5 characteristics of the new ideal worker

For organizations to thrive in the 21st century, the needs of the new ideal worker must be understood. That means grappling with questions of work-life balance, as well as gender and leadership, in a meaningful way.

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- **The old "ideal" employee — who was, presumably, a man wholly dedicated to work, putting family and personal life on the back burner — is no longer as beneficial to today's organizations.**
- **The 21st century's ideal employee is someone who reconciles work, family and private aspects of life, thus contributing more to all of them — including**

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the professional realm.

- **Increasingly, both diversity and equality are deemed important to companies for the benefits they bring.**

Evidence is mounting: the old vision of "ideal" workers — who give 100% to their employers, without family interference — isn't actually ideal for 21st century organizations. In fact, the old model of full devotion to work has a negative influence on performance, research says. Now it's time to talk about "the new ideal worker," someone who is able to achieve a better work-life balance and bring more to the various tables in their lives.

In *The new ideal worker*, editors Mireia Las Heras, Nuria Chinchilla and Marc Grau gather research on work-life balance as well as on gender and leadership. The academic papers gathered in this book were presented at the 7th biannual International Conference of Work & Family as well as the 1st biannual International Conference of Women and Leadership, both organized by IESE's International Center for Work and Family and supported by its Carmina Roca and Rafael-Pich Aguilera Women and Leadership Chair.

A global view

More than 100 scholars, representing more than 25 nationalities, participated in the IESE conferences, presenting research focused on such countries as Brazil, Canada, Chile, Germany, India, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Chapters include qualitative and quantitative studies set in these countries, as well as theoretical explorations of topics such as the flexibility-availability paradox facing the new ideal worker, with its potential for blurring boundaries, as both flexibility and availability increase.

The book, directed at practitioners as well as academics, seeks to define and address the needs of today's workforce, looking at the role of technology and corporate policies.

In parallel, it explores discrimination and equality, the latter of which is ultimately for the good of organizations and the people in them.

From an "ideal" worker to real people

In the past, talk of the "ideal" worker might conjure up an image of a white man who began his professional career in his early 20s and continued working without interruption for the next 40 years, usually at the same company. He prioritized work over the family, who was primarily cared for by someone else (usually his wife). His status grew along with the size of his office and the number of business trips he took.

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This outdated view has been pushed aside by another. Here are five features of the new ideal worker:

- A man or a woman, of any ethnicity, race, age, disability or other status.
- Their career starts at any age, moving into and out of the labor market as needed.
- They bring (and draw on) their knowledge and experiences from past jobs and other spheres of life, including social, sporting, family and cultural realms.
- They may prioritize work or family or something else that is vital to them, depending on the personal circumstances and stage of life.
- They put more stock in feeling that they are contributing, part of a team and learning, and less in status.

In short, the new ideal is more inclusive and lets people do more. Blurring the boundaries between the various aspects of life can bring more value to companies as well as to the human beings who work in them.

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