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RESEARCH ARTICLE

## **Organizational leadership and work-life integration: Insights from three generations of men**

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**Abstract.** The literature has traditionally portrayed work-life balance as a women's issue. However, working men, specifically those classified as Generation X and Generation Y, are starting to speak up and share that they too are struggling with integrating all aspects of their lives. Workers, as well as organizations can benefit when employees have a healthy work-life balance; however, the specific role of organizational leadership must be examined to determine the influence leaders play in assisting employees achieve work-life balance. In addition, further insight is needed to understand how employees in the three generations (Millennials/Gen Y, Gen X, and Baby Boomers), which predominantly comprise the current workplace, view organizational leadership in relationship to work-life balance. Since the voices of women have been studied extensively (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Favero & Heath, 2012; Guillaume & Pochic, 2009; Jyothi & Jyothi, 2012; Roebuck, Smith, & Elhaddaoui, 2013; Schueller-Weidekamm & Kautzky-Willer, 2012), this exploratory study examines the perspectives of working men by asking how different generations of men view organizational leadership in light of work-life balance. The researchers used a convenience sample to invite men to participate in an online survey about organizational leadership, work-life balance and generational factors. One hundred one participants provided data, which the authors analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. Three major themes emerged. First, Generation Xers and Millennials, in particular, feel more pressure than Baby Boomers to be at home, in the community; and if they are fathers, to be present in their children's lives. Second, technology both helps and hinders men in integrating their personal and professional lives. Third, organizations are generally more supportive of men's multiple life roles than they were previously. However, most of the study participants still perceived that putting work first was tantamount to receiving a leadership position. A general conclusion from this exploratory study is work-life balance greatly influences men's decisions to pursue organizational leadership opportunities. Consequently, the results suggest that organizations, in their effort to acquire and retain talented leaders, should explore and embrace new strategies that support employees in their endeavor to achieve work-life balance.

**Keywords:** *work-life, leadership, generations, men*

### **Introduction**

Full-time employees are working more hours around the world (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010). Access to technology such as smartphones, widespread internet, social media, and video chatting has increased the amount of time people spend working (Voydanoff, 2007) thus making work-life balance an important social and organizational issue (Kanwar, Singh, & Kodwani, 2009).

Researchers have often overlooked work-life balance, work-life integration, or work-life conflict as it relates to men (Rehel & Baxter, 2015). However, men, particularly fathers, find work-life balance to be a significant and critical issue. Excluding men from the conversation makes outdated assumptions about the role men seek to play in their families and the priorities they set for work (Evans, Carney, & Wilkinson, 2013; Marche, 2014).

Generational membership often shapes the ways in which men attempt to balance work-life challenges and conflicts (Hannay & Fretwell, 2011). Additionally, the complexities of how men from each generation either do or do not support one another impacts those men who aspire to attain leadership positions, and determines who is/is not promoted into those positions (Harrington, Van Deusen, & Humbert, 2011). Employers need to adapt to view work-life preferences for integration as a new form of workforce diversity (Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010). As such, organizational leaders who wish to cultivate future leadership would benefit from a better understanding of these issues.

### ***Work-life integration—An issue for men***

Work-life integration, also referred to as work-life balance, is a process of finding personal meaning and satisfaction across multiple roles and aspects of one's life (Evans, Carney, & Wilkinson, 2013). Additionally, work-life balance can also describe workplace practices employed by organizations to help their employees balance work and family life demands (Blazovich, Smith, & Smith, 2014; Jyothi & Jyothi, 2012).

Research indicates that employees and organizations both benefit when employees have a healthy work-life balance (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Burke, 2010). For example, Baltes et al. (1999), found that employees reported increased job satisfaction and organizational leaders reported better employee attitudes, improved work performance, and reduced costs when organizational work-life balance policies were in place. Burke (2010) had similar findings stating that:

Men reporting organizational values more supportive of work-personal life balance also report working fewer hours and extra hours, less job stress, greater joy in work, lower intentions to quit, greater job career and life satisfaction, fewer psychosomatic symptoms and more positive emotional and physical wellbeing (p. 91).

While work-life balance involves many aspects of an individual's life, for those who are parents, being involved in their children's lives is what typically consumes most of their time outside of work. Meeting parental responsibilities has become an area of concern, not just for women, but also for men (Aumann, Galinsky, & Matos, 2011; Benko & Anderson, 2010; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Greif, DeMaris, & Hood, 1993). Since 1977, a Department of Labor survey has asked respondents the question "How much interference do you feel between your work and your family life?" (Dorment, 2013). In 1977 fathers reported less conflict than mothers did. In the late 1990s, a shift occurred in the numbers as more fathers started to describe work/life conflict. By 2008 the numbers changed significantly with 60 percent of fathers in dual-earning families sharing they experienced some or a lot of work/life conflict.

Harrington, Van Deusen, Fraone and Eddy (2014) had similar findings in their study. They noted that Gen X and Millennial fathers experienced work/life conflict because they wanted to take more time off work when their children were born than their Baby Boomer colleagues, who were often their supervisors, thought was necessary. In a recent Pew study (Parker, 2014) fathers also reported that (a) balancing the responsibilities of their job and family was difficult, and (b) they would like to be home and spend more time with their children but needed to work to support their families.

The perceptions some men hold that employers negatively view their desire to be involved in their home lives, especially once they become fathers, are not always accurate. A Boston College Center for Work and Family study found that when men became parents, employers' positive perceptions of them increased and they viewed their employees as more mature, committed, and promotable (Harrington, Van Deusen, & Ladge, 2010). However, Mundy (2013) found that fathers still did not inquire about or ask for formal work-life balance policies in the workplace. Rather, they created their own work-life balance strategies using "stealth" methods such as slipping out to coach soccer practice" (p. 27). Working fathers may

get more workplace leniency because they do not ask for much, but they have also increasingly reported feeling insufficient and conflicted about their work and family commitments (Graham & Dixon, 2014; Raiden & Raisanen, 2013). Sharing a different point of view, Mellner, Aronsson, and Kecklund (2014) noted previous studies, including their own, have shown men emphasize boundary control and thus have greater success with achieving work-life balance. So does this mean that men, in fact, have solved the work-life dilemma? Groyberg and Abraham (2014) doubt as much and stated, “when work and family responsibilities collide, men may lay claim to the cultural narrative of the good provider” (p. 61).

Organizations who have attempted to address work-life integration issues for men have not had optimal results. For example, IBM, who surveyed 60,000 employees, found that both men and women reported difficulties with work-life balance. In response to this challenge, IBM established a Men’s Diversity Network Group (Goodman, 2011). However, the men who were fathers in the group avoided discussions concerning work-life balance. The men revealed concerns about being too open regarding their desire to be family-focused. Fearing others would see their desire as a sign of weakness or lack of devotion to their job, the working fathers focused their conversations on work-related topics only. Relatedly, in Benko and Anderson’s (2010) research, fathers more so than mothers, cited difficulties with balancing work-life commitments. However, these fathers feared becoming ostracized in the workplace and chose to leave their companies rather than address their struggles with employers

Research has indicated the biggest cost of not having work-life balance is job stress and burnout (Kanwar, Singh, & Kodwani, 2009; Lowe, 2007). In Lowe’s (2007) study, workers who expressed they could achieve work-life balance were near retirement, self-employed, or part-time workers. On the other hand, full-time workers in management/leadership positions reported the most job stress and lowest levels of work-life balance. Such was the case with Google’s former CFO Patrick Pichette. Pichette resigned from his position, stating that his marriage was under stress and he desired to spend more time with his family (Jelalian, 2015).

### ***Broad generational descriptions***

Most workplaces are primarily comprised of three generations, and each generation places a different emphasis and value on leader characteristics and behaviors (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2007; Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008). Additionally, organizational leaders must learn how to lead multi-generational employees who might be motivated by different types of rewards. For example, Schullery (2013) found all generations value altruistic rewards, such as the opportunity to volunteer during work hours, but Generation X (Gen Xers) and Generation Y (Gen Yers) value intrinsic rewards, such as considering their work challenging and interesting, less than Baby Boomers.

Generational differences can also be examined by researchers in light of the impact of world events which shape generational values, attitudes, motivations and workplace expectations. For example, Baby Boomers, born between 1946 -1964, experienced the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, the Vietnam War, and the civil rights and women’s movements (Shen & Jiang, 2013). Baby Boomers are often described in the literature as idealistic, self-conscious, dedicated, and competitive workaholics who are fulfilled by their status at work (Williams, Page, Petrosky, & Hernandez, 2010).

Gen Xers, comprised of people born between 1965-1980, were affected by events such as the Challenger disaster, the Iran-Contra affair, the Gulf War, social unrest, acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), and single-parent and blended families (Coupland, 1991; O’Bannon, 2001). Gen Xers are often characterized in studies as being financially independent, entrepreneurial, supportive of experimentation and informality, self-reliant, skeptical, adaptable to change, and focused on emotional security (Glass, 2007; Howe &

Strauss, 2007). Additionally, Gen Xers value education and knowledge as a way to ensure their financial security while making their mark on history (Johnson & Romanello, 2005).

Gen Yers, or Millennials, born between 1981-2000, grew up with events such as the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the September 11 attacks, the Columbine High School massacre, changes in the environment, and technological advancements (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Millennials are cyber-savvy, sociable, goal-oriented, self-confident, social minded, and accepting of diversity (Sago, 2010). Gen Yers are also not as focused on organizational politics or group decision-making processes as their older co-workers. They instead prefer to learn as an individual the needed skills to successfully complete tasks (Gentry, Griggs, Deal, Mondore, & Cox, 2011).

### ***Generational comparisons of work-life integration***

How individuals negotiate work-life balance is dependent upon their particular generational attitude as well as their understanding of their work environment (Favero & Heath, 2012). Most Baby Boomers grew up in families where the father was the primary wage earner and the mother's role was to stay home, manage the household chores, and raise the children. However, some Baby Boomers experienced the societal switch to dual income families and watched gender roles change as more women entered the work force and men started to help with home responsibilities and children (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008). Boomers were also the first generation to be caregivers for both children and aging parents (Benko & Anderson, 2010; Kohl & McAllister, 1995). Comfortable keeping work and family separate, Boomers desire job security and loyalty from their employers while believing hard work and sacrifice are the keys to success. Boomers deem that their career success is dependent upon them being competitive and climbing the organizational ladder (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008). Even at young ages, Boomers were workaholics and had no concept of the notion of work-life balance (McGuire, By, & Hutchings, 2007; Stauffer 1997). However, Wong, Gardiner, Lang, and Coulon (2008) noted that as Boomers prepared to exit their careers they were less focused on and motivated by career advancement; instead, they focused on the next stage in their lives.

More so than Boomers, single-parent families characterize the household in which many Gen Xers grew up (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008). Gen Xers witnessed first-hand the negative effects of corporate downsizing (Howe & Strauss, 2007) and have higher levels of work-life conflict than Boomers (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008; Glass, 2007; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Shen & Jiang, 2013). Gen Xers were the first generation to report technology increasingly blurring the lines between personal and work time (Glass, 2007). Additionally, as compared to their fathers, Gen X fathers devote at least one extra hour each day to their children's lives (Goodman, 2011). As such, career development opportunities and workplace environments which support family life are highly valued by Gen X fathers (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008). Some Gen Xers have declined pay increases, adjusted job travel, and refused job relocations if they perceived their family lives would otherwise deteriorate (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008; Goodman, 2011).

Gen Yers/Millennials seem to strive harder than Baby Boomers and Gen Xers to maintain a work/life balance (EY, 2015; Schullery, 2013). Several studies indicate Gen Yers highly value leisure time and are more family-oriented than Boomers and Gen Xers (Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010; De Hauw & De Vos, 2010; Kowske, Rasch, & Wiley, 2010; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2010). Millennial fathers want a more active role in their families and a different relationship with their children than what they may have experienced with their own fathers (Aumann, Galinsky, & Matos, 2010; Harrington, Van Deusen, Fraone, & Eddy, 2014). Ernst and Young's global study of 9,699 working adults, which spanned eight countries, provides further corroboration of these findings about millennial fathers. The study found that millennial men were more likely to take a pay cut, pass on a promotion, or relocate if it helped them integrate their work-life roles (EY, 2015). Additionally, Gen Yers/Millennials attempt to integrate work-life responsibilities by seeking

flexible career paths, instead of climbing the corporate ladder as Boomers did (Carless & Wintle 2007; Smola & Sutton 2002). Finally, citing technology as a way to integrate their work and personal lives, Gen Yers spend 50 percent more time than other generations online (Hellrigel & Slocum, 2009).

Although the previously discussed literature emphasizes generational differences in how individuals integrate their work and life commitments, some research highlights generational overlaps and commonalities (Gentry, Griggs, Deal, Mondore, & Cox, 2011). For example, in Turner's (2012) study, both Gen Xers and Gen Yers desired freedom and the flexibility to pursue a non-linear career as a means to pursue overall work-life balance. Gen Xers and Gen Yers in Sonier's (2012) research also both preferred using technological options in lieu of face-to-face interactions as a way to efficiently integrate their work-life roles. Both generations also prefer to be evaluated and managed based upon delivering results and not be penalized for not working long hours at a physical organizational office.

### ***Organizational leadership***

The generational lens with which employees and organizational leaders view one another impacts both workplace interactions and employees' aspiration for and ability to move into leadership positions (Gentry, Griggs, Deal, Mondore, & Cox, 2011; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). For example, Baby Boomer leaders who perceive that Gen Xers and Gen Yers are not putting in the long hours they do and are asking for special accommodations will not favorably consider their younger colleagues when it comes time for promotions (Favero & Heath, 2012; Sonier, 2012). However, organizational leaders who learn to use the strengths of each generation in the workplace can help facilitate an environment that furthers organizational goals as well as attracts and develops future leaders (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014). Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, and Brown (2007) agree and asserted that manager-led discussions about the value of generational differences would also help employees of all generations understand what organizations look for and value in their leaders. They stated:

As organizations increasingly mix generations in leadership ranks, differing expectations in how a leader should act and differing behaviors enacted need to be openly acknowledged so that this diversity can be appreciated and utilized to the best advantage of the organization (p. 70).

Furthermore, organizational leaders need to adapt and vary their leadership styles to appeal to the broad workplace values, attitudes, and beliefs held by each generation (Meredith, Schewe, & Hiam, 2002). For example, Arsenault (2004) identified an individualist leadership style which values self-expression as the most effective style for leading Baby Boomers, while Gen Xers who liked being change agents preferred a motivational leadership style. For those newest to the workplace, the Gen Yers, organizational leaders needed to exhibit a team leadership style, which helped these workers meet both corporate goals and the greater societal goals they value. Millennials and younger Gen Xers in Lyons and Kuron's (2014) research reported similar findings; younger employees preferred leaders who focused more on building relationships and providing a working environment conducive to individual fulfillment, rather than leaders who focused on task completion and organizational success.

Overall, the research is unclear as to whether or not the efforts of Baby Boomer and older Gen X leaders to vary their leadership practices will indeed entice Gen Yers and younger Gen Xers to assume future organizational leadership roles. Millennial men in particular place a great emphasis on a healthy work-life balance and if they perceive that the negatives of assuming an organizational leadership role outweigh the benefits, they are not quick to accept promotions (EY, 2015). Some Gen Xers have also reported, that over time, they determined they no longer wanted to pursue stressful leadership positions (EY, 2015).

## **Purpose and rationale for study**

Generational differences are an increasingly significant organizational leadership challenge and future research is needed to clearly define and understand these divergences and their impact in the workplace (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown 2007; Schullery, 2013). While the aforementioned research findings are useful for current organizational leaders, there is little existing research that includes gender as a factor and even less that considers how men pursue, obtain, and succeed in leadership positions (Evans, Carney, & Wilkinson, 2013). Additionally, the literature on work-life integration, generational differences, and workplace leadership does not examine the intersection of all three constructs as they relate specifically to men.

Therefore, the current exploratory study seeks to expound upon existing research and develop a more comprehensive understanding of how work-life issues and generational factors directly and indirectly complicate the transitional leadership process of men. The authors conducted a similar study in which they examined the intersection of these constructs as they related to women. Upon hearing the previous study's findings, younger male colleagues of the authors shared that they too struggled with work-life balance and were frustrated they could not safely address the topic at work. Some men shared that it was just easier to leave their organizations. Knowing this the authors assumed that in general the Gen Yers in the current study would possibly report they were not interested in obtaining organizational leadership roles. To explore this assumption, the authors strove to answer the following question – How do different generations or men view organizational leadership in light of work-life balance? In the subsequent sections, the authors will outline the method they used to explore this general question, discuss the results of their findings, and conclude with implications for organizations

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Data was gathered from 101 men of whom 34 were Baby Boomers (born from 1946-1964), 41 were Generation Xers (born from 1965-1980), and 26 were Millennials/Generation Yers (born from 1981-2000).

The participants were primarily White (76 percent), followed by Black (16 percent), Asian or Pacific Islander (five percent), Hispanic (two percent), and lastly Other (one percent). As to marital status, the majority of participants were married (75 percent), with 19 percent being single and six percent being divorced. Seventy-one percent of the respondents had at least one child, while 29 percent had no children. Eighty-seven percent of the participants held full-time positions in a variety of settings ranging from Information Technology to Education and Service industries to Transportation and Utilities with 64 percent presently holding a leadership or managerial position. The participants were well educated with 41 percent possessing a Master's degree.

### ***Instrument***

One of the authors initially designed the survey, which she pilot tested in a series of studies. In the pilot studies, interviewers used open-ended interview strategies when interviewing organizational leaders. This approach allowed the participants to focus on what they deemed to be most important about their experiences (McNamara, 2009; Turner, 2010). Asking open-ended questions in online surveys can be advantageous in that participants are more willing to type, than write a response, and are more honest in their responses than they might be when speaking directly with an interviewer (Selm & Jankowski, 2006). The pilot data yielded rich responses which overlapped with the related literature the researchers were reviewing. The authors then refined the interview questions to use in an online survey.

The researchers used the current study questions in a previous study they conducted on women's work-life balance, generational differences, and leadership (Roebuck, Smith, & Elhaddaoui, 2013). As such, the authors were confident using the same questions with a sample of men would address the various aspects outlined in the present study's literature review. Additionally the authors hope to conduct a future comparative study between the two samples and thus chose to maintain the question wording used in their previous study. The current study's questionnaire was comprised of five primary questions (see Appendix A), several demographic questions and an optional overall comment box.

### ***Procedure***

The researchers utilized a convenience sampling for data collection. Respondents were encouraged to share the survey with other working men. Over a six-month period from January to June 2014, researchers collected responses to the questions using a web-based survey program, Qualtrics.

The authors then sorted the responses by generation under each of the five main questions. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) and Lincoln and Guba's (1985) constant comparative analysis techniques were used for the broad, initial data analysis. Then, using open coding strategies, they undertook further data analysis to determine a general framework, examine the context, and identify key words and phrases (Boyatzis, 1998).

The next analysis phase involved ascertaining emerging categories, codes and themes, followed by using axial coding to create a hierarchy of categories, codes and themes. The final data analysis stage employed selective coding to suggest key statements, which served as the backbone of the general conclusion regarding men in leadership, work-life integration, and generational differences. To establish the credibility required in qualitative research, all three authors examined the results at three different points in the study to verify the coding processes and conclusions.

### **Results**

Several themes emerged across the five primary survey questions. Additional illustrative participant quotes supporting each of the themes can be located in Appendix B.

#### ***The integration of work-life roles varies across generations***

Millennials consistently stated a stronger desire to be actively involved in their family and community than Baby Boomers. Gen Yers in particular reported that they intended not to work as much as their fathers and grandfathers. Instead they planned to be active in their communities and, if fathers, to have a strong presence in their children's lives.

Some Gen Xers also reported they desired to spend more time pursuing interests and activities outside of work than they observed their own fathers doing. However, Gen Xers also shared that with time they came to value their fathers' work ethic and found themselves making similar choices about balancing work and life roles.

Boomers reported that early in their careers it was difficult to balance work and other life responsibilities, but they quickly embraced the cultural norm of the time that work came first. Several Baby Boomers reported that taking care of aging parents was a new responsibility they were now seeking to integrate into their lives.

#### ***Technology is a help and a hindrance to work-life integration***

Millennials, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers had much to say about technology and its impact on their work lives. Millennial respondents said technology was an asset in balancing their personal and professional obligations. However, they also reported the downside of the flexibility technology provides is that they always have to "be on." Gen Xers reflected

sentiments expressed by both the younger and older generations than them saying that technology both helped and hindered them from achieving work-life balance.

Although a few Baby Boomers relied on technology as a way to help balance their personal and professional lives, most Boomers reported they structured their workday by traditional hours at a physical location. Furthermore, many Boomers were not convinced that Millennials actually produced more work by using technology. Instead, they thought Millennials primarily used technology to enhance their personal lives. Some Boomers, however, expressed concern that while their younger colleagues actually took vacations, Gen Yers' reliance upon technology meant they never really disconnected from work.

### ***Organizational support impacts leadership opportunities and aspirations***

Across all three generations, respondents stated that companies often said they supported an employee's responsibilities outside of work, but employer support was not always evident. For example, one participant shared that "Most organizations will talk a good game about balance, but reality can be different." and "They have been somewhat supportive for emergencies, but typically offer only lip service commitment to balance." Several men made comments such as "It is a fine line. Taking advantage of time away from work could be seen as unfavorable when applying for leadership roles."

Several Baby Boomers shared that over the course of their careers companies had become more accepting of flexible work schedules that would allow employees to integrate their life roles and progress in their companies. For example, one participant remarked his company's "new" approach was contradictory to the company's culture when he first started working there. He recalled, "One owner would actually walk the halls at 5 p.m. on Fridays to be sure everyone was still at their desk."

Some Boomers reported they thought it was important to mentor and support younger colleagues who might aspire to leadership positions. Others, however, shared that it was hard to seriously consider Millennials for leadership positions, as they perceived Millennials worked less hours than they did and valued leisure time over work. Some Gen Xers concurred noting "Millennials watch the clock and do the minimum amount of work needed."

Conversely, several participants stated that a lack of organizational support meant they would or could not pursue leadership positions. As one Gen X respondent put it when describing the top ten percent of his companies' leaders "The expectation is to be connected to your phone every hour."

Regardless of the generation, most men still did not want to ask for help. If they did ask for help, the participants stated it needed to be work-related, not personal. As one Millennial/Gen Y said, "It's not easy for men to ask for help because then they feel like failures." Some of the study participants also expressed concern that accepting help would involve some sort of future payback. One participant succinctly summed up this belief stating, "Most men are willing to help as long as you are willing to return the favor."

## **Discussion**

A discussion of the thematic findings follows, along with limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

### ***The integration of work-life roles varies across generations***

The first study finding indicates that compared to Baby Boomers, Millennials and some Gen Xers feel much more obligated and want to be regularly involved in their home and community lives. Hannay and Fretwell (2011) shared similar findings noting that for Baby Boomers work was the primary focus in their lives, while Gen Xers and Gen Yers insisted on a better balance between work and other life commitments. Perhaps because they witnessed first-hand the negative effects (e.g. health and personal issues) their fathers and even grandfathers experienced from not having a healthy work-life balance, Gen Yers reported

being very committed to not following the heavy work patterns established by older males in their families. In addition to home life obligations, many Millennials shared that being involved in church, pursuing advanced degrees, volunteering, fulfilling board responsibilities, and enjoying hobbies and a social life were just as, if not more, important to them than work. The authors found it intriguing that many Millennials thought they had a better work-life balance than their older co-workers and male relatives, but overall they seemed to have more commitments. Only time will tell if Gen Yers have indeed found a better path for integrating their work-life roles.

Gen Xers, especially those who were fathers, also asserted they did not want to be like their own fathers who they described as being frequently absent from home. However, the realities of their work schedules were often different from what they desired. For fathers in particular, work-related travel induced feelings of guilt about not being at home, a finding which echoes the emotional and mental tensions that arose from the role conflict observed by Graham and Dixon (2014) in their research. Interestingly, several of the Gen Xers in the current study seemed to have developed a different understanding about their father's work schedules than they held previously. The participants concluded that their fathers put work first because that was what their own fathers had done and "their wives were not dominant in the relationship." The authors surmise that such comments indicate some Gen Xers have partners who greatly influence how much time they spend in their various life roles. Beginning to sound more like their older co-workers, some Gen Xers stated that Gen Yers spend too much time being concerned about aspects of their lives not related to work.

Similarly, many of the Boomers were even more certain that Millennials, and younger Gen Xers, did not have a strong work ethic concluding that younger men favor hobbies, social media, vacations, and their families over their jobs. The researchers determined that such sentiments might simply reflect the passage of time. Many Boomer parents also reflected that when their own children were young they too valued family life over work, but could not always align the two. Sonier (2012) had a related finding that Baby Boomers are loyal to their companies while expecting and accepting that work will, at times, take precedence over their personal lives. In concurrence, Groysberg and Abraham (2014) found that Boomers justified working more hours as a means to provide their families with a wider range of opportunities. A present concern for several of the Boomers in the current study was caring for aging parents, an ever-growing, care-giving balancing act for working Baby Boomers (Jyothi & Jyothi, 2012).

### ***Technology is a help and hindrance to work-life integration***

Technology differentiated how Gen Yers and Baby Boomers, in particular, balanced their various life roles. Millennials, who fully embraced the use of technology, showed no concerns about separating work from other aspects of their lives. The Boomers predicted that over time their younger co-workers would increasingly experience more of an imbalance between their work and home lives as a result of their reliance on technology. Such observations support the work of other researchers who noted that while technology provides flexibility and allows employees to work anywhere (Brough & Kalliath, 2009), it has also blurred the lines between work and home (Sarker, Xiao, Sarker, & Ahuja, 2012). In fact, technological advancements may benefit organizations more than employees (Currie & Eveline, 2011). Gen X participants in the current study would agree. Several interviewees expressed frustration that they were expected to respond to work emails in the evenings, on the weekend and while on vacation. Cousins and Varshney (2009), however, reported participants in their study indicated technology was not a curse, but a blessing, which allowed them to live and work a new way. The majority of Millennials who participated in the current study would agree that the advantages of technology outweigh the disadvantages. For them, the interface which technology provides between their work and personal lives is normal.

***Organizational support impacts leadership opportunities and aspirations***

Men employed by organizations that supported their lives outside work were more committed to their employers and interested in pursuing leadership roles than those who did not receive such support. Study participants, who were organizational leaders, repeated what is in the literature. Helping employees achieve lives that are more balanced is not only profitable for employees, but also for companies (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Kanwar, Singh, & Kodwani, 2009; Lazar, Osoian, & Ratiu, 2010).

The majority of the current study participants, however, indicated that while their workplaces often espoused work-life balance, most organizations did not consistently support men's individual efforts to achieve balance. Affirming Raiden and Raisanen's (2013) finding that men often compromise their personal lives to be successful at work, participants shared they were wary of bringing up personal commitments, concerned they would eventually be passed over for leadership positions.

Boomers affirmed their younger colleagues' thought process stating that over the course of their careers, workplaces had generally become more supportive of men trying to meet their obligations outside of work. However, companies still wanted their employees to put their jobs first and rewarded those individuals who put in the most face time at work. Knowing this dynamic, some Boomers confessed to becoming self-imposed workaholics at a young age. They believed that the personal sacrifices they made would pay off when they received leadership positions.

Now organizational leaders themselves, Boomers reported having a hard time considering younger men for leadership positions. Boomers perceived that Millennials, in particular, focus on themselves more than the team or organization. Conversely, several Millennials shared that seeing their fathers and other older men with workplace leadership positions undergo tremendous amounts of stress made them decide not to seek leadership positions; the personal cost was too high. This finding concurs with EY's (2015) results that millennial men were more likely than any other demographic in their study to forego a promotion in favor of better work-life balance. For the same reason, some Gen Xers in the current study shared they gave up on their leadership aspirations. Still other Gen Xers were at the point in their careers where they felt pressure to produce if they wanted a promotion. Obtaining higher-paying leadership positions was especially important to these men who were concerned about being able to pay for college for their children and save for their retirement.

Men who do aspire to move into leadership positions may need to make known that they desire organizational support for leadership development, but doing so can be challenging. While men in the workplace are generally supportive of one another more than they were in previous generations, a competitive aspect still exists in men's relationships as well as a sense that asking for and receiving help is a sign of inadequacy. Gen Yers in the present study perceived that to receive support at work required that they first needed to be liked. Even if they determined others liked them, the Gen Yers were still concerned that asking for help might be seen as a sign of weakness. Men who are perceived as breaching gender norms can indeed be at risk for discrimination in the workplace as both Garcia's (2012) and Jelailan's (2015) studies found. Rudman and Mescher (2013) concurred noting that "male family leave requesters were less recommended for rewards to the extent they were judged as poor workers and weak" (p. 332). Another concern the Gen Y men in the present study mentioned was payback. If they asked for and received help, they anticipated that at some point they would have to return the favor.

Although defined differently by each generation, the current study's general conclusion is that work-life balance does matter to men, and as such, it is a factor when men make decisions about pursuing or staying in leadership positions.

## **Limitations of the study**

Several limitations exist in the present study. The first concern is the non-representative demographics of the sample. The majority of the respondents were white, well-educated, married, and fathers. As such, their responses might not be applicable to others who do not share the same demographics.

A second related limitation is the study's sample size. Although this study was exploratory in nature, a larger sample size would provide more confidence in interpreting the results, particularly in regards to whether or not the degree to which men integrate their work and life roles influences their desire to pursue leadership positions.

Third, some of the survey questions (see Appendix A) may not have effectively captured what the authors were trying to ascertain. For example, the first question assumed individuals worked full-time for a company. Thus, 20 percent of the respondents who were self-employed, in a family business, disabled, semi-retired, part-timers, consultants, or flex-timers may have found it challenging to answer the question. Other participants only answered the first question from a career perspective noting that their personal and professional goals were the same. While it would be tempting to surmise that such responses affirm the current study's first finding (different generations place different degrees of importance on integrating work-life roles), the responses may simply be the result of the question itself being somewhat close-ended. Wording choice may have also been a factor in the last three study questions. Some men perceived there to be an implied gender comparison and gave gender-related responses instead of answering the question within the framework asked. Such responses affirm the literature and the current study's results that work-life integration is often only viewed and considered from women's perspectives, but again the wording of the questions may have led the participants to assume they were being asked to make a comparison statement.

Finally, the current study is a replication of a study the authors conducted with a sample of women (Roebuck, Smith, & Elhaddaoui, 2013). Findings from the previous study may have influenced the authors' general interpretation of the results.

## **Recommendations for future research**

Researchers interested in further study related to the original research question (How do different generations of men view organizational leadership in light of work-life balance?) can expand on the study's findings in a variety of ways. Each of the five primary questions could make an independent study. Future research might also examine how or if demographic data such as ethnicity or types of industries in which respondents work affects their responses. Another area to explore further is the intersection of generations and work-life balance as it relates to men's marital or parental status. In the present study, there was some indication that parental status in particular might make a difference, but there was not enough data to make a definitive conclusion. Finally, researchers could compare the study results with findings from studies looking at similar issues with women.

## **Conclusion**

The current exploratory study's findings have some implications for organizations who wish to benefit from the strengths of each generation, promote workplace collegiality, and encourage/support men to work together as leaders. First, men, particularly Millennials and some younger Gen Xers, desire to play a more prominent role within their homes and their communities than perhaps their Baby Boomer's organizational leaders did. Organizational support is needed to help men integrate work-life roles early on so that when the time comes they will be more inclined to pursue, accept, and keep organizational leadership positions. As the authors discussed in the literature review, and affirmed in the present study, organizations who provide such support can expect loyal, productive employees. Organizations should

consider ways to open up the lines of communication and have an ongoing dialog with all employees. Doing so will help men who reported difficulty asking for help because they fear being perceived as weak.

Other ways organizations can offer support is by providing alternative formats for working such as flextime, telecommuting, compressed workweeks, job sharing, and part-time work. Organizations may need to provide flexible options or a menu approach to work-life policies and programs as no two employees have the exact same life demands outside of work, and work-life balance needs will vary at different life stages. Organizational leaders should not penalize employees who take advantage of such programs and working formats when the time comes for these leaders to decide whom they will choose for open leadership positions. Results, not face time, should be the determining factor in making such decisions.

Organizations must continually develop initiatives and programs that encourage and support leadership development for employees at all phases of their careers and outside lives. Leadership development programs of the past may not be successful in the present or the future.

Continued examination of how men of all ages integrate their work-life roles to become and stay authentic organizational leaders is an important task for scholars who study leadership and for organizations who seek to develop leaders.

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## Appendix A

### Primary research questions

1. Has there been a time in your life when your personal and professional goals clashed or were not in balance? If so, please elaborate.
2. Do you see any differences between the way you balance your work and personal life from men in your family or workplace who are from different generations than you? If so, please elaborate.
3. How supportive have organizations for which you have worked been regarding your responsibilities and commitments outside of work? Please explain your response.
4. What impact does the above described level of organizational support have on the ability of men to move into organizational leadership positions?
5. Do men in your workplace help each other and have you noticed any change in the willingness of men to help each other over the span of your professional life? Please explain your response.

## Appendix B

Example participant quotes which illustrate the study's themes

| Example quote                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Study theme                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>“While a restaurant manager, I was given promotion opportunities to become a general manager/managing partner if I was willing to relocate out of state. My family and my wife’s family are both located in North Georgia and we were not willing to leave.”<br/>(Gen Y participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                                      | The integration of work-life roles varies across generations.            |
| <p>“I have to constantly balance workplace demands in the light of new responsibilities with personal priorities like spending time with my daughter, attending to my wife who is pregnant and helping her with household chores. Also, the current competitive situation at the workplace demands I complete my MBA...I am constantly trying to utilize every minute of my day and sometimes get even sleep less than is required.”<br/>(Gen X participant)</p> | The integration of work-life roles varies across generations.            |
| <p>“For most Baby Boomers their personal identities come from their professional lives.” (Baby Boomer participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | The integration of work-life roles varies across generations.            |
| <p>“People in my generation seem to have less strict adherence to hours and work as the amount of work dictates, regardless if that conflicts with their personal lives or not.” (Gen Y participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Technology is a help and a hindrance to work-life integration.           |
| <p>“It’s hard to be completely disconnected from the job when you always are available to be connected.” (Gen X participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Technology is a help and a hindrance to work-life integration.           |
| <p>“I observe that the guys that are younger than me tend to have a harder time shutting things down after hours. It may be that they are more comfortable with technology and therefore are more wired in.”<br/>(Baby Boomer participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Technology is a help and a hindrance to work-life integration.           |
| <p>“I notice that older men keep score with sick leave and are determined to be at work and appear busy no matter what. Men my age tend to focus more on results than appearances.” (Gen Y participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Organizational support impacts leadership opportunities and aspirations. |
| <p>“Men I interact with feel as though those in leadership have very little personal time, so they themselves don’t pursue positions in leadership.” (Gen Y participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Organizational support impacts leadership opportunities and aspirations. |
| <p>“There is a great deal of ‘talk’ about support, but when the day is done, there are still expectations of what they want to see from you...Numerous times requests are made after 5 p.m. on Friday with the expectation that something is returned during the weekend.” (Gen X participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                               | Organizational support impacts leadership opportunities and aspirations. |
| <p>“Men are willing to help each other so long as it doesn’t put them at risk for not getting additional leadership opportunities.” (Gen X participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Organizational support impacts leadership opportunities and aspirations. |
| <p>“Boomers have a difficult time promoting Millennials/ GenYers who appear to be less committed to professional and organizational development.”<br/>(Baby Boomer participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Organizational support impacts leadership opportunities and aspirations. |
| <p>“The company requires relocation once you are promoted out of your sales territory. Some good candidates do not move up because they are unwilling to uproot their families.” (Baby Boomer participant)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Organizational support impacts leadership opportunities and aspirations. |