Buy-In: Targeting Three Levels of Barriers to Change

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Research increasingly focuses on identifying barriers to work-life initiatives. The following are often cited by employers or supervisors:

- Cost
- Difficulty supervising employees
- Employee fairness
- Reactions of clients/customers
- Abuse of policies
- Co-worker resentment
- Administrative hassles
- Loss of productivity
- Others: liability, unions, absenteeism, more pressing issues, not cost-effective
Policy ➔ Practice Implementation Gap

Where do barriers exist?
- Establishment of policies and initiatives
- Implementing them: the policy ➔ practice implementation gap

Usually conceptualized at two levels
- Policy level ("Institutional")
- Individual "buy in" ("Individual")

Third level is key:
- Promoting group responsibility to translate individual attitudes into collective practices ("Interactional")
How does change occur? The traditional model:

**Top Down**
*Formal policy change, administrative leadership*

**Bottom Up**
*Individual, grass roots*

**Climate Change**
*or*
**“Institutional Transformation”**
Understanding Barriers - A Three-Level Model

- **Individual** *(Individual)*
  - Employee skepticism and fear $\rightarrow$ bias avoidance behaviors
  - Embracing traditional societal norms (ideal worker norm, cultural differences)

- **Organizational** *(Institutional)*
  - Embracing traditional cultural norms (face-time, etc.)
  - Doubt about the business case

- **Supervisory gatekeepers** *(Interactional)*
  - Passive resistance
  - Managerial “allowance decisions” factors
  - Family friendly supervisor behaviors are key
3-Level Model of Barriers to Change

**INSTITUTIONAL**
Are administrative offices in support of policy?
Do administrative offices provide resources for implementation?

**INTERACTIONAL**
Do Chairs, HR, etc., offer information and help proactively?
Does a *culture of coverage* exist among colleagues?

**INDIVIDUAL**
Are employees using the policy openly and without fear of negative repercussions?
Do non-user colleagues endorse the policy?
Interactional dynamics are interpersonal dynamics, and cross all levels

**Supervisory support**
- asking about employee’s family (+)
- scheduling late-day meetings (-)
- disseminating new WL policy info (+)
- added workload after a leave (-)
- promotion denial because of flexwork (-)

**Institutional culture**
- slow getting new WL policy on the books (-)
- referencing new WL policy during talks, in meetings, on website (+)
- reminder HR memo about tardiness (-)
- finding funding for dual career hire (+)

**Colleague to colleague**
- offering to cover class when child is sick (+)
- offer to team teach to lighten schedule (+)
- comments of suspicion when colleague is absent (-)
- Congratulating dad, ignoring mom (-)

*Interactional level dynamics*  
*where the rubber meets the road*
Social Perception Bias: Assessments of Positive Efforts by Supervisors

- Kossek & Hammer, 2008
- Families & Work Institute, 2005
- URI Mentor Survey, 2008

Legend:
- Red: by supervisors
- Yellow: by employees
Individual Attitudes vs. Interactional Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Recipient</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actor interacts <em>positively</em> in 1-1 interactions</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actor interacts <em>positively</em> within a group of actors</td>
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URI Initiatives from a 3-I Perspective

Institutional Level

- Policies
  - Paid parental leave (not available to all collective bargaining units)
  - Dual career hiring (strong resistance on all 3 levels)
  - Lactation

- Work-Life Standing Committee
  - Philosophical Statement framing all initiatives

- Work-Life Website
  - A website makes it official

- Part-time Work-Life Position Approved
URI Initiatives from a 3-I Perspective

Individual Level

- **Education & Awareness**
  - Brown bag lunch series
  - Child care fair
  - Administrators’ Breakfast Summit
  - RI State Senate Resolution
  - Work-life website, literature, fliers, etc.
  - High profile speakers and work-life events
  - Connect wellness and work-life
URI Initiatives from a 3-I Perspective

Interactional Level

- Supervisor Training
  - Individual support versus group practice
  - Cheerleader versus facilitator
  - Individual friendship versus group inclusion
  - “Othering” versus emphasizing similarities
- Department/Division Training
  - Appreciative Inquiry
  - Building social capital
Addressing Resistance: A Faculty-Led vs. HR-Led Initiative

- Advantages
  - Peer-to-peer influence
  - Social science grounding
  - Broad networks
- Disadvantages
  - Unfunded
  - Not institutionally endorsed
  - Slow pace
  - Elitism
- 3-I Perspectives--?
**Organizational Motives for Flexibility Scale**

*Continuum of motives cited for implementing flexibility options*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Altruism</th>
<th>Pragmatic self-interest</th>
<th>Impression management</th>
<th>Profit</th>
<th>Compliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>“It’s just the right thing to do for our workers.”</td>
<td>“I want to be the employer of choice.”</td>
<td>“It looks really good to clients.”</td>
<td>“It will improve productivity and retention.”</td>
<td>“It’s the law.”</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>“We’re getting too many complaints.”</td>
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How are motives linked to outcomes?

- Possible research questions:
  - What is the effectiveness of each type of motive? Does the work culture and level of support differ depending on motives?
  - Which types of organizations most likely to adopt the business case model?
  - Are motives consistent across the organization? Do institutional motives match supervisory motives?
  - Are supervisors who endorse the business case but who actually fit a “compliance” profile the most insidious gatekeepers of flexible work options?
  - At the employee level, do employees’ perceptions of supervisory motives impact job-related outcomes, such as satisfaction, morale, productivity, retention, organizational citizenship behaviors, etc.

- Build on and use in conjunction with Family Supportive Supervisory Behaviors Scale (Hammer, Kossek, Zimmerman, & Daniels, 2007)
- Future research to include a complementary Barriers to Flexibility Scale
Thank you!
Questions?

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