Using data from a representative sample of American private-sector establishments, this paper explains variation across firms in the implementation of work/family programs by examining how these are related to the employment strategy of organizations. The central hypothesis is that firms seeking to implement so-called high-performance or high-commitment work systems, incorporating employee involvement and quality programs, are more likely to adopt work/family programs as part of an effort to build up the level of workforce commitment to the enterprise. This hypothesis is tested, controlling for two other broad hypothesized effects: (1) that adoption of work/family programs is linked to the demand for them arising either from workforce problems such as absenteeism and turnover or from pressure from the labor force; and (2) that adoption is linked to whether employers already have in place elements of well-developed internal labor markets such as job ladders and human resource departments. Results show considerable support for the link between work/family programs and the use of high-commitment work systems.*

A central problem employers face is eliciting behaviors from employees when those behaviors are not easily obtained via direct control and supervision. These behaviors range from relatively straightforward compliance with rules to more extensive involvement such as participation in suggestion systems and quality efforts. Many scholars have studied the mechanisms firms use to obtain cooperation. Baron, Jennings, and Dobbin (1988) used historical evidence to identify three sets of techniques: personnel practices such as formal job analysis and record keeping, which derived from the scientific management movement; seniority rules, which emerged from unionism; and internal labor market rules such as demarcated promotion paths, which developed in white-collar industries. They demonstrated how the nature of the control mechanisms that firms use have shifted over time in response to external conditions, particularly pressures from the state, as well as in response to pressures from unions and personnel professionals. Baron, Jennings, and Dobbin’s work, and the bulk of the literature on the employment relationship, has focused on hiring, promotion, compensation, and employment security practices. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to believe that employee benefits can also play an important role in eliciting desired employee behaviors and hence can be studied in the same terms as other employment practices.

Much of the research on benefits can be found in the economics literature. This literature emphasizes how rising income increases the demand for benefits and how tax policies are biased in favor of nonwage compensation. These arguments are clearly helpful in understanding marginal changes in policies such as health care and pensions, but it is important to view in a broader framework benefits that expand the scope of employer responsibility, particularly adoption of benefits such as work/family programs. That this is true can be seen from the fact that employer-based benefits played an important role in firms’ employment

strategies early in the twentieth century, well before the kind of tax effects noted above. The spread of the so-called American Plan, or welfare capitalism, occurred for reasons unrelated to taxes, i.e., to increase employees’ commitment in the firm and reduce their interest in unions (Brandes, 1970). One might also suspect that whether the firm has established a production system that depends on a committed and loyal labor force will influence the choice of benefits policies.

Work/family benefits are of growing interest and importance in the landscape of organizations’ personnel policies. The limited longitudinal data available suggest that there has been substantial expansion in recent years. A national-level survey conducted in 1982 found 415 private-sector firms and nonprofit organizations that supported child-care services for their employees (Burud, Aschbacher, and McCroskey, 1984: 226). In 1985 the Conference Board found 2,500 organizations that provided their employees with support of various types for child care, and in 1989 they found 4,000 (Friedman, 1985, 1989). The Bureau of Labor Statistics’ survey of benefits in medium and large firms found that in 1985, 1 percent of employees received child-care support from their employers, whereas in 1989 the figure was 5 percent (Hyland, 1990). Although these surveys are not always consistent and definitions vary from survey to survey and from time to time, it is hard not to come away with the impression of growth in these benefits. Other indicators are that the Wall Street Journal now runs a weekly column on work/family and recently published a special supplement on the theme (June 21, 1993), Business Week (June 28, 1993) devoted a cover article to the topic, Human Resource Management devoted a special issue of the journal to it, and Working Women magazine publishes an annual issue on the most family-friendly companies. In addition, the Bureau of National Affairs organizes an annual conference on work/family, and the Conference Board has established a center devoted to the issue. Finally, a number of consulting firms, including Work/Family Directions, Catalyst, and the Families and Work Institute, have been created that provide services to firms as well as engage in research and advocacy on the topic.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

There are three plausible explanations for the adoption of work/family programs. The first is that the programs are adopted as practical responses to workforce difficulties linked to work/family issues. The second is that adoption is linked to bureaucratic or rationalized personnel policies, as indexed by formalized internal labor markets (ILMs). The third, and the central focus of the paper, is that the presence of a particular subset of internal labor market practices—so-called high-performance or high-commitment work systems—is associated with the adoption of work/family programs, even after controlling for bureaucracy more generally.

Practical Responses

One of the most obvious explanations for the spread of programs is a straightforward model that focuses on

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changing family work patterns. The facts about the growing labor-force participation of women are well known. In 1975, 54 percent of women aged 25–34 were in the labor force, as were 55 percent of women aged 35–44. By 1993 the figures had grown to 73 percent and 76 percent, respectively (Hayghe, 1994: 38). In 1975, 28.3 percent of women with children under age three were employed, while by 1993 the figure was 49 percent (Goodman, 1995: 6). These demographic and labor-force participation patterns create pressure for the workplace to become more family-friendly. First, employees responsible for child care seemingly face greater risks of lateness, absenteeism, and distraction and, if these costs become substantial, it may be in the employer’s interest to provide assistance. In addition, as the rate of dual-career families and single parenting increases, employees will clearly need and desire assistance with work/family issues.

Another version of the practical argument concerns the need to recruit employees. The argument is that firms that wish to recruit high-quality professional women and men are well advised to offer work/family programs because attitudes have changed concerning employees’ willingness to sacrifice family for work (Rodgers, 1992). Hence managers see work/family programs as a recruitment tool, both for the actual services they provide and as a signal of broader attitudes within the firm. Arguments for a practical explanation lead to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: The likelihood of implementing work/family programs is positively related to the percentage of the firm’s labor force that is female.

Hypothesis 1b: Independent of the gender composition of the workforce, firms for which issues such as absenteeism, tardiness, recruitment, and relocation are the most serious are more likely to adopt work/family programs.

Links to Internal Labor Markets

ILMs are systems of formal rules that structure the employment relationship and, as such, signal bureaucratization or rationalization. The “opposite” of an ILM is the spot labor market of economic textbooks, in which wages and employment conditions are established via an impersonal external labor market and in which administrative rules play little role (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Osterman, 1984). In this paper, an ILM signifies the formalization of the employment relation, and the hypothesis is that when the employment relationship is formalized in an ILM, new problems such as work/family difficulties are solved through the introduction of new formal programs, i.e., work/family programs.

There are several reasons to expect an association between ILMs and the establishment of formal programs that address new problems. One view is that the presence of ILMs is itself linked to technical considerations, such as the nature of skills and technology, and hence firms with ILMs are likely to make greater investments in their workers than are other employers (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Cohen and Pfeffer, 1986). As a consequence, they have a stake in retaining employees, and benefits such as work/family
programs may be useful in this regard. Another is that bureaucracy begets more bureaucracy. Once a pattern of formal programmatic solutions has been established, people's expectations about how to address new challenges are likely to continue along these lines. Finally, possible links between ILMs and the establishment of work/family programs can be found in institutional theory, which suggests that ILMs may be adopted because they provide organizational legitimacy. A logical extension is that firms that adopt formalized personnel rules for institutional reasons may also be more likely to adopt new cutting-edge benefits programs such as work/family for the same reason (Sutton et al., 1994).

An important channel for institutional pressures is the human resources or personnel department. Internal labor markets typically imply a level of formalization of employment practices (seniority, testing, job posting, etc.) that requires a human resources department to administer. Hence, the presence of a personnel department is both a consequence and an indicator of the extent of ILM practices. In addition, the institutional literature emphasizes the importance of the personnel department, for other reasons (e.g., Edelman, 1990; Sutton et al., 1994). The human resources department and the personnel professionals transmit institutional pressures because the personnel professionals are likely to be in the communications network that diffuses these practices, and they are concerned with appearing to be modern or are responsive to external pressure.

Some support for the relationship between institutional theory and the establishment of work/family programs is found in Goodstein (1994), who found evidence for institutional explanations for the adoption of work/family programs in a study of public and private organizations in Washington State. He found that the greater the diffusion of work/family benefits among other employers in the same industry and geographic area, the higher the probability that a given establishment would also adopt programs. The above arguments lead to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** The adoption of work/family programs is positively related to the presence of internal labor markets, as signaled by job ladders, seniority systems, and a personnel department.

**High-commitment Work Systems**

Until a decade or so ago, work organization in America could be characterized by what might be termed a traditional model. The workplace was organized around tight divisions of labor and narrowly designed, specialized jobs. Employee participation was limited, and clear, detailed rules, specified either in a personnel policy or a collective-bargaining contract determined the criteria governing career progression from one job to another and the compensation associated with each individual job. This description applied, in broad terms, to both union and nonunion settings and to blue- and white-collar work (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie, 1986; Osterman, 1988). Many American companies are attempting to move away from this traditional model. The reorganization is driven by the observation that, in a number of industries, innovations such as self-managed work teams and quality
programs lead to higher levels of productivity than traditional production systems (Osterman, 1988; Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1991; MacDuffie, 1991; Ichniowski, Shaw, and Prennushi, 1993).

At the core of the new systems are changes in how employees do their job. These work systems seek to improve productivity by drawing on the ideas and commitment of the labor force to a much greater extent than is typical under traditional employment systems. In many of these high-commitment firms, employees are involved in tasks other than direct work activities. The most common example is problem-solving groups, in which employees work in groups, often consisting of a cross section of employees and, hence, to some extent, obviating traditional managerial/nonmanagerial distinctions. These groups address problems such as production techniques, quality issues, and health and safety. In the most extreme form, these groups can take up topics that in the past have been seen as clearly managerial, e.g., outsourcing and supplier policy. In addition, in many cases, employees can decide how best to do their job. For example, at the General Motors-Toyota joint venture, NUMMI, each task is rigidly prescribed, but employees have considerable power to make suggestions as to how to alter these prescriptions.

The adoption of these work systems is considerably more widespread than is often realized. The popular press has highlighted firms such as Saturn, Corning, Xerox, and Motorola that have adopted these systems. There have also been numerous case studies in the academic literature on efforts to reorganize work (for a review, see Applebaum and Batt, 1994). In addition, survey evidence suggests that the spread of these innovations extends well beyond these specific cases. Osterman (1994) found that 36.6 percent of establishments in his nationally representative sample met his definition of high-commitment work places. In another survey, using data collected by the General Accounting Office on the 1,000 largest corporations in America, Lawler, Mohrman, and Ledford (1992) found that 32 percent of firms in 1990 involved 20 percent or more of their employees in quality circles. Ernst and Young, along with the American Quality Foundation, sponsored a survey of U.S., German, Canadian, and Japanese firms. Among American firms, the survey found that 49 percent involve more than one-fourth of their workers in quality-related teams (Applebaum and Batt, 1994: 73). Using a national survey, Bailey (1994) found that even in the relatively low-skill apparel industry, 25 percent of plants use three or more innovative practices that are elements of high-commitment systems in that industry.

These new or transformed work systems are potentially related to work/family benefits because, for the new work systems to function, they require high levels of employee commitment to the enterprise and depend on employee initiative and employee ideas. An illustration is NUMMI, where, in 1991, employees contributed over 10,000 suggestions for improvement, or five suggestions per employee, and 80 percent were adopted (Adler and Cole, 1993).
The plausibility of a link between these new work systems and work/family programs is enhanced by an analogy with Japan. Japanese firms, or at least the large ones, provide a very wide range of services such as housing, education loans, sports activities, family assistance, and social facilities (Dore, 1973; Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990). In reference to these services, Dore (1973: 215) argued, “the Japanese system [of benefits] enhances enterprise consciousness.” More formal evidence on this point is provided by Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990: 244), who found that an index of these benefits and services was positively related to employee commitment to the firm for both American and Japanese employees. They found the size of the effect essentially the same for the two countries, although the mean of the services variable was higher for Japan. Lincoln and Kalleberg’s (1990: 245) preferred interpretation of the effect is that the welfare services “are interpreted directly as a positive gesture by the firm.”

High-commitment organizations are a distinctive subset of firms with ILMs. Like all firms with ILMs, high-commitment organizations have administrative and bureaucratic rules that structure employment, but they function in a way that requires the commitment of employees, for example, in the form of extra effort or suggestions, to be effective. Hence, both a traditional automobile factory and the new Saturn plant are bureaucratic firms with ILMs, but only the Saturn plant seeks to elicit high levels of employee involvement. Commitment is therefore defined as the employees’ willingness to engage themselves and offer their ideas and knowledge with a degree of authenticity that, by its very nature, is not enforceable and which therefore requires a substantial element of voluntarism on the part of the workforce. The task of the firm that seeks to organize itself along these lines is to find ways to induce or encourage this commitment, and benefits may be a tool firms use to do this. The hypothesis, then, is that even after controlling for ILMs, an important consideration in explaining the adoption of work/family programs is the presence or absence of high-commitment forms of work organization:

Hypothesis 3: Firms that place a high value on obtaining employee commitment and have implemented so-called high-commitment work systems such as quality programs are more likely to adopt work/family programs.

METHODS
The hypotheses were tested with data from an original survey of American private-sector establishments. The survey collected data on the presence or absence of a variety of work/family programs, as well as on a broad range of characteristics of the establishment and its labor force. This cross-sectional strategy for exploring variation in employment practices has been used extensively in the literature for a wide range of dependent variables (Pfeffer and Cohen, 1984; Wholey, 1985; Baron, Davis-Blake, and Bielby, 1986; Baron and Bielby, 1986; Cohen and Pfeffer, 1986; Davis-Blake and Uzzi, 1993).

The Survey
The survey on which this paper is based was part of a larger study of work organization called the Survey of American
Establishments, done in 1992, that contains 875 observations on American establishments (Osterman, 1994). An establishment is defined as a business address and is distinct from a company. For example, each assembly plant of General Motors is an establishment, as is the corner gas station. The great advantage of establishments is that responses from their personnel are likely to be more accurate than those from corporate human resource personnel about practices in branch plants on the other side of the country.

The sampling universe was Dun and Bradstreet’s Dun’s Market Identifier File, a commercial, publicly available establishment file that purports to be a list of all establishments in the nation. In their comparison of this file with alternative sampling frames (the unemployment insurance files, the telephone White Pages, direct enumeration, and Chamber of Commerce membership listings), Kalleberg et al. (1990) found that, for a local area, the Dun and Bradstreet file and the unemployment insurance files yielded representative samples and are the most preferable. For creating a national sample, the Dun and Bradstreet file is the only practical choice.

The sampling was limited to for-profit establishments with 50 or more employees in nonagricultural industries. According to the Dun and Bradstreet file, establishments with 50 or more employees represent just 10 percent of all establishments but, according to the May 1988 Current Population Survey, these establishments employ 51 percent of workers. The sampling was size-stratified to create adequate samples within size categories, and appropriate weights were used to create a representative sample of establishments. The survey was conducted by the University of Massachusetts Center for Survey Research and had a response rate of 65.5 percent.

The survey research firm worked with the establishment to identify the most knowledgeable respondent about work organization and benefits. Each contact person first received an introductory letter and a worksheet, and interviews were then conducted by telephone. In the final sample, 46 percent of the respondents worked in the human resources function, and 54 percent were line managers. In unreported regressions, I reestimated the models reported in Table 3, below, including a variable for the functional position of the respondent, and none of the results were affected.

It is possible to estimate response-rate bias by using variables in the Dun’s file. I estimated a logit model in which the dependent variable was the probability of response and the independent variables were size, a dummy variable if the establishment was manufacturing, a dummy variable if the establishment was a headquarters of a multibranch firm, and a dummy variable if the establishment was not part of a larger enterprise. The manufacturing dummy variable and the headquarters dummy variable were significant. Transforming the coefficient at the mean value of the variables indicated that the probability of response increased by 5 percentage points if the respondent was in a manufacturing establishment. A similar calculation revealed that the
the probability of response decreased by 8 percentage points if the establishment was a headquarters, but even among nonmanufacturing, headquarters establishments the response rate in the survey was 59.1 percent. The weights used in this paper were adjusted to reflect the industry distribution in the Dun and Bradstreet database to partially compensate for nonresponse.

A final point regarding the survey procedure concerns the unit of analysis within the establishment. Most variables, including the measures of work/family programs, were collected for the entire establishment, but because no single answer regarding work practices is likely to be applicable to all occupational groups within an establishment (Osterman, 1987), the notion of a “core” job was developed to collect data on work organization. This strategy is similar to that employed in the National Organizations Study and the research that has flowed from that (Spaeth et al., 1993). The core job was defined for respondents as

The largest group of non-supervisory, non-managerial workers at this location who are directly involved in making the product or in providing the service at your location. We want you to think of the various groups directly involved in making the product or providing the service and then focus on the largest group. For example, these might be assembly-line workers at a factory or computer programmers in a software company, or sales or service representatives in an insurance company.

The distribution of core jobs in the completed interviews was 14.3 percent professional/technical; 19.0 percent sales; 6.0 percent clerical; 18.3 percent service; and 42.3 percent blue collar.

Dependent Variables

Data were collected on the following activities and programs: direct provision of day care on site, provision of day care off-site, employer (not tax-based) financial subsidies to pay for day care, donations to local day-care facilities in return for slots, full-time work/family staff, work/family workshops during the working day, day-care referral systems (e.g., toll-free numbers provided by employers), elder-care referral systems, and flexible hours. For each of these programs and/or policies, the survey asked whether services were currently offered and, if not, whether there were definite plans to provide them within two years, whether they might be provided in the future, and whether the establishment had decided against the service. The distribution of responses is shown in Table 1.

From Table 1 it is apparent that work/family programs are less widespread than the popular press might lead one to believe. Nonetheless, a substantial fraction of employers provide programs at the cheaper end of the spectrum (e.g., workshops), and a large fraction offer flexible hours. To get a rough sense of how this distribution compares with other surveys, it is possible to compare these patterns with those found in the Department of Labor’s 1987 survey of establishments with 10 or more employees (Hayghe, 1988). That survey found that 5 percent of establishments provided financial services of the sort identified in the first three rows of Table 1, whereas 7.8 percent of establishments in the
## Table 1

**Distribution of Work/Family Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Offer now</th>
<th>Definite plans to offer within 2 years</th>
<th>May offer</th>
<th>Have decided not to offer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-site day care paid or subsidized by employer</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-site day care paid or subsidized by employer</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-care subsidies paid by employer to employees</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-care donations to local providers in return for slots for employees</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-care referrals</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A full-time work/family staff employee</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops on work/family issues</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder-care referral</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible hours</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey of American Establishments.

The current survey offered at least one of these programs. The differences in sampling frames and the four-year gap between the two surveys make exact comparison impossible, but clearly the results are roughly consistent.

The programs listed in Table 1 are diverse with respect to their costs to the employer and the level of benefits they deliver to employees. Some may be complements, while others (e.g., on- and off-site day-care centers) may be substitutes. In addition, programs such as flextime may be provided for reasons other than work/family problems. As a result of these complexities, there is no single obvious dependent variable. The central dependent variable reported here, therefore, is an index (sum), which is the sum of the number of the programs listed in Table 1 that are offered by the establishment. This sum can range from zero to nine. The Cronbach's alpha for the index is .75. The model is estimated with ordinary least squares. The findings reported below are robust to alternative estimation techniques and alternative formulations of the dependent variable.¹

### Independent Variables

This section presents variables from the survey used to operationalize and test the explanations and hypotheses developed above. The variables described below apply to the entire establishment, unless it is specifically indicated that they were asked only of the core job.

#### Practical explanations

The survey asked about the actual difficulties establishments experience as a result of their employees' family situations. Four separate areas were identified—tardiness or absenteeism (*absent*), turnover (*turnover*), recruitment difficulties (*recruit*), and refusal to relocate (*relocate*)—and for each of these, the variable measure is the response on a 5-point scale to the following question: ‘‘I will now ask about four labor force concerns. For each of these please tell me how serious are the difficulties which are attributable to family issues.’’ The interviewer then asked, in turn, about tardiness/absenteeism,
turnover, refusal to relocate, and difficulty in recruiting important employees. The scale for each question was "not serious," "slightly serious," "moderately serious," "very serious," and "extremely serious."

The establishment was also asked how difficulties associated with work/family conflicts were expected to evolve. The question read: "Looking ahead five years do you expect that the impact of family issues upon work performance will (compared to now) cause more difficulties, about the same level of difficulties, or less difficulties?" The variable future measures the response of the establishment on this 3-point scale.

The natural expectation is a positive relationship between work/family programs and reports of workplace problems due to work/family difficulties. In the absence of such a positive relationship, however, a strong defender of the practical hypothesis might still argue that if work/family programs were implemented for practical reasons and were effective in eliminating problems, then the contemporaneous correlation of reported problems and programs need not be positive. But even if this were true, the practical hypothesis can still be tested by seeing if reported difficulties are positively correlated with plans to implement work/family programs in the near future among those establishments that currently have no such programs in place. Since the yet-to-be implemented programs have had no opportunity to eliminate the difficulties, one should unambiguously expect positive coefficients on the variables measuring difficulties. Therefore, I also report below the results of models that use as the dependent variable definite plans to develop work/family programs in the future.

In addition to measuring these variables, the survey asked about the percentage of the establishments’ core employees who were women. Given the current distribution of family responsibilities in most American households, one would expect that the higher the fraction of core employees who are women (female), the greater would be the need and demand for work/family programs.²

The link to internal labor markets. Hypothesis 2 proposed that establishments with well-developed internal labor markets would be more likely to provide work/family programs. Three variables, each of which is common in the empirical literature on internal labor markets, were used to assess this relationship. The first variable, ladder, measures where the establishment is on a 5-point scale assessing the extent of preference for insiders in filling job openings (the value of 5 indicates that such a preference is extremely important). This variable therefore measures whether ports of entry are limited in the establishment (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). The second variable, seniority, is a similarly structured variable that measures the extent to which seniority is used as the criterion for determining which insider gets promoted to fill vacancies. The use of seniority is common in both union and nonunion settings (Abraham and Medoff, 1984) and is characteristic of the traditional form of elaborated internal labor markets (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). The two foregoing variables capture aspects of the promotion or job-ladder system of the establishment and

² The results are unchanged when the percentage of all employees who are women is used instead of the percentage of core employees.
are similar to measures of internal labor markets used by Pfeffer and Cohen (1984), who used a scale measuring job ladders as the central test for the presence or absence of internal labor markets. The final variable is the presence or absence of a human resources department (HR). This variable, or variants of it, is very widely used as a proxy of the formalization of rules and procedures in internal labor markets (Cohen and Pfeffer, 1986; Baron and Bielby, 1986). It is also a central variable in the institutionalization literature, because it is taken to represent the channel by which institutional pressures are transmitted to the firm (Edelman, 1990; Sutton et al., 1994) and as an indicator of political pressure within the organization to adopt certain policies (Cohen and Pfeffer, 1986). HR takes the value of 1 if the establishment had a human resources department, defined as a person or group of persons whose only responsibility was human resource issues.

**Link to high-commitment work systems.** Hypothesis 3 proposed that the adoption of work/family programs is linked to the implementation of high-commitment employment systems. There is no accepted definition or measurement of high-commitment work systems, both because the academic literature is not well developed and because the actual practices of firms that by common consent are high-commitment nonetheless vary. Therefore, a variety of different measures were used. One variable, *commit*, measures the extent to which the establishment seeks a committed labor force relative to other goals. To develop an anchored scale, the surveyors asked the respondent to assign a value of 100 points to the goal of limiting the growth of wage and benefit costs over the next five years. Then the respondent was asked to assign points to several other objectives relative to the limitation of wage and benefit costs. One of these objectives was “obtaining or maintaining a committed and cooperative workforce over the next five years.” The variable *commit* is the number of points assigned to this objective (relative to the 100 points for limiting wage growth). The mean of this variable, 193, implies that the average establishment believes that obtaining a committed workforce is more important than limiting wage growth by a factor of 1.93. The second variable (*discretion*) captures the extent of employee discretion in carrying out work assignments. The variable indicates where on a 5-point scale the establishment is in response to a question about the extent of discretion core employees have in deciding “the best way to accomplish their assignments” (the value of 5 indicates complete discretion).

The final two variables in this series are measures of the existence and penetration of two practices—problem-solving groups (*groups*) and total quality management (*TQM*)—that are most associated with high-commitment work systems. The interviewer defined each practice for the respondent. The definitions used were, for problem-solving groups/quality circles: “Quality programs where employees are involved in problem solving”; and, for total quality management: “Quality control approach that emphasizes the importance of communications, feedback, and teamwork.” Data were
collected on whether any core employees were involved in each of these practices and, if so, what percentage was involved. The percentage of "core" employees involved in each practice ranges from 0 to 100.

Control Variables

I included a variable, HiWage, an indicator of whether the establishment pays above-market wages, to control for skill level as well as to control for the possibility that benefits such as work/family programs are simply a form of rent sharing (i.e., sharing surplus returns, with surplus being defined as profits higher than the competitive rate of return). Employers that have slack resources may choose, for one of several reasons, to share those resources in the form of higher benefits. Managers may simply feel better on moral grounds for sharing the surplus or sharing wealth, and creating a more comfortable atmosphere may reduce supervisory tensions and ease managers’ work loads. Rent sharing may also reduce employee unrest that might otherwise result in a variety of outcomes that are undesirable. By including an indicator of rent sharing in the form of above-market wages, I held this factor constant and was able to examine the considerations more central to the arguments developed in this paper. The variable used is whether the establishment had a policy to pay core employees a wage above that paid to comparable employees in other firms in the same geographic area. This measure is preferable to the actual wage level of the core job, since that would vary by the occupational group of the core job and hence would simply function as a proxy for occupation.

In a similar spirit, I included a variable (benefits) that takes the value of 1 if the establishment provides any level of employer contribution for each of the following conventional benefits: health insurance, pension, sick pay, and disability pay. The percentage of establishments meeting this test was 55.3 percent. This variable can be thought of as similar to the wage variable: It controls for the generosity or ability of the establishment to pay and thus enabled me to isolate considerations that are unique to work/family programs.\footnote{In unreported regressions, industry dummy variables were included. To the extent that there are relevant omitted variables that are correlated with industry (e.g., technology or wage levels not fully captured by the wage variable), the industry variables would pick these up, but the inclusion of industry variables had no effect.}

A substantial literature demonstrates a positive relationship between elaboration of personnel rules and organizational size (Blau and Schoenherr, 1971; Child and Mansfield, 1972). In addition, size may be positively correlated with benefits to the extent that there are economies of scale in benefit provision (Knoke, 1993). The size variables used are both for the establishment (lnSize) and for the larger organization, if there is one, of which it is part (lnFirm). Both size variables are included in their natural log form. For the larger organization, or branch-plant variable, I created a measure that takes the value of 0 if there is no larger organization and the log of its size if there is one.\footnote{The results are not sensitive to this particular formulation. Two logical alternatives are a simple dummy variable for branch-plant status or a dummy for the presence of a larger organization, as well as the interaction of the dummy and the size of the larger organization. No results reported in this paper change when these specifications are used.} Because some scholars have argued that current employment and other organizational practices are characteristic of the period in which the organization was founded (Stinchcombe, 1965), I also included the age of the establishment. It is also important to control for union status, although the impact of unionization is likely to be ambiguous. In recent years many

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major American employers have developed personnel policies explicitly aimed at avoiding unionization, and taken together these policies seem to constitute a coherent system (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie, 1986). It is certainly plausible to believe that provision of work/family programs, which in financial terms are relatively cheap compared with other elements of the benefits package, such as health care or pension, fits well with this strategy. At best, however, the union avoidance story can only be partially true, since work/family programs have emerged in unionized as well as nonunionized settings. In particular, unions may be effective voice mechanisms that put forward employees’ demands for the programs. In this case, the expected effect would be positive. In the models that follow, the control variable union takes the value of 1 if any employees in the establishment were covered by collective bargaining.

RESULTS

The means and intercorrelations of the variables are provided in Table 2. The regression results are presented in Table 3, which reports standardized beta coefficients for the variables and enters each group of variables in blocks.

Results for the control variables show that the presence of a union is never significant. One possibility is that the union-avoidance motive and the union-voice effect offset each other, leaving essentially a zero net impact. The other possibility is that unions are simply irrelevant. The size of the establishment and the size of the larger organization (if there is one) are nearly always significant. The importance of being a branch plant (i.e., having a larger organization) suggests the presence of the kind of mimetic or coercive pressures often cited in the institutional literature. It is also worth noting, however, that the importance of the establishment size variable diminishes considerably with the introduction of additional variables, while the importance of the branch-plant variable is unaffected. This implies that size, but not branch-plant status, has much of its effect via the channel of the other variables.

The benefits variable is never significant. This nonfinding is important because it implies that work/family benefits are not simply proxies for benefits policies in general. The wage variable is significant in all but the equations that include the high-commitment work system variables. This implies that paying above-market wages is associated with both high-commitment organizations and work/family programs but that high-commitment work organizations are prior to above-market wages in explaining work/family programs. It is apparent from the results that support for the practical arguments of hypotheses 1a and 1b is mixed. The variable measuring the percentage of the core labor force that is female is positive and significant in all specifications and retains its magnitude as additional variables are added. Of the variables measuring particular problems and future difficulties, only the recruitment variable is significant, and it is negative and ceases to be significant once measures of high-commitment work systems are taken into account. Goodstein (1994) reported more support for practical arguments than that found here, but his variable, the
Table 2

Means and Correlations of the Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
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<td>1.09 -</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Absent</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Turnover</td>
<td>2.21</td>
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<td>.26</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Recruit</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.37</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>7. Future</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. TQM</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Discretion</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td>11. Commit</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<td>.08</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.18</td>
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<td>13. Seniority</td>
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<td>-.08</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td>14. HR</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<td>15. Union</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>.11</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
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<td>16. Age</td>
<td>24.47</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>17. InSize</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. InFirm</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<td>19. Wage</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Benefits</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.26</td>
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</table>

employers’ perceived benefits from implementing work/family programs, included not only concerns such as absenteeism and tardiness but also enhancing employee loyalty, i.e., the theme that underlies hypothesis 3.

As noted above, I reestimated the model for establishments that had no programs, using as the dependent variable a count of the number of work/family programs the establishment definitely planned to implement within two years (i.e., a count of the number of positive replies in the second column of Table 1). This formulation eliminates any ambiguity with respect to the expected sign for the practical problems. In this equation, none of the coefficients for the variables testing hypotheses 1a and 1b were significant, further undermining the practical explanation.

None of these equations include controls for which occupation is defined as the core occupation. In regressions not shown here, occupational controls were included (i.e., a series of dummy variables for which occupation was defined as the core). When these were included, the percentage of employees who were female lost significance, and the

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### Table 3
Regression on Work/Family Program Scale ($N = 552$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
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<td>Union</td>
<td>.006</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.015)</td>
<td>(.045)</td>
<td>(.080)</td>
<td>(.110)</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.50)</td>
<td>(1.40)</td>
<td>(1.10)</td>
<td>(1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InSize</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.06*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.10)</td>
<td>(2.60)</td>
<td>(1.40)</td>
<td>(1.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InFirm</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.10)</td>
<td>(5.60)</td>
<td>(5.60)</td>
<td>(5.30)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HiWage</td>
<td>.07**</td>
<td>.10**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.90)</td>
<td>(2.60)</td>
<td>(2.50)</td>
<td>(1.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.0005</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.89)</td>
<td>(1.00)</td>
<td>(0.55)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.10**</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.80)</td>
<td>(2.30)</td>
<td>(2.60)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.20)</td>
<td>(1.10)</td>
<td>(1.00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover</td>
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<td>.00007</td>
<td>-.03</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.02)</td>
<td>(.001)</td>
<td>(.67)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruit</td>
<td>-.06*</td>
<td>-.08*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.80)</td>
<td>(1.80)</td>
<td>(1.80)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relocate</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.66)</td>
<td>(.84)</td>
<td>(0.82)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.40)</td>
<td>(1.40)</td>
<td>(1.60)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ladder</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>-.007</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.21)</td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.22)</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>1.0*</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.10)</td>
<td>(1.80)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discretion</td>
<td>13**</td>
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<tr>
<td>TQM</td>
<td>(2.90)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Groups</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>-.37</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.00)</td>
<td>(0.86)</td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
<td>(1.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>$F$ (incremental contribution of additional variables)</td>
<td>2.64*</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>5.75**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.532)</td>
<td>(3.536)</td>
<td>(6.539)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$ (equation)</td>
<td>12.66**</td>
<td>7.75**</td>
<td>6.52**</td>
<td>6.56**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01.

*Beta coefficients are reported; t-statistics are in parentheses.

The pattern of the occupational dummies showed that establishments whose core employees are professional and technical workers are significantly more likely to provide work/family programs than establishments whose core employees are service workers, clerical, or blue-collar employees.

As an additional check on the possibility that work/family programs are directed primarily toward high-earning women, I reestimated the regression reported in column 4 with an additional variable, interaction of the HiWage and female, but the results were insignificant.

The findings on hypothesis 2, on the link to the presence of well-structured internal labor markets, are also quite mixed.
The addition of these variables adds very little to the explanatory power of the equation (the $F$-test for the inclusion of this group of variables is not significant). Only the human resources department variable is significant.

In contrast to the tepid support for the practical explanation and the ILM explanation, there is very strong support for the hypothesis that establishments that are seeking to implement high-commitment work systems are more likely to put into place work/family programs. As a group, the variables that assess this add considerably to the explanatory power of the model, as measured by the increment to the $R$-square statistic and the $F$-test for the explanatory power of this group. Because this group of variables was added last, any explanatory power that is shared by these and the prior groups of variables is fully attributed to the prior variables, and the incremental gain in explanatory power from the last group added is all the more impressive. In addition, the scales measuring the importance of commitment, the penetration of total quality management, and the extent of employee discretion are significant. The variable measuring the penetration of problem-solving groups is not significant, but this variable is correlated with total quality management, since problem-solving groups are typically an element of TQM programs.  

**DISCUSSION**

This paper is one of the few efforts to examine the adoption of work/family programs, and it is the first to do so by viewing these programs in the context of the firm's broader employment strategy. The most striking finding is that establishments that pursue so-called high-commitment work systems—measured by the overall employment goals espoused by the establishment, the amount of discretion provided to employees, and the adoption of specific work practices—are more likely to adopt work/family programs. The result is robust across several alternative dependent variables and specifications and to controls for ILM structures, wage and other benefit levels, and more narrowly defined practical explanations for the adoption of work/family benefits.

One limitation is that this paper deals only with private-sector establishments and that the considerations that underlie adoption of work/family programs in the government and nonprofit sectors may be quite different from those discussed here, although Goodstein (1994) did not find a significant difference in the determinants of adoption in private and public organizations. Similarly, how the problems of commitment and control are dealt with in smaller private-sector establishments may also vary from the models developed here. Hence, while this paper has strongly established the cross-sectional link between the employment strategies of firms and the adoption of work/family programs, much more can be learned by tracking their progress in the future in samples similar to that employed here, as well as in organizations that differ in important respects from those represented in this paper.

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6 A referee expressed concern that work/family programs are likely to be programs that are implemented at the behest of headquarters, and hence the foregoing analysis that related establishment conditions to adoption may be misleading. To test this question, I reestimated the full model in column 4, limiting the sample to single-establishment companies, those not part of a larger organization. In this model, the results for the high-commitment work system variables were unchanged. What did change was that the human resource department variable became insignificant, while the union and age variables were positive and significant. There was no additional support for the practical model.
Work/Family Programs

In addition, while this paper examines only one form of benefits, the results raise, though they do not resolve, important questions about the evolving nature of the employment relationship. Reports of substantial reductions in other benefits, notably health care and pensions, suggest that American firms are not moving to the extreme case of the Japanese "welfare firm," but the spread of new forms of work organization and their linkage to family benefits policies nonetheless imply that a new model for organizing and motivating the labor force is emerging.

This is not the first time that American firms have sought to use benefits to gain worker commitment. An analogy is the American Plan, or welfare capitalism, early in this century. During this era, leading firms established a system of benefits and personnel policies that, taken together, constituted an employment system with a distinctive character. The personnel policies included formalizing hiring, training foremen, and creating a personnel department (Jacoby, 1985). The benefits policies included life insurance, company housing, company schools, social work, and recreational programs (Brandes, 1970). The major objective of this system, according to its leading historian, was as "a protective device aimed largely at [avoiding] trade-unionism" (Brandes, 1970: 32). The central point is that the benefits programs were an integral part of this effort. Through them, firms sought to tie the employee to the firm and to create the illusion, if not the reality, of community. It is striking that one of the most prominent new benefits today, work/family policies, is similar in its linkages to efforts to obtain employee commitment.

This paper, then, directly raises issues about the links between work systems, benefits, and the nature of the commitment between employer and employee. An optimist might read the results as suggesting that at least a substantial minority of firms are both introducing work systems that empower employees and taking more responsibility for the personal welfare of employees. A pessimist would point to cuts in other benefits—not documented in this paper and which may or may not be occurring in the same firms that are expanding work/family programs—and argue that the analogy with the American Plan suggests that work/family benefits are being introduced to gain a one-sided and uneven commitment that is in the narrow interests of employers. This debate mirrors the broader one about how we should assess high-commitment work systems from the perspective of employee welfare. Are these systems genuine improvements, or are they clever devices to speed up work and use commitment as a form of self-supervision and regulation? This paper contributes to this discussion, but clearly much more work remains to resolve this question.

While the paper succeeds in showing how work/family benefits fit into the broad context of the firm's employment strategy, important questions remain unresolved. There are, for example, several hints—the significance of the human
resource department variable and the importance of being a branch plant—that institutional considerations may be important. The institutional literature suggests that early in the history of the adoption of innovative programs, the kind of interest-based considerations emphasized in this paper (e.g., increasing employee commitment and adopting high-performance work systems) are likely to be important while, over time, the forces of mimicry and institutional coercion become increasingly salient (Tolbert and Zucker, 1983). The institutional literature also recognizes that firms may vary in their response to the pressures for mimicry (Oliver, 1991). It seems clear that work/family programs are still in a relatively early stage of adoption, measured by their rate of adoption compared with other benefits such as pensions or health insurance, and the research reported here is not designed to profile change. Nonetheless, an important question, and one deserving further attention, is how the balance of factors that lie behind program adoption will change over time.

Another possibility is that, rather than being institutionalized, work/family programs will prove simply to be another human resources fad. It is not at all apparent from the survey data whether these programs will in fact spread and take root. Widespread layoffs and restructuring may undermine efforts to introduce high-commitment work systems, and because of the important links between these efforts and work/family programs, the latter may also be at risk. At a more prosaic level, the programs face competing pressures for resources and the attention of their internal advocates, personnel specialists. As a practical matter, human resource staff can only be aggressive internally around a limited range of issues. Field interviews I conducted suggest that attention is now shifting to other concerns, such as downsizing policies, health, AIDS, or disabilities.

Other human resource innovations such as the quality of worklife movement (QWL) have seemingly gained the same foothold as have work/family programs, only to fade eventually. Goodman (1980), who examined the fate of QWL experiments founded in the 1970s by the National Commission on Productivity and the Quality of Work, found that none had survived by 1980. Other research found similar results for quality circles started in the early 1980s (Lawler and Mohrman, 1987). The relatively low rate, shown in Table 1 above, at which firms that have no programs plan to add at least one in the next two years and, for that matter, the moderate rate at which firms that have at least one program plan to add others reinforce this concern. Nonetheless, these considerations are not advanced to make the case that work/family programs are a passing fad. They may turn out to have considerable staying power. Certainly the objective facts about shifts in labor supply and changing views of families suggest that these policies have a robust future. In addition, the association of these programs with large and presumably powerful firms will help. The performance gains that considerable research shows are associated with high-commitment work systems also suggests that efforts to establish these may survive the current economic climate.

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Blauf, Peter, and Richard Schoenherr

Brandes, Stuart

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