

Work-Life Inclusion

This book will be a very valuable tool to help HR professionals and organizations to take their health and wellbeing strategy to the next level. To optimize its impact, a strategy should be based on the health risks and needs of its workforce throughout the employee 'life course'. The CIPD fully supports the notion that employers need to consider the whole person if they are to be effective in reducing work-life conflict and supporting their health and wellbeing as they journey through work and life. The book provides an excellent narrative of how this needs to include the multidimensional nature of people's identity and experiences. The different chapters cover a range of key life-stage events, such as menopause transition, that individuals can encounter through the employee lifecycle and which can understandably impact on health and work. The book is a welcome clarion call to breakdown the silence and taboo that persists in many workplaces around broader wellbeing issues that affect so many, so that people can receive empathy, support and understanding.

—*Rachel Suff*, Senior Policy Advisor, CIPD

I am delighted to provide an endorsement for this handbook edited by Dr Krystal Wilkinson and Dr Helen Woolnough. Through a series of well-informed empirical chapters, they respond to the call to broaden understandings of the work-life interface to consider a range of challenges for different groups across the life-course. Many of the chapters highlight topics that have previously been under-explored in work-life literatures, and are highly topical, such as social class in Chapter 2, the earliest stages of working lives (Chapter 3 and 4) solo-living for women (Chapter 5), menopause (Chapter 12), apprenticeship (Chapter 9) and male perspectives on parenthood (Chapter 11). The ground-breaking work is carried in the middle of the book with chapters 6 to 8 on topics that are historically missing from academic agendas; bound by the development of theory on the connection between fertility treatment, miscarriage and perinatal mental illness respectively. These chapters successfully illuminate silenced and taboo topics, bringing them into mainstream workplace narratives to the benefit of readers.

Strength and depth are added by intersectional empirical studies with reflections on work-life complexities from older workers (Chapter 13), ethnic minority female workers that manage chronic illness (Chapter 10) and older ethnic workers (Chapter 14). Taken as a whole, authors draw on a range of theoretical frames and lenses including the work-life interface; equality, diversity and inclusion, career theory, empowerment, training and wellbeing. The book is pitched to appeal to both academics and practitioners through its accessible credible approach. The style is provocative and critical; it challenges our assumptions as researchers or organisation practitioners to think creatively and be more work-life inclusive. All chapters conclude with implications for practice. Thanks to insightful guidance and analysis from Dr Wilkinson and Dr Woolnough, their book plants a stake in the sand that others in the field will need to observe.

—*Professor Carol Woodhams*, Human Resource Management,
Surrey Business School

Taking an inclusive approach to the work-life issues employees face at different stages of the life-course should be part of an organization's overarching inclusion strategy. This book is a welcome step forwards in deepening our understanding of the multi-faceted nature of people's lived experiences of the work-life interface. Feeling included at work has a positive impact on employees' engagement, productivity and wellbeing. This book is a call to action for organizations to go further in cultivating inclusive cultures by shining a light on some of the under-explored and 'hidden' issues employees face when navigating their working life and personal experiences. A highly informative and valuable read which will help readers think more creatively about how people experience the work-life interface.

—*Craig Oddy*, Head of Talent and People Experience,
Novuna Financial Services

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Work-Life Inclusion: Broadening Perspectives Across the Life-Course

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

We dedicate this book to all the voices we have collectively attempted to elevate through highlighting under-researched areas of the work-life interface and absent narratives in the workplace.

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About the Editors

Dr Krystal Wilkinson is Reader (Associate Professor) in Human Resource Management, based at the Business School's Centre for Decent Work and Productivity at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her research focuses on the work-life interface, women's health and well-being at work. Recent research projects have focused on solo-living staff; complex fertility journeys (including employees going through fertility treatment, experiencing pregnancy loss and involuntary childlessness); mental health in pregnancy and post-birth; and women's health more broadly and employment. She has published in academic journals including *Work, Employment and Society*; *Human Resource Management Journal*; *Gender, Work and Organization*; and *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*. She is passionate about knowledge exchange and is working with various stakeholders to raise awareness and create resources, including the CIPD, National charities and employers. Her research has also been featured in the media and trade press including the *Wall Street Journal*, the *BBC* and *People Management Magazine*. Prior to studying for her PhD at Leeds University, Krystal held operational Human Resource Management roles in different industries, including construction, retail and hospitality. She is a Chartered Member of the CIPD and was a member of the CIPD National Examinations team for 15 years.

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Katy Schnitzler is a Business Consultant, Researcher and Lecturer, specializing in the areas of reproductive health, and childlessness, at work. Katy is the Founder and Director of MIST Workshops Ltd., a company working with organizations to provide training, policy guidance and support for the prevalent and significant (yet often overlooked) issues of pregnancy loss, infertility and childlessness. Her work with organizations is informed by the most current academic research, notably findings from her PhD. Katy has also taught and supervised students on a variety of degree and Masters courses, including Psychology, Business and Health and Social Care. Katy has presented at academic conferences, and has won awards for her research. Through her consultancy, Katy has collaborated with various organizations, including The NHS, CIPD, global energy and financial companies, universities and baby loss charities.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Exploring the Under-Explored

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While there is a large volume of research and publications (academic and practitioner) on the work-life interface, especially focusing on work-life balance and work-life conflict, most of this work has adopted a narrow conception of both work and life (Kelliher, Richardson, & Boiarintseva, 2018; Warren, 2021), with the latter largely being equated to family, or more specifically parenting young children (Powell, Greenhaus, Allen, & Johnson, 2019; Wilkinson, Collins, & Antoniadou, 2022; Wilkinson, Tomlinson, & Gardiner, 2017). This edited collection broadens the focus to include a range of non-work or “personal” issues that occur at different stages of the life course and considers the intersection with employment. Importantly, we focus on issues which have received limited practitioner attention in the field of work and employment; are new and emerging topics in the work and employment literature, and/or are considered “taboo” in a work context (Grandey, Gabriel, & King, 2020). The chapters bring together considerations of the work-life interface, well-being at work and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) to consider how those with diverse needs can be best included and supported in the workplace.

The aim of this book is to shine a light on the under-explored, and to get people thinking and talking about a range of “life” or “non-work” issues and experiences in employment contexts. These issues span from the very start of the working life (young people and those juggling study and various types of paid and unpaid employment) through to retirement transitions; they consider living situation and challenges with family formation, “taboo” health conditions and reproductive transitions, social class, transnational lives, and much more. We seek to put these important issues front and center of future academic debate and practitioner know-how, to advance knowledge and secure real improvements for people at work.

This book will be of interest to work and employment scholars, those studying human resource management and related courses, and HR professionals and people managers. Each chapter explores a specific topic, providing background information, outlining current gaps in knowledge, and highlighting the importance of the issue for organizations and people professionals. Each chapter also contains original empirical research on the issue, and ends with implications for practice, which will be particularly useful for readers seeking to implement evidence-based better practice in their workplace.

Existing Scholarship on the Work-Life Interface

The work-life interface has been a focus for academic research for decades, with papers on work-family issues first emerging in the 1960s and flourishing since. In a 2023 review article, Allen and French noted over 4,500 articles based on the term “work-family” published from a psychology perspective (data from PsycInfo) since 2010, and there are many more taking sociological perspectives and extending the focus beyond family. [Beigi, Shirmohammadi, and Otaye-Ebede \(2019\)](#) observed a staggering 48 unique terms in academic publications for articulating the relationship between the work and non-work domains.

Early psychological work focused on the negative impact of work on family, and later family on work, coming from the perspective of role stress theory ([Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964](#)) and role scarcity theory ([Goode, 1960](#)). These theories assume that people possess limited and fixed amounts of resources (notably time and energy), and that managing multiple roles (employee, spouse, and parent) is problematic as the roles draw on the same scarce resources. Managing multiple roles is therefore difficult and creates strain. Work-life conflict remains the most well-known and researched work-life interface concept ([Allen & French, 2023](#)), with much focus on time-based conflict and strain-based conflict ([Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985](#)). Here, time and energy invested in one domain are seen to take time and energy away from another domain; and strains (such as tension, anxiety, fatigue, depression, irritability) derived from one domain can spill-over into the other. Work-family conflict is often considered as a source of stress that together with other stressors, will have adverse effects on health and well-being (e.g., [Leiter & Durup, 1996](#)).

More recently, it has been acknowledged that there can be positive interactions between the domains, such as work-life facilitation and enrichment. In contrast to the role strain/scarcity hypotheses, theorists here draw on the role enhancement hypothesis (derived from Marks’ 1977 expansion approach on the fulfillment of multiple roles and human energy). They suggest that additional skills, status enhancement, and status security from one domain (such as work) can have a positive influence on experience in another domain (such as family) ([Greenhaus & Powell, 2006](#)). There is also the possibility of positive spill-over ([Grzywacz & Marks, 2000](#)).

Other notable concepts and theories concern work-life balance; boundary management; resource-based theories; and identity theories. Unlike the conflict and enrichment concepts, which reflect directional causal interdependencies

between work and non-work, work-life balance concerns an integrative relationship between the two (Casper et al., 2018; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011) and recognizes that personal values and priorities are central to feeling balanced (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011, in Allen & French, 2023). Boundary management concerns how people create, navigate, maintain, or change boundaries between work and non-work (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996), which is influenced by both external factors and personal preferences (e.g., to either integrate or segment different roles). Resource-based theories include adaptations of the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) which explore the demands associated with each domain, the resources needed to manage them, resource gains and losses, and daily decision making over resource allocation (Allen & Paddock, 2015; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Identity theories consider how individuals classify themselves with respect to different roles they hold and seek to behave in identity-consistent ways, which can influence time investment in different activities. More information on the main concepts and theories can be found in review articles such as Allen and French (2023).

Despite the volume of research attention and diversity in terminology, it has been repeatedly observed that most studies have adopted a restricted conception of both “work” and “life,” which does not take account of recent developments in life worlds, working arrangements, and employment relationships (Allen & French, 2022; Kelliher et al., 2018). Samples tend to focus on white-collar managerial staff in stable employment. Furthermore, the overwhelming “work-family” focus rather than “work-life” interface exploration (Powell et al., 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2022), together with gender being the primary diversity issue under consideration (Allen & French, 2023; Powell et al., 2019), means that work-life is mainly seen as a women’s or mother’s issue, and this is reflected in much organization policy. This focus potentially reinforces societal perceptions that women are primary caregivers, having responsibility for “balancing” work and family, while their male counterparts are primary earners – which has obvious implications for career progression and pay-gaps. This could be seen in the flurry of research interest around the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the work-family interface, and increased dependent care demands especially for women (Kossek, Dumas, Piszczek, & Allen, 2021; Shockley, Clark, Dodd, & King, 2021) as well as broader blurred work-life boundaries (Allen & French, 2023). This book recognizes the importance of work-family (including parenting young children) research but emphasizes the value of expanding the focus beyond this to explore broader work-life challenges and dilemmas (Wilkinson et al., 2017) for men and women at different stages of their lives. This includes challenges around navigating normative assumptions about who flexibility and other work-life balance provisions in the workplace are for and decision making around investment in different domains. The aim is to influence the work-life narrative – what people feel able to voice in the workplace, the perceived legitimacy of varied non-work needs, and the supports available.

As well as showcasing more nuanced research on the complexities of the non-work domain and its interaction with work, we explicitly connect research insights to practice, highlighting how employers can expand their horizons on

what work-life balance means and how it is experienced, thereby providing enhanced and forward-thinking support for their people.

Our Focus: Work-Life Inclusion Across the Life Course

When considering the range of non-work experiences and issues we wanted to explore in this book, we felt a broader definition was needed than that traditionally seen in the work-life interface literature. Most scholarship sets the “work” and “family” or “life” or “non-work” domains as separate entities, seeking to measure the impact of roles, experiences, or activities in one domain upon the other, or consider how someone subjectively experiences the balance between them. While some of our chapters do focus on non-work activities that have a positive or negative impact on work and *vice versa*, many of our chapters are about “private” or “personal” issues or experiences which are evident in both the non-work and work domain but set the individual at odds with the notion of the “ideal worker” (Acker, 1990; Bradley, 2012; Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010) who is considered to be young, rational, able-bodied, and able to engage in full-time employment unencumbered by responsibilities or demands outside of the workplace. These issues are often invisible, silenced or taboo in the workplace. This includes chapters on health conditions, reproductive transitions, and grief. We consider these to be work-life interface issues because such conditions and experiences can have an impact on experience at work – due to the experience itself and/or attitudes toward it – and because work experiences can have an impact on conditions (see Atkinson et al.’s (2021) work on the menopause). We also recognize intersectionality – that a person’s various identities combine to form experiences, and that things like gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, social class and other factors may compound work-life challenges and discrimination. It can be especially problematic where a stigmatized experience (e.g., a menstrual or mental health condition) sits alongside a stigmatized identity. We thus coin the term “work-life inclusion,” to note the need for these broader issues to be included in work-life thinking, and to explicitly tie the book into work on EDI.

The book also foregrounds consideration of temporality, critical incidents and the life course. A life course is defined as “a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time” (Giele & Elder, 1998), and a life-course approach is concerned with the phases of people’s lives within their structural, social, and cultural contexts. We thus consider how work and non-work experiences, demands, resources, preferences, priorities, strategies, challenges, and dilemmas may vary as people move through different phases of their lives and careers. Also, how the same issue or non-work activity might have different work-life implications depending on life-course stage. For example, we dedicate two chapters to how study intersects with work and home life. Chapter 3 focuses on full-time university students while Chapter 9 focuses on older adults who are working split-shifts in hospitality and undertaking apprenticeship training. The work-life interface issues, experiences, and perceptions for the two groups are very different. We also have chapters on being single and solo-living (Chapter 5) and being childless (Chapter 11). It is important for employers to consider how

attitudes toward being single and/or childless might vary over the life course, as well as between different individuals due to their preferences. In [Wilkinson and Rouse's \(2022\)](#) research on single and childless professional women, the younger women in the sample were largely unconcerned about their relationship and parental status and happy to focus on careers and other non-work goals (such as home ownership) while the older women felt more work-life conflict and ambivalence, due to social norms and pressures and their pathways of experience. Most of our chapters focus on a specific group, at a specific stage in their lives, with the structure of the book as a whole providing the life-course perspective, although the final empirical chapter specifically considers the work-life positioning of one group – ethnic minority migrant women – across the life course, and how their experiences and perceptions change over time.

In summary, this book responds to calls made in the broader literature (i.e., [Allen & French, 2022](#); [Demerouti, Corts, & Boz, 2018](#); [Ozbilgin et al., 2011](#); [Powell et al., 2019](#); [Warren, 2021](#)) for more research focused on minority groups and intersectional experiences; on diverse contexts; that considers emotions, including how people attempt to manage emotions at work and home to meet expectations and norms; that acknowledges embodiment and power structures and relations; on how the work-life interface may change over time, including life course and careers perspectives; that considers the impact of critical events and disruptions to rhythms; on retirement and ageing workers; and on low-pay workers. We echo the words of [Ozbilgin et al. \(2011, p. 178\)](#) that making the conceptualization of the work-life interface more akin to the nature of reality on the ground for contemporary diverse workforces will render organizational initiatives aimed at improving work-life arrangements more effective. This means moving away from the stereotype of the “ideal work-life balancers,” who are predominantly female, white, middle-class, involved in a heterosexual relationship, and the parent of young children ([Ozbilgin et al., 2011, p. 191](#)).

Summary of Chapters

While the topics covered in this book are under-explored in the work and employment literature, every chapter is underpinned by broader (often interdisciplinary) literature and includes empirical data. As the work-life interface literature is dominated by quantitative cross-sectional studies, most of our chapters take a qualitative approach, with two making use of autoethnography, where the authors draw on their own lived experience. All chapters conclude with implications for practice.

The first chapter extends our discussion above, providing a more detailed critique of established work-life interface literature from the perspective of social class. Dr Samantha Evans and Dr Maddy Wyatt challenge middle-class bias in work-life literature, and reveal class-based disparities in physical, temporal, and psychological outcomes, including the role of economic capital in work-life balance and the challenges encountered by the socially mobile in achieving psychological balance. The authors urge organizations to address class-based inconsistencies and inequalities in their practices.

The following chapters are roughly mapped against the heteronormative working-age population life course. We start with two chapters addressing the first stages of working lives. In Chapter 3, Dr Marilena Antoniadou, Dr Mark Crowder, and Dr Eileen Cunningham address the work-life interface for university students who also engage in paid and unpaid work – a necessity for many. Drawing on survey and interview data on undergraduate and postgraduate students studying full-time in a UK business school, the authors explore motivations, experiences, perceived consequences, and factors which may help or hinder student efforts to balance study with work.

In Chapter 4, Dr Fabio Rizzi, Professor Jérôme Chabanne-Rive, and Professor Marc Valax consider the work-life interface for “Generation Z” employees, the latest generation to join the workforce at the time of writing. This chapter explores whether employee empowerment experiences can ensure better work-life connections, drawing on interviews from case study research in the Italian branch of a multinational organization which is included in the Fortune 500 list.

In Chapter 5, Dr Grace Gao, Dr Linna Sai, and Dr Menghi Xu use autoethnography to discuss the work-life challenges experienced by single and solo-living female academics, using a feminist lens. The authors question the equality and fairness of HR policies which affect various groups of employees, but seemingly exclude those who live alone. The authors conclude that their insights on “vulnerability” may lead to a feminist approach being incorporated into work-life policy development in order to better engage underrepresented groups of employees, accommodate the needs of “others” and promote collective flourishing.

Chapters 6–8 focus on less considered issues and complications when it comes to balancing family formation with employment. In Chapter 6, Dr Krystal Wilkinson and Dr Clare Mumford explicate the work-life challenges involved in navigating fertility treatment alongside employment. The authors show the considerable “reproductive work” involved in following lifestyle advice and accessing treatment; the incompatibility of this work with paid employment; how work-life conflict is exacerbated by lack of legislative and employer provisions; and how employees respond in practice. The chapter briefly touches on the challenges for line managers tasked with supporting affected employees in the workplace.

In Chapter 7, Katy Schnitzler discusses the intersection of miscarriage and work, specifically in relation to what she terms a “pronatalist workplace.” Drawing on interview data, the author shows how concealment of miscarriage is common in the workplace, but that where disclosure does occur, this is often met with inconsistent (or absent) support, minimization, and even discriminatory practice. She explains that the absence of formal initiatives, including policy and training, exacerbate the issue.

Chapter 8 focusses on an under-explored issue in the literature on maternity and work, with Dr Krystal Wilkinson, Dr Sarah-Jane Lennie, and Dr Keely Duddin discussing the relationship between perinatal (during pregnancy and post-birth) mental illness and employment. After introducing perinatal mental illness, and the two-way relationship between illness and work, the authors offer key insights from their qualitative research study in the context of UK policing, highlighting challenges linked to the nature of police work and organization

culture, and issues that are more broadly applicable to how maternity and mental illness are treated in the workplace.

Chapter 9 revisits the notion of the work-life-study balance from Chapter 3 but considers this dynamic at a later point in the life course. Dr Gail Hebson and Dr Clare Mumford pose the question: “Are training opportunities another work-life challenge?” by exploring the experiences of hospitality staff working split-shifts and undertaking apprenticeship training. Their longitudinal qualitative research highlights how fragmented working time (Rubery, Grimshaw, Hebson, & Ugarte, 2015) rather than long hours led to the apprenticeship training further eroding an already blurred work-life boundary as workers were required to complete training activities in their non-work time which for them is during the middle of the day. They also explore the nuances in experience over time linked to specific positioning.

In Chapter 10, Dr Humera Manzoor takes an autoethnographic approach to engage with her “emotionally charged” lived experiences of living and working with a stigmatized chronic illness – irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) – in a highly patriarchal Pashtun society where women are expected to perform various social roles despite of illness and are silenced to male domination. The author uses lenses of stigma and normalization to shed light on the challenges she faced as she tried to fit into the roles of a “professional” academic, a “good” wife, a “good” daughter, a “good” sister-in-law, a “good” daughter-in-law, while managing the symptoms of chronic illness.

In Chapter 11, Social Gerontologist Dr Robin Hadley draws attention to involuntary childlessness, and how men are rendered silent on this topic in society more broadly and in the workplace. Drawing on two qualitative research studies, the author explores how not achieving the pronatalist ideal of parenthood impacts on men’s identity, sense of self, behaviours, health and well-being, and social networks across the life course. He argues that exclusion and discrimination in the workplace – through policy, working practices and everyday interaction – has a significant impact on both individuals and institutions alike.

In Chapter 12, Professor Carol Atkinson, Professor Fiona Carmichael, and Professor Jo Duberley discuss the well-being implications of the menopause transition in the workplace. Drawing on data gathered via online survey in a male dominated industry (three police forces), the authors present findings that demonstrate that many women experience menopause-related symptoms that are bothersome at work and that these frequently have negative effects for two elements of workplace well-being – job satisfaction and health-well-being. They also evidence that individual/job characteristics and workplace context can either improve or worsen experiences.

In Chapter 13, we address the latter part of the work-life course, with Professor Katrina Pritchard, Dr Rebecca Whiting, and Dr Cara Reed discussing ageing and work-life complexities in retirement. The authors first review how the traditional concept of retirement (as the end of paid employment) has been challenged in recent years and argue that conceptualizations of both retirement and the work-life interface are more fluid, ambiguous, and complex. Drawing on empirical data from contemporary media, they then consider the current experience of

the older worker and retiree, linking to neoliberalism as well as factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The final empirical contribution, Chapter 14, comes from Dr Sajja Ferdous, who discusses ethnic minority older migrant women and the work-life interface across “transnational” life courses. Drawing on interview data with migrant-citizen older British women of South Asian heritage living in the UK, the author shows how work-life interface issues are inevitably entangled with the active ageing agenda for the older workforce and that we need further attention from scholars exploring these issues across life courses to appreciate and understand how ageing across locations, times and contexts unveils unique aspects of the work-life interface.

In the Conclusion chapter, we identify the key messages and recurring themes from across the contributors and consider the implications for organizations and people managers. We wish we had space in this collection for other topics that are important and under-researched in organization studies literature: lesser-known issues in reproductive and menstrual health; a broader range of chronic illness and mental health conditions, which can each have very different implications for work; neurodiversity (i.e., Szulc, McGregor, & Cakir, 2021); the issues facing employees in less-traditional family situations (see Anand & Mitra, 2022), such as single parents, same-sex parents and those in blended families; issues of balancing paid work with care for grandchildren (i.e., Cantillon, Moore, & Teasdale, 2021); and other “personal” issues which may be silenced/taboo in certain contexts, such as divorce/separation, grief, loneliness and infidelity. We urge other scholars to pick up the baton to identify important and neglected areas for empirical study.

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