, 2002). These categories were used as a starting point for further coding of all experiment descriptions.

Next, two other researchers reviewed the content of the experiment description text and refined the nine categories to clarify and distinguish them, following Creswell's (2002) suggestions for revising category-types and reducing overlap and redundancy. The researchers used an extensive iterative process (in which the types were modified, experiment descriptions were reviewed, and the types were modified again) in order to do this. We provide a detailed description of these steps.

Phase I: agree upon the action described in the experiment description. Because some descriptions of experiments were long, vague, and/or complex, it was important to simplify this text to a manageable amount of information (Creswell, 2002):

Step 1: each researcher independently read each description and wrote a brief phrase to describe the action taken (hereafter called an "action phrase"; e.g. exercised with coworker, worked from home, volunteered at church).

Step 2: the two researchers compared their action phrases and agreed upon a single action phrase to describe the experiment description. When there was disagreement, the content of the experiment description was reviewed and discussed until agreement was reached about an appropriate phrase to represent the action.

Phase II: categorize experiment description:

Step 3: both researchers coded whether the created action phrase for each experiment description did or did not fall into each of the nine categories (experiment types). If an action phrase did fall into a particular category, it was coded as a "1,"

otherwise it was coded as a “0.” Each action phrase could therefore be coded into more than one category since the types were treated independently.

Step 4: determine agreement level between two researchers. The level of disagreement ranged from 1 to 4 percent. The average level of disagreement across all nine types was 2 percent, indicating that approximately 98 percent of the time, the two researchers agreed on whether an individual’s experiment (based on the action phrase) fell into a particular category or not. Because each action phrase was coded nine times (into each of the nine experiment types), we also calculated the percentage of time that the researchers disagreed at least once per action phrase. There was one or more disagreement on 12.5 percent of action phrases.

Step 5: discuss any action phrase that did not have 100 percent agreement between the two researchers and agree upon the final coding of that action phrase.

Step 6: for each of the nine types of experiments, participants received a score indicating whether they did or did not engage in each type of experiment (0 = did not complete this type, 1 = did complete this type). Note that this coding scheme does not consider whether an individual reported using the same type of experiment more than once because the main consideration was whether a particular type of experiment was adopted or not. Focussing on the number of times an individual used a particular experiment type would have confounded the number of experiments completed with the types of experiments used.

Results

Table I provides comparisons of the pre- and post-Total Leadership self-assessments for satisfaction and performance. Our findings indicate that participants report large increases in satisfaction in all areas of their lives (as measured by Cohen’s *d*-value; Cohen, 1988). Further, they reported large increases in performance in the home and self-domains. Medium increases in performance were reported in the work and community domains of life. In other words, from the perspective of the participants themselves, the EI had a significant, positive impact on their ability to be happy with and perform better in all areas of their lives.

Based on the results of this qualitative coding of participant descriptions of their experiments, we concluded that these descriptions could be successfully classified into

	Time 1		Time 2		Mean difference (Time 2-Time 1)	<i>d</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<i>Satisfaction</i>						
Work	5.92	2.13	7.14	1.59	1.22	0.89
Home	5.69	2.15	7.25	1.60	1.56	1.14
Community	4.59	2.48	6.03	2.09	1.44	0.95
Self	4.62	2.19	6.44	1.78	1.82	1.29
<i>Performance</i>						
Work	7.22	1.19	7.84	1.08	0.62	0.58
Home	6.59	1.33	7.59	1.23	1.00	0.88
Community	6.07	1.94	6.80	1.74	0.73	0.54
Self	5.14	1.56	6.43	1.38	1.29	1.06

Table I.
Descriptive statistics
for satisfaction and
performance

Notes: *n* = 242-303. *d* refers to Cohen’s *d*. Values around *d* = 0.2 are considered small, *d* = 0.5 are considered medium, and *d* = 0.8 are considered large (Cohen, 1988)

nine distinct types. Results of the coding of experiment descriptions experiments are presented in Table II. Of the 734 experiments coded, the number of experiments falling into each of the nine types is shown in Table II. Note that many experiments descriptions were coded as encompassing more than one type of experiment (descriptions were coded into an average of 1.36 categories; there was no limit as to the number of experiment types that a description could be coded). Also included in Table II is the number of participants who engaged in each type of experiment at least once (percentage of participants included in parentheses).

Types of experiments

We now discuss each of these nine experiment types, in turn (see Table II for summary). After reviewing the types of experiments, we present overarching themes that represent important considerations in the development of EIs.

The first type of experiment, labeled Tracking and Reflecting, focusses on recording feelings and behaviors for the purposes of self-reflection and tracking progress toward goals. This was the least common type of experiment with only 18.4 percent participant engagement. Examples include keeping a traditional diary of thoughts, setting aside time each day for reflection, and tracking behaviors (e.g. writing down the number of hours of sleep per day, or number of visits to the gym). Tracking and Reflecting experiments are distinguished from other types of typical behavioral monitoring experiments because Tracking and Reflecting experiments consider the process as an important end-goal in and of itself rather than solely as a means to an end (i.e. tracking as monitoring process toward another goal):

I am going to begin maintaining a monthly log of what efforts (both positive and negative) I have made in the home and community domains [...] In effect, such a log would force me to communicate more often with myself.

The fact that nearly 20 percent of participants felt compelled to undertake a Tracking and Reflecting experiment has important implications for employee development. These individuals believed that simply taking time out of their busy schedules to gain self-awareness and self-insight would significantly enhance their performance at work, at home, and in their communities. Tracking and Reflecting may facilitate the creation of creative, customized solutions to employees' unique work-life needs.

Key insight: EIs support introspection, which may result in helpful realizations about or solutions to work-life challenges.

Over one-third (38.3 percent) of participants engaged in Planning and Organizing, which consists of engaging in either short-term planning (e.g. creating a "to do" list for the day or week that includes all life roles) or long-term planning (e.g. planning the steps necessary to reach long-term career and life goals). Using Planning and Organizing to purposefully allocate time and energy across multiple life domains in ways that are aligned with their goals and values can enhance work-life balance. For example, one participant created a time management system in which he planned out his activities across all life domains. This experiment was expected to create benefits across life roles because it "acknowledges the fact that there will always be competing demands on [his] time" and will help him to "manage those demands more effectively." Concrete scheduling and planning may also increase commitment to goals by formalizing the intention to accomplish them in the form of a schedule or "to do" list, especially if it is made public, for this escalates commitment.

Table II.
Nine types of
experiments

Experiment type (%) ^a	Description	Examples	Potential benefits to organization	Key management development specialist insights
Tracking and Reflecting (18.4%)	Keeping a record of activity, thoughts, and/or feelings	Keeping a diary Recording hours spent on the computer	Employee has a greater awareness reallocation of time and energy at work; finds creative ways to use time/energy more efficiently	EIs support introspection which may result in helpful realizations about or solutions to work-life challenges
Planning and Organizing (38.3%)	Preparing and planning for the future (short- or long term)	Creating an all-domain to do list Putting "date night" on the calendar Taking a yoga class	Employee more purposeful and proactive regarding use of work time; less stressed regarding when/how tasks will be accomplished	EIs may encourage employees to become more purposeful with how they allocate time and work, thus enabling them to achieve their work and non-work goals without reducing their work-load or quality
Rejuvenating and Restoring (56.6%)	Attending to body, mind, and spirit	Quitting smoking Going on bike rides with your child Joining a book club with your coworkers Turning off the cell during family dinners Setting aside "no e-mail" time at work	Employee has improved health, fewer sick days, greater mental clarity; greater energy and enthusiasm at work	When employees understand the value of physical and mental health for their work productivity and work-life balance, they may be more likely to adopt (and stick with) healthy behaviors
Appreciating and Caring (36.7%)	Doing activities with key stakeholders	Employee builds trust and camaraderie with coworkers; employee has reduced stress regarding non-work relationships	Through EIs, employees may more effectively engage with their key stakeholders in ways that build trust, support, and camaraderie, thus facilitating performance in all life roles	
Focusing and Concentrating (20.3%)	Removing distractions to focus on one thing at a time	Employee accomplishes work more efficiently; experiences benefits from relaxation associated with breaks from work	EIs may enable employees to realize the impact of multi-tasking and distractions and allow them to experiment with ways to achieve greater clarity and focus	
Revealing and Engaging (66.5%)	Communicating and sharing with key stakeholders	Employee develops clearer understanding of goals and expectations at work; maintains healthy non-work relationships for greater overall well-being	When EIs help employees to communicate more effectively with stakeholders, there is a greater understanding of mutual expectations and goals	

(continued)

Experiment type (%) ^a	Description	Examples	Potential benefits to organization	Key management development specialist insights
Time-Shifting and Re-Placing (28.2%)	Completing tasks at a different time or in a new place	Working from home one day per week Going to the gym during lunch break instead of after work	Employee adopts results-oriented work attitude; finds creative solutions to completing work in a mutually beneficial way	When employees experiment with alternative work arrangements in the context of EIs, they justify how the arrangement will improve their work, not just their personal lives
Delegating and Developing (20.9%)	Delegating tasks to others	Delegating a "stretch" assignment to a work subordinate Assigning chores to your children	Employee focusses more energy focussed on high-priority work tasks; creates growth opportunities for colleagues	When EIs support experiments in delegation, employees learn how to achieve their own work-life goals while simultaneously providing growth opportunities to others
Exploring and Venturing (29.7%)	Creating or undertaking a new, innovative project	Undertaking a new work project Developing a new hobby	Employee pursues projects that he/she is passionate about; feels inspired by work	When employees pursue projects they are passionate about, they not only experience a greater sense of fulfillment in all life roles, they bring creativity, enthusiasm, and persistence to their work

Notes: Total $n = 316$. ^aPercentage of participants undertaking experiment type

Management development specialists should note the popularity of Planning and Organizing experiments. While many organizations may already offer time management seminars, these seminars may not be conducted with attention to multiple life roles. Through Planning and Organizing across multiple life roles, employees can become more proactive in their allocation of time and energy. By providing EIs toward this outcome, organizations may reap the benefit of employees who feel less overwhelmed and are better able to meet goals in all life domains.

Key insight: EIs may encourage employees to become more purposeful with how they allocate time and energy, thus enabling them to achieve their work and non-work goals without reducing their work-load or quality.

Experiments aimed at Rejuvenating and Restoring are directly focussed on physical and psychological health. Over half of the participants in this study (56.6 percent) used this experiment type. On the physical side, examples of Rejuvenating and Restoring include exercising on a regular basis, eating healthier, quitting addictions (e.g. smoking, drinking, caffeine), and improving sleep habits. Participants who engage in Rejuvenating and Restoring may take time out for relaxing or enjoyable activities (e.g. reading novels or yoga). Participants who engaged in Rejuvenating and Restoring experiments expected the benefits of attention to self to spillover into other life domains. For example, one participant designed an experiment to sleep more each night because this “would give [him] more energy, which would increase [his] productivity levels in all domains [...] [His] stakeholders would see better output and [he] would be in better moods, which would improve [his] time with them.”

Organizations benefit when employees are physically and mentally healthy. Yet, employees may neglect their own health if they feel that such behaviors detract time and energy from the work role. When employees develop Rejuvenating and Restoring experiments, they begin to see their physical and mental health as an important contributor to effective work performance.

Key insight: when employees understand the value of physical and mental health for their work productivity and work-life balance, they may be more likely to adopt (and stick with) healthy behaviors.

Individuals who undertake Appreciating and Caring experiments engage in activities with key stakeholders, for enjoyment, support, and relationship-building (36.7 percent of participants). Examples include attending social events such as happy hours with coworkers, having lunch with friends, and engaging in community service with family members. The fact that over one-third of participants created Appreciating and Caring experiments underscores the importance of relationships for performance in all life domains. Without a network of support both inside and outside of work, employees may feel overwhelmed by the demands that they face. For those engaged in employee development, the popularity of this experiment type should highlight the fact that work-life challenges do not occur in a vacuum and that the solution to such challenges does not always lie in the utilization of a formal policy/practice. Simply changing the way that employees engage with their stakeholders leads to the development of fun, fulfilling relationships that may better enable employees to approach their work with enthusiasm and effort:

I decided to organize more social events for employees. The intended re-alignment among domains: Improving morale and camaraderie should improve the amount of teamwork thereby improving efficiency in the office and freeing up time for people to spend out of the office.

Key insight: through EIs, employees may more effectively engage with their key stakeholders in ways that build trust, support, and camaraderie, thus facilitating performance in all life roles.

About one-fifth (20.3 percent) of Total Leadership participants choose to engage in an experiment aimed at Focussing and Concentrating. In contrast to other types of experiments, which may blur the boundaries across domains, this experiment type often involves creation of boundaries and the separation of domains. Individuals attempt to eliminate distractions (e.g. avoid personal calls and e-mails at work or turn off the television during the family dinner) and set aside time to focus on a particular goal or priority. Focussing and Concentrating allows an individual to provide enhanced attention to the tasks that they are working on or the stakeholders that they are interacting with. Such focus may result in improved interactions, increased efficiency, and a greater sense of being “in the moment.” For example, one participant implemented a Focussing and Concentrating experiment at work in order to remove unnecessary distractions and become more efficient:

I spend too much time during the day on non-value-add activities, forcing me to spend on average 1-3 hours each night doing work. If I can improve the efficiency with which I work during the work day, improve my ability to delegate work to co-workers, and improve my capacity to say “no” to requests of my time, I believe the result on my other domains will be noticeable and quite powerful.

Although employees may not realize it, multi-tasking and distractions can have significant negative consequences for work performance (e.g. Jett and George, 2003; Liefoghe *et al.*, 2008). Focussing and Concentrating may allow employees to re-think the way they manage their responsibilities so that they function in a more efficient and timely manner. Further, when employees are able to focus on other life roles without work distractions, they may be better able to take a break from the demands of work and experience a sense of relaxation and restoration.

Key insight: EIs may enable employees to realize the impact of multi-tasking and distractions and allow them to experiment with ways to achieve greater clarity and focus.

Revealing and Engaging was also one of the two most popular types of experiments that participants engaged in (66.5 percent). This strategy is focussed on increasing or enhancing communication and the sense of connection with and accessibility to key stakeholders. Individuals may choose to use Revealing and Engaging experiments in order to learn more about the needs/goals/values of their stakeholders, or to disclose their own vision. Revealing and Engaging can be used in order to build relationships and extend one’s network for both instrumental and emotional sources of support. Note that, while similar, Appreciating and Caring is focussed on engaging in activities with stakeholders, while Revealing and Engaging is focussed primarily on directly communicating with stakeholders via words on paper, electronically, or in person:

By making small changes like using email to communicate with my mother when I am too busy to talk on the phone or calling my sister on my way home from work, I have been able to improve these relationships in my life with very little drain on my time. The improvement in these relationships has made me a happier person and allowed me to be more focused at work.

For management development specialists, it is important to realize the positive impact of EIs on communication among stakeholders. When employees initiate authentic

communication about goals, values, and priorities, all parties stand to benefit. Employees will be better able to direct their energy in ways that are valued by their supervisors and subordinates and to have own needs understood by these key stakeholders. Additionally, clear communication with non-work stakeholders may alleviate employee stress and create a more supportive network. Although organizations may already offer training programs on effective communication, employees may not see the value in incorporating these lessons into work and non-work interactions.

Key insight: when EIs help employees to communicate more effectively with stakeholders, there is a greater understanding of mutual expectations and goals.

Time-shifting and Re-placing refers to changing when and where tasks are accomplished. Less than 30 percent of participants engaged in this type of experiment. One common example of this type of experiment is negotiating with one's employer to work from home for a set number of hours per week. Additionally, many individuals changed their work hours (but not necessarily number of hours). Doing work or other tasks at a different time or place increases flexibility in how goals in multiple domains are met. One participant conducted the experiment of working from home one day every two weeks. This benefited his work role by allowing him to "better communicate with internal customers in different regions of the world." Furthermore, it benefited other life roles by giving him "more time in the days that [he] work[s] from home to spend with [his] wife and family" and "reduc[ing] the amount of commute time and us[ing] that time for something more satisfying, like physical activity."

Although management development specialists are already familiar with flextime and telework options, they may not fully appreciate the benefits of implementing them within the context of an EI. When employees design an "experiment" in flextime/place, they identify the ways in which flexibility will enhance their work performance. Thus, they recognize that the quality of work must be maintained or enhanced throughout the duration of the experiment.

Key insight: when employees experiment with alternative work arrangements in the context of EIs, they justify how the arrangement will improve their work, not just their personal lives.

The next experiment type, Delegating and Developing, refers to re-allocating tasks to others in a way that frees up valuable time for accomplishing one's most important goals. For example, delegating household chores to children can enhance their self-sufficiency and alleviate domestic responsibilities from the parent. Approximately one-fifth (20.9 percent) of participants used a Delegating and Developing experiment to increase performance and to do so, in the best case, in ways that help others to take up new tasks and to learn:

I have made a conscious effort to delegate and say "no" to requests of my time. When I get an email or phone call now, the first thing I ask myself is "Should I be the one handling this?" rather than jumping immediately to "How can I help?" In my mind, this is what leadership is really all about: not what you can do as an individual, but what you can motivate others to do.

Management development specialists should note the potential of EIs to have a positive impact on individuals beyond those who directly participate and design experiments. When individuals create Delegating and Developing experiments at work, others in the organization have the opportunity to grow through stretch assignments and a greater

sense of autonomy and contribution. In other words, the benefits of EIs can have a ripple effect throughout the organization.

Key insight: when EIs support experiments in delegation, employees learn how to achieve their own work-life goals while simultaneously providing growth opportunities to others.

The final type of experiment is termed Exploring and Venturing because it refers to undertaking an innovative project in order to better align one's actions with one's core values – to do more of the things about which you are most passionate. Examples of innovative projects include writing a novel or taking steps toward a promotion or lateral move in the organization. Nearly one-third (29.7 percent) of participants used an Exploring and Venturing strategy by undertaking a new endeavor. Such endeavors may enhance performance in a number of different ways, including increasing energy and enthusiasm which can spillover to other life roles, allowing for a more optimal allocation of time across life roles, and integrating roles:

In order to optimize progression toward my goal, while overlapping domains and utilizing leadership and communications skills, I intend to join a city-based community board. I will work with our firm's foundation, its charitable giving program, to develop a plan to get me involved with a board [...] Not only will this satisfy my need for community involvement, but it will also help me hone my leadership skills, which is crucial in my quest for becoming a CEO.

For management development specialists, the implications of the Exploring and Venturing experiments are profound. Employees may have innovative solutions to work challenges, projects that they are passionate about, and goals that they wish to pursue. However, if they feel that experimentation with these ideas would not be supported by the organization, they may prefer to stick with the status quo. Yet, employee creativity and passion has the potential to push the organization forward by leaps and bounds. Further, when employees work with genuine passion, their performance will be enhanced and they will inspire those around them.

Key insights: when employees pursue projects they are passionate about, they not only experience a greater sense of fulfillment in all life roles, they bring creativity, enthusiasm, and persistence to their work.

Discussion

We have highlighted key insights that emerge from each experiment type for management development specialists. We now provide conclusions from our findings that those engaged in the work-life effectiveness and performance of employees should note.

First, regardless of the type of experiment undertaken, participants in Total Leadership reported significant increases in their satisfaction and performance across all life roles. When employees are happy and productive, both the individual and the organization benefit. In line with prior research (e.g. Eaton, 2003) our findings suggest that simply having policies/practices "on the books" may not be enough. Given the positive experiences of Total Leadership participants, we encourage management development specialists to strongly consider the incorporation of EIs into their repertoire of work-life offerings:

I feel more confident as a leader as a result of defining a vision, establishing domain priorities, and measuring results. The tools and skills I have developed [...] have made me more confident in my approach with my peers and managers at the office. More importantly, I have

really taken to the idea that a true leader is one who acts as a leader in all domains of his life. My key takeaway from TL is that I don't want to be an excellent leader at work at the expense of my family, friends, self, and community. I want to be a leader in all domains by acting authentically and being true to my core values.

Second, we feel management development specialists should note the vast array of experiments that individuals design. Importantly, these different types of experiments link to established and emerging factors associated with employee performance and well-being in organizations (e.g. emotional intelligence, mindfulness, self-regulation, meaningfulness striving; multi-tasking and focus; Barrick *et al.*, 2013; Brown and Ryan, 2003; Joseph and Newman, 2010; Kantrowitz *et al.*, 2012; Sitzmann and Ely, 2011). By providing structure, guidance, and support, EIs enable employees to identify and undertake experiments that are uniquely suited to their goals, needs, and experiences. Rather than assuming that one-size-fits-all, management development specialists can support employees by encouraging them to explore their own particular work-life needs and experiment with custom solutions to address those needs.

Third, our findings suggest that work-life policies may be more effective when complemented by an EI. When Total Leadership participants decide that they would benefit from utilizing a work-life policy, they have come to this conclusion after self-reflection, support from peers and coaches, and dialogues with key stakeholders (including their supervisor). Individuals have already considered the impact of policy utilization on their work performance and thought about challenges that they may face. Therefore, such an employee is considerably more prepared to effectively utilize a policy than one who simply reads about such a policy on the company web site and assumes it is a good fit for them.

Fourth, one notable benefit of EIs is that they can help employees in any organizational culture and in any job (even when the context is unsupportive). When employees design experiments, they take into consideration the social and organizational environment that they work in. While we certainly advocate that organizations strive to create more supportive cultures and policies, we realize that some organizational factors may be slow to change. In the interim, organizations can offer EIs to support the here-and-now needs of employees.

The final takeaway for management development specialists is the fact that the EIs teach employees how to experiment with how they manage their multiple life roles. Thus, individuals learn a valuable process that they can utilize throughout their careers. Across the array of experiment types, individuals are all learning how to design experiments, engage with stakeholders and coaches, and develop a creative, open mindset toward work-life issues. As employee needs grow and change over time, the skills that they gain through the EI will continue to be relevant. Thus, EIs prepare employees for the long-term and see them through the many phases of their lives.

Limitations and conclusions

We recognize that there are limitations to the study described herein. In particular, the individuals in this study were participating in Total Leadership as an academic course. As noted previously, we contend that there is significant overlap in the nature of the experiments conducted and the insights gleaned from participant experiences across those participating as part of an academic course and those participating as a corporate initiative. Anecdotally, our findings to date suggest that the nine experiment types are prevalent regardless of the context in which Total Leadership is offered. Nonetheless,

future research should explore this in a systematic manner and investigate whether the frequency with which experiment types are implemented and their relative effectiveness across settings. More broadly, we recommend the development of scholar-practitioner relationships that would facilitate the empirical investigation of work-life EIs in an organizational context. Additionally, the use of single-item pre/post measures of satisfaction and performance is another potential limitation. While prior research has demonstrated the value of single-item measures (e.g. Wanous *et al.*, 1997), there may nonetheless be benefits to utilizing an extensive pre/post survey. Despite these potential limitations, we feel that our findings provide a valuable initial foray into understanding work-life initiatives and creating opportunities for employees to enhance their work-life balance while simultaneously achieving greater work performance.

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