

# WORKPLACE OPTIONS



**Fitting together  
the workplace and  
personal life puzzle**

**Work-life policies and programs  
can have a positive impact on your  
business' bottom line:**

- **increased productivity**
- **reduced absenteeism**
- **reduced turnover**
- **increased job satisfaction**
- **increased job loyalty**

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## Trendy Topic or Competitive Advantage?

**F**or years society has considered a person's work life to be separate from family life. It has become increasingly clear that the demands of one may "spill over" into the other and lead to difficulty in balancing both work and personal life. Others believe the underlying theme is that work and personal life are independent of each other.

During the 1990s, this theory of independence has been challenged. The new term being used is interdependence. Business people who deny this interdependence are more likely to place their bottom line at risk. Today's thinking has shifted to examining the contexts of the workplace and an individual's life. It means getting beyond individual behaviors and looking at the bigger picture.

As one stress management speaker put it, "I'm tired of talking to employees about managing stress, balancing work and family, prioritizing and taking care. The fact is that none of what I say will matter if it flies in the face of the business they work for and the policies and supports provided to honestly manage the stress and responsibilities in their lives."

The workplace and the employee's personal life are no longer opposing forces. It's time to focus on the interface between the two. Some will brush it off as a passing trend—or a fad based on the latest babble from researchers and the popular press. Others will view it as an opportunity to create a competitive advantage for their business. Where will you position your business on this issue as you face the next century?

The most successful growth-oriented companies demonstrate a strategic view of the situation. The workplace and one's personal life are not opposing or separate issues. They necessarily touch one another, often profoundly. The solution is to build consideration of personal life issues into job design, work processes and your organizational structure, just as you would consider marketing concerns or engineering input.

The New Economic Equation Project, which convened conferences of national leaders and focus groups of individuals around the country, suggests the answer. The report reflects the understanding that a thriving economy rests on successful integration of people's work, family and community. The New Economic Equation Report is available for \$5 from the Radcliffe Public Policy Institute at Radcliffe College, 10 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA. 02138.

The report includes the following **10-Step Guide** for employers to use as you weigh these important issues.



# **10-Step Guide For Thought And Discussion About The Interdependent 21st Century Workplace**

Use these questions as a catalyst for discussion.

1. Does your workplace offer all employees of the organization a livable wage that enables them to meet the physical and educational needs of their families?
2. Does your workplace provide all employees of the organization opportunities to participate through committees/teams or unions in decisions on how, when and where to do their work?
3. Does your workplace offer paid or unpaid family leave policies to enable all employees, men and women, to care for children, elderly relatives and/or disabled family members?
4. Does your workplace offer flexible schedules that help all employees to meet personal life responsibilities?
5. Does your workplace provide opportunities for employees at all levels of the organization to participate in community activities?
6. Does your workplace allow all employees to have access to portable health insurance and retirement plans?
7. Does your workplace provide education and training programs to allow each worker to develop and maintain knowledge and skills essential for the changing economy?
8. Does your workplace offer attractive alternatives to full-time jobs—such as job sharing, reduced hours or working from home—that come with benefits and options for promotion?
9. Does your workplace provide an environment that is safe and secure and free from discrimination for all employees?
10. Does your workplace encourage people at all levels of the organization to put into action work/family/community policies?

The New Economic Equation  
Radcliffe Public Policy Institute



# Business Success Stories .....

**C**an business policies and programs really make a difference? What are some of the results noted by businesses? Are there examples of policies and programs that really save a business money? These questions are often the bottom line for businesses that attempt to address the workplace and private life interface.

The following examples provide evidence of success stories. They are the most compelling reasons for giving attention to work-life issues.

- Companies considering work-life responses such as flextime, job sharing, home-based offices, telecommuting and dependent care look for proof of the economic benefit of doing so. Business case studies support the conclusion that **workplace-private life interference is costly to companies** in terms of retention, recruitment, productivity, absenteeism and turnover, and that **providing support improves measures in these areas** (Anfuso, 1995; Bowen & Pittman, 1995).
- The average rate of annual turnover for all American companies was 13 percent when research indicated that lowered turnover rates were associated with the implementation of work-family initiatives. For example, in a small textile manufacturing company in the Southwest, which was experiencing 40 percent turnover, turnover, the rate dropped to 7 percent after the first year of initiation of a childcare program. **For every \$1 spent, the company yielded \$6 in cost containment** (Vanderkolk & Young, 1991).
- Unpublished data from the Families and Work Institute indicate that work-family programs generally have a greater impact on retention of employees than on recruitment. **Work-family supports were rated 14th out of 16 reasons for taking a job, but the same supports were ranked 6th out of 16 reasons for staying in a job** (Friedman et al., 1993b). In another study, 25 percent of mothers were found to leave their jobs for family reasons (Hofferth et al., 1991).
- Employee retention is a particularly important issue when one considers the relatively high cost of recruitment and training of new employees. One estimate indicates that **it costs an organization three to four times more to replace an employee on parental leave than to hold the job open for the employee's return** (Friedman et al., 1993a). Johnson and Johnson research found users of work-family benefits were absent less, 71 percent reported the programs were important in their decision to stay and 57 percent would recommend the company to others (Seitel, Fingerman, & Kieger, 1996).



# Commitment and Corporate Culture

- Studies at John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance and a Commerce Clearinghouse Survey found **absenteeism was cut in half and savings were as much as \$668 per employee each year** when work-life benefits were put in place. The Detroit office of Deloitte & Touche found its **benefits were responsible for a turnover drop from 40 percent to 10 percent.**
- Waste Management started its programs and evaluated 50 participants along with a control group of 130 randomly selected employees. The company found the results to exceed its hopes in real dollar savings. Half the participants had considered leaving yet only 22 percent did after the program began. Waste Management documented **savings of \$1,600 per participant through productivity, reduced absenteeism, lost time from work and benefit claims.** The savings of \$1,600 was offset by an average cost of \$200 per person (Seitel et al., 1996).
- Work-family programs have become even more important as more states develop and experiment with welfare reform initiatives. A longitudinal study of participants in a welfare reform program found that single mothers who were able to obtain dependable, high-quality child care were more likely to successfully complete their job training and/or maintain their employment (Meyers, 1993). Workplace supports, such as paid sick leave, employer-provided health insurance, employer-provided or subsidized child care, and co-worker support, **were positively related to single mothers reducing their reliance on welfare as a source of household income** (Parker, 1994).

- Zimney (1994) concluded that **workers withhold their discretionary effort when they think employers do not see eye-to-eye with them about what is really important.** His study of what drives the commitment of workers indicates the **number who say "having a job that doesn't interfere with personal life is important" has doubled since 1992.** This is an emerging priority for American employees. Managers now face the task of motivating employees who are stressed by pressures to maintain their share of a shrinking pie while preserving enough energy to deal with demands outside of work. Company size was found to impact commitment levels among employees. Commitment is higher among companies with fewer than 100 employees than among larger companies. **The higher the employee's commitment, the stronger the tendency to work hard and to increase output.** When commitment declines, discretionary effort is withheld, productivity decreases and the incidence of non-supportive behaviors rises.
- Starrels (1992) found corporate culture to be one of the most important themes in work-family research. For example, having a supportive supervisor was found to have about the same effect on stress as having a supportive spouse. **Supervisor support was linked to lower stress-related health problems and less stress in general.**



■ Research has identified job satisfaction, productivity and turnover as relevant in predicting employee responses. Supervisor support and supervisor training were related to changes in the effects on the value of the job, attitude toward the job, job problems and job stress. Overall job satisfaction was also improved when supervisor support was present (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982). Supervisor training and positive relationships with employees were found to be critical. **Policies are ineffective if supervisors do not support them.** Merck was the first business to include this type of training, and many have followed (Galinsky & Stein, 1990).

■ Galinsky and Stein's (1990) research used a scale of seven indicators to define an accommodating workplace (sick leave, disability support, parental leave, supportive supervisor, health insurance, flexible scheduling and child care assistance). The women in the study who worked for more accommodating companies were found to be more satisfied with their jobs, took fewer sick days and worked more on their own. In addition, 78 percent returned to the workplace after a child was born compared to 52 percent who worked in unaccommodating environments. In the end, **employers who were more accommodating were more likely to experience the same in return from their employees** (Galinsky & Stein, 1990).

■ Mergenhagen (1994) observed that during the past decade, **job benefits have become more personal.** More than one-third of employed caregivers lost time from work because of caregiving duties. Retirement was noted as one of the top five stress producers. Changes in benefits reflect these employee concerns as witnessed by

retirement planning programs and child care support from employers. In the end, all employers share the same goal: keeping employees productive in times of stress.

■ A Cambridge Institute study concluded that **workers' commitment grow when they see their employers acknowledging the importance of personal life issues.** Another commitment study by professors at Indiana University and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee assessed the impact of parental leave, flex schedules and child care assistance on organizational attachment. Results indicated greater commitment to employers among employees who felt their employers cared. They were more willing to stay late and work extra days. They were more loyal.



# Productivity .....

**A** number of studies have shown that productivity is negatively affected by the lack of work-life support. To date, however, far more research has examined how productivity is negatively affected by unresolved family problems than how it is positively affected by company efforts to support the family.

- One of the earliest studies found family problems to cause worry and stress at work resulting in loss of concentration and the inability of employees to perform at the expected level (Katz & Piotrkowski, 1983). In another study, 25 percent of employees with children under age 12 were found to experience performance breakdowns two to five times in a three-month period. Such breakdowns were linked to higher absenteeism and tardiness and lower concentration on the job (Friedman, 1991). In fact, one-third of employees with children spent time worrying about the care of their children on the job. And **absenteeism for both men and women has been found to be more related to family conditions and economic status than to motivation and commitment** (Galinsky et al., 1991).
- **Lower absenteeism as well as improved recruitment and productivity seem to be the most important outcomes** for organizations that initiate work-life policies (Galinsky et al., 1991; Holmes & Friedman, 1995). Improving profitability means eliminating factors that limit productivity such as absenteeism and turnover. It also means conveying a message of responsiveness to employees. They need to know they are valued members of the business team. Corporate culture and image are reflected to consumers, and good corporate citizenship pays off as consumers become more savvy about their choices.
- Merck moved the field ahead by figuring all the costs of losing a valued employee and found **it cost 150 percent of an exempt salary and 75 percent of a non-exempt employee's wages**. Suddenly, the cost of turnover moved into the millions and retention efforts became a priority.
- Families and Work Institute found **the cost of parental leave is less than replacing employees** (32 percent of annual salary vs. 150 percent for replacement for managers and 75 percent for non-managers).
- GMAC planned to improve profitability by reducing absenteeism, turnover and lateness, and **within five years went from 43 percent turnover to 7.5 percent**.
- Fel-Pro is a smaller company with a long list of family-friendly efforts. Its studies show employees made good use of benefits (72 percent had used at least one) and believed the benefits are valuable; **77 percent agreed the benefit package is a major reason they stay**, and 81 percent perceived supervisors as helpful. In the end, these employees had better work performance than those not using the available programs.
- A study by the Commission on Skills of the American Workforce found too many American companies were using short-term solutions to remain competitive, such as cutting wages, exporting production to low-wage countries and automating skilled jobs rather than investing in people. The ultimate result will be lower standards of living. The study urged investing in better wages and training for high-performance work systems with supports. Former Labor Secretary Robert Reich has concluded that **treating employees as assets to**



**be developed rather than costs to be cut is the surest way to productivity and profits** (Seitel et al., 1996).

- Quaker Oats surveyed 1,100 employees about the impact of family concerns and responsibilities on work performance and found **90 percent of employees spent some time during work attending to family and personal concerns**, 60 percent were absent from work an average of 3 days a year due to children's illness, 33 percent were absent 3 days due to child care problems, and 40 percent were absent an average of 3.4 days due to responsibilities for elderly family members. In addition, 66 percent were late for work or left early because of child care problems and 50 percent because of elder care problems.
  - A survey of workers in Oregon, conducted by Portland State University, **found that fathers and mothers whose children cared for themselves (before and after school) were the workers most affected** on the job by days missed, lateness, interruptions and early departures. In fact, the **highest absenteeism rate was for men whose children were in self-care**.
  - Elder care problems among employees already cost businesses \$10 billion a year, and the percentage of workers with caregiving responsibilities will be 40 percent to 50 percent in the next five years, according to the Families and Work Institute. **The worries and distractions of elder care can be far more damaging and distracting in the workplace than child care issues**. This is exacerbated by the fact that one-third of employed caregivers live more than 100 miles from their parents, and 25 percent changed careers or took less demanding jobs or part-time jobs as a result of elder care responsibilities. **Caregivers are ab-**
- sent one and one-half times more than the average, and productivity losses amount to about \$2,500 per caregiving employee**, according to Andre Scharlach, professor of aging at the University of California at Berkeley.
- A study by St. Paul Fire & Marine Insurance Company found **bosses are one of the chief sources of workplace stress**. A "bad boss" lowered productivity, diminished quality and increased absenteeism. Of those with "bad supervisors," 76 percent mentioned quitting and 65 percent said productivity could be improved. Effects of poor supervisors led to strain in relationships at home and even increased alcohol consumption. In fact, **employees indicated that work, more than personal issues, affected home life**. Factors that contribute to a low-stress environment included teamwork, sense that everyone is contributing equally, "fair" treatment, manageable workload and balance in their lives with time spent relaxing with family or friends (Seitel et al., 1996).
  - In general, **several factors were found to be associated with productivity-related problems in a review completed by a national panel of experts:**
    1. Terms of employment, such as number of hours and weekends and the flexibility in work schedules and locations.
    2. Availability of services for family members such as care arrangements for children, elderly and handicapped members and short-term care when regular arrangements break down.
    3. Extent to which family considerations are recognized as legitimate in the workplace (Ferber & Farrell, 1991).



# Flexibility, Leave and Dependent Care

- **The most commonly requested support by workers is flexibility** (Friedman et al., 1993b; Galinsky & Stein, 1990). Flexibility relates to job autonomy and control in the work environment. A sense of control is important to the employee's ability to navigate the work-life interface.
- **Personal leave and dependent care are also linked to reduced stress** (Bureau of National Affairs, 1990; Friedman et al., 1993b). Workers are given the resources to solve problems rather than having someone else to solve the problems for them. Supports range from referrals to child care options to funded on-site care. Elder care and child care were cited as major problems facing employees in Galinsky and Stein's study (1990), and companies cited commitment to these work-family issues to improve recruitment and retention, increase morale, reduce stress and keep up with the competition.
- Seyler et al. (1995) studied the role of employer-supported child care benefits and under which conditions these benefits are offered. Their study concluded that the **benefits offered were related to size of the company and the number of women in the workforce.**
- A 1990 study by Robert Half International, an executive recruiting firm, showed **more than half of 500 men polled would accept as much as a 25 percent cut in salary if it meant they could spend more time with their families and 45 percent would refuse a promotion** if the alternative was less time (Seitel et al., 1996).
- Three major studies of company perception of benefits and corporate child care found that offering such benefits resulted in an **increased ability to attract employees, lower absenteeism, improved employee attitudes/morale and positive public relations** (Galinsky & Stein, 1990).



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# Business as (un)usual

**I**t's no longer business as usual for employers or employees. During the past 10 years a significant amount of interest and research has emerged to bring the issues of the workplace to the forefront. Is it possible to meet both employer objectives of profitability and growth at the same time as meeting employee objectives of financial security and personal life balance?

There's a wealth of information from the business sector about increasing profitability and a wealth of information about coping with stress from the human development/mental health sector. But is there a link between the two? Is it possible to address one and positively impact the other?

- The current challenges for business include competing for well-qualified employees, providing these employees with a rewarding and supportive work environment, and coping with changes in demographics.
- Compared to past decades, American people are:
  - older (average of 34 in 1994)
  - far more diverse in ethnicity
  - more highly educated (degrees beyond high school)
  - more diverse in family composition
  - less loyal to their employers
  - faced with changed sequences in their lives and have fewer points of certainty (college from 18-22, first child by 23, retirement at 62, ).

What demands will this population place on America in the next two decades? People regularly make reference to the huge increase in services for the elderly that will be required as the number of workers per retiree drops from 17 in 1970 to 3.4 in 1995 and 2 in 2015. It's easy to predict business will not be as usual. Workers may have to work until age 70 and the Medicare crisis will escalate. Society as a whole and each individual will need to take all of this into consideration and adjust their life planning.

It's not quite as easy to see the long-term consequences of these challenges. For example, businesses in general struggle to deal with the aging workforce and unprepared new entrants to the workforce.



Recently, a study of Midwest employers and their employees asked questions about these workplace and personal life issues. The results provide information for businesses. The clear road map has not been developed, but the guide emerging from this research is a step in the right direction—if the destination is a quality workplace, quality workforce and a quality community and family environment for everyone.

## Employer Perspective

**T**he Midwest study examined both employer and employee perspectives. Employers were asked about existing policies related to flexibility, personal/family leave, dependent care, corporate culture and economic benefits. The most common benefit available to the majority of employees (from entry level to management) was personal/family leave. About half of the employers responded that flexibility is available including flextime and flex-workplace arrangements. This was not consistently available to all employees within an organization.

The overall organizational climate was reason for concern as **less than 10 percent of the businesses surveyed had conducted any type of work-family needs assessment or offered supervisory training related to workplace and employee balance issues.**

A majority of employers reported a positive corporate culture reflecting their business as a good place to work with average economic benefits. **The good news was that employers perceived their business as positive workplaces and were aware of the importance of these issues. The disturbing news was that most of these positive supports were not available to all employees.** The issue of equal access to benefits was a concern to employees, and this issue conflicts with the employer perception of the workplace.

Flexibility in work time and workplace has surfaced as the most important policy in numerous research studies. The Midwest sample indicated about half of the businesses offered flexibility, but again equal access to flexibility was not available for the majority of employees. Economic benefits (salary, insurance) were average and provided inconsistently to all employees.



# Employee Perspective

One interesting finding from the employee study was that professionals, managers and administrators reported lower stress and health concerns, lower burnout, higher overall health status and higher abilities to cope with increased stress. Employees at this level have different experiences than those who work below them. Perhaps this group is able to take advantage of supports/policies that are unavailable to others, or it may be that this group can afford to purchase additional needed supports.

Employee issues such as burnout, job demands and satisfaction did contribute to turnover and the ability to hire or recruit employees. This was most evident among employees under age 40. In the end, workforce demographics such as the percent under 40, percent part time or percent professional employees predicted employee attitudes and behaviors.

# Employer-Employee Relationships

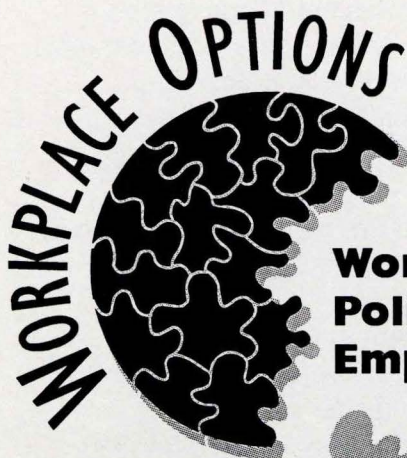
When employer surveys were compared with employee surveys, several strong messages emerged.

As flexibility increased there was a decrease in stress and health concerns due to the job. As the corporate culture became more positive, employees experienced less personal/family impact on the job and had higher overall health status, higher ability to cope with stress and higher work-family support from supervisors. The good news is this relationship exists in the Midwest despite national studies indicating more dissonance between employer and em-

ployee perceptions. The disturbing news is few employers in the Midwest recognize the potential for increased productivity and decreased turnover to be found by addressing these issues in their strategic business planning.

- Employee survey results indicated Midwest employees **experienced more stress and health concerns due to their jobs than they experienced due to their families.**
- Burnout and job demand were above average while job autonomy was low, a factor indicating little freedom or control in their job. Overall, **employees indicated their health and ability to cope with the stress was about average.**
- Employees reported supervisor support above average which was not consistent with other national workforce studies. This finding was particularly encouraging as **supervisor support has been found to be one of the most powerful predictors of worker attitudes and behavior.** Perhaps this is one of the reasons many people would like to work in the Midwest but can't due to the limited job opportunities. Overall, most employees indicated they were satisfied with their jobs.
- When asked if workers would feel resentful about their company providing benefits that they did not use or about occasionally helping co-workers with personal needs, little resentfulness was expressed. **When asked if they'd go out of their way to meet employer needs if their personal needs were accommodated, a majority agreed.**





## **Workplace and Personal Life Policies in the Midwest: Employer Survey**

### **Executive Summary**

Companies often compare themselves to other businesses in terms of products, earnings, productivity and innovation.

A new area of business concern – family friendliness or workplace and personal life balance – has begun to receive similar interest. Most research in this area is conducted with large businesses on the east and west coasts. This research, however, used small- and medium-sized businesses typical of the Midwest.

In response to employer interest, this study measured the extent to which companies have implemented policies and programs designed to assist employees in managing work and family responsibilities more effectively. From four states, 403 randomly selected companies participated in a telephone survey. Family-friendly issues measured included the following:

- Flexibility in work arrangements (time and place)
- Types of leave offered (vacation, sick, funeral, family)
- Assistance with dependent care arrangements (child and elder)
- Organizational climate and supervisory support
- Economic benefits (health and life insurance)

### **Purpose**

To benchmark the status of workplace policies and programs among Midwest businesses.

### **Findings**

- Larger companies offer more support in terms of dependent care, organizational climate and economic benefit.
- No significant difference was found between companies of different sizes in terms of leave or flexibility.
- Companies with a higher percentage of women are more likely to be flexible and offer assistance with dependent care.
- No significant difference was found between companies in terms of the number of women employed and policies on leave, organizational climate or economic benefit.



- Companies with a higher percentage of professional employees are more likely to offer assistance with dependent care and economic benefits and have more positive organizational climates.
- No significant difference was found between companies in terms of flexibility and leave related to the percentage of professionals employed.
- A negative relationship was found between the percentage of employees under age 40 and the presence of a positive organizational climate and provision of economic benefits.
- While companies with a higher percentage of employees under 40 offer more flexibility in work arrangements, there is no significant difference in dependent care or leave arrangements.
- The organizational climate is less favorable and economic benefits less generous in companies with a high percentage of part-time workers despite the fact they offer greater flexibility.
- No significant difference was found in leave and dependent care provisions based on the percentage of part-time workers.
- Firms that are subsidiaries of larger companies which determine policy are more generous in terms of leave, dependent care, organizational climate and economic benefits than those that are independently owned. However, independently owned firms are more likely to be flexible.
- Firms in the business/finance category have a more positive organizational climate.

In general, companies are least likely to offer flexible work arrangements, leave or any kind of support for dependent care. Only 15 percent offer resource and referral services. This finding is surprising given the relatively inexpensive nature of many of these programs. Further, less than 10 percent of the firms have conducted any kind of formal assessment about work-family needs and issues.

## **Recommendations**

Companies that want to be more supportive of employees could take the following actions.

- Ask employees about their needs and potential solutions in balancing work and personal life issues (task force, needs assessment).
- Adopt low-cost policies and benefits such as flexible work arrangements and information and referral services for dependent care needs. There are many low-cost and creative ways to be supportive of employee needs.
- Maintain or establish an employee assistance program for employees and their families.
- Sponsor workshops and/or offer information about work and family issues (parenting, stress management and retirement planning).
- Continue to offer economic benefits (health and life insurance).
- Promote an alliance of business, citizen groups and community leaders who will commit to an ongoing process of addressing work and family issues.
- Offer flexible spending accounts/pre-tax transfers.
- Evaluate current policies and benefits for part-time employees.



## Demographics

Sample is representative of Midwest business in size and type.

### Business Types

Wholesale/Retail	171	(42%)
Manufacturing/ Construction/ Mining/Transportation	99	(25%)
Business/Financial Services	66	(16%)
Other Services	67	(17%)
	<u>403</u>	

### Business Size

Fewer than 49 employees	290
50-99 employees	18
100-249 employees	51
250-499 employees	30
500+ employees	13
	<u>402</u>

Company totals vary based on available data.

74% of the firms were independently owned and determined their own policies.

91% reported that none of their employees were unionized.

### Part-time Employees

75% of the businesses indicated that half or fewer of their workers were part time.

0-25%	59%
26-50%	16%
51-75%	13%
76-100%	13%

### Female Employees

37% of the businesses had more than 50% female employees.

0-25%	35%
26-50%	28%
51-75%	21%
76-100%	16%

### Professional, Managerial & Technical Employees

20% of the businesses had more than 25% of their employees in the professional category.

0-25%	80%
26-50%	15%
51-75%	2%
76-100%	3%

## Four State Sample

North Dakota	100
South Dakota	100
Iowa	100
Nebraska	103
	<u>403</u>

Businesses were randomly selected by SIC code and size from a national data-base and are reflective of business patterns in the four states.



**Prepared by:**

North Dakota State University

Deb Gebeke, Sarah Jacobson, Harriette McCaul

South Dakota State University

Lynette Olson

Iowa State University

Donna Donald, Karen Shirer

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Georgia Stevens, Herb Lingren, Beth Davis, Janet Fox





## **Regional Work-Family Research: Employee Survey**

### **Executive Summary**

Employees are the core of a business and help determine its successes or failures. National workforce studies are frequently conducted to measure the status of our workforce. This study measured a sample of Midwest workers (North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska) within four business sizes (20-49, 50-99, 100-249, 250-500) typical of the Midwest. A total of 2,030 employees were invited to participate and 1,329 completed the survey (65 percent return rate).

Employees were asked to complete a confidential survey addressing stress and health concerns, impact of family responsibilities on the job, burnout, health, job demands, job autonomy, supervisor support, commitment, work-family culture and job satisfaction.

### **Purpose**

To determine employee perceptions of work-life issues.

### **Findings**

- Professionals, managers and administrators reported lower stress and health concerns, lower burnout, higher overall health status and higher abilities to cope with increased stress.
- Stress and health concerns due to the job were cited more often than stress and health concerns due to family or personal life.
- Family and personal-life issues were a strong consideration in job decisions.
- Burnout was above average yet employees indicated their ability to cope with stress was also above average.
- Job demands were rated as high while job autonomy was rated lower, indicating little freedom or control in their job.
- Overall health of all workers was above average.
- Job and workplace affected worker attitudes and behaviors at work as well as general well-being and ability to deal with personal life issues.



# Survey Results

## Demographics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	546	41
	Female	785	59
Marital Status	Married/Living with partner	970	73
	Single/Divorced/Widowed	351	27
Age	18-29	345	26
	30-49	826	63
	50+	149	11
Children	0	228	22
	1-2	580	56
	3+	224	22
Elder Care:			
• Adult Responsibility	Yes	197	15
	No	1,125	85
• Live with you	Yes	229	20
	No	912	80
• Within 5 years	Yes	93	16
	No	496	84
Disability	Yes	63	5
	No	1,258	95
Income	Under \$15,000	182	14
	\$15,000-24,999	248	19
	\$25,000-44,999	482	38
	\$45,000-74,999	206	24
	\$75,000+	62	5
Employment Status	Single-income	458	35
	Dual-income	857	65
	Part time	100	8
	Full time	1,229	92
Hourly Earnings	Less than \$7 per hr.	499	38
	\$7-15.99 per hr.	644	50
	\$16+ per hr.	157	12
Education	High school diploma/equivalency or less	492	38
	Some college	321	24
	Completed technical training or college degree	478	36
	Masters/Doctorate/M.D.	28	2
Race	Caucasian	1,232	91
	Other	34	3
	Missing (left blank)	83	6
Supervisor (of 3 or more people)	Yes	186	14
	No	1,138	86
Length of time at this job	Under 1 year	302	23
	1-5 years	436	33
	6+ years	590	44



## Scores

Summarized Variables	Negative Perception		Neutral		Positive Perception		Not Applicable	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Work-Family Culture	358	28	187	14	773	58		
Personal Attitudes Toward Work-Family Policies	118	9	211	16	990	75		
Supervisor Work-Family Support	289	22	111	8	900	68	21	2
Overall Supervisor Support	104	8	14	1	1,161	88	42	3
Job Demands	120	9	83	6	1,121	85		
Job Autonomy	219	16	168	13	942	71		
Burnout	319	24	93	7	919	69		

## Individual Variables

## Scores

	Frequency	Percent
• <b>Stress &amp; Health Concerns</b> (job on personal life)		
-never/rarely	633	48
-sometimes	144	11
-often/very often	539	41
• <b>Stress &amp; Health Concerns</b> (personal life on job)		
-never/rarely	988	76
-sometimes	66	5
-often/very often	239	18
• <b>Psychological Stress Symptoms</b>		
-never/rarely	114	9
-sometimes	70	5
-often/very often	1,142	86
• <b>Frequency of Minor Health Problems</b> (headaches, insomnia)		
-never	136	10
-seldom	492	37
-occasionally	486	36
-often	170	13
-quite often	58	4
• <b>General Health Status</b>		
-poor	15	1
-fair	174	13
-good	592	44
-very good	451	33
-excellent	109	8

Continued



	Frequency	Percent
• <b>General Psychological Outlook on Life</b>		
-delighted	47	4
-pleased	292	22
-mostly satisfied	500	37
-mixed	410	30
-mostly dissatisfied	44	4
-unhappy	34	3
-terrible	10	1
• <b>Job Satisfaction (present job)</b>		
-not satisfied	143	11
-neither satisfied/dissatisfied	143	11
-satisfied	1,039	78
• <b>Job Satisfaction (Do it again?)</b>		
-Take same job without hesitation	616	46
-Have some second thoughts, but would take same job	495	37
-Probably would not take same job	182	14
-Definitely would not take same job	34	3

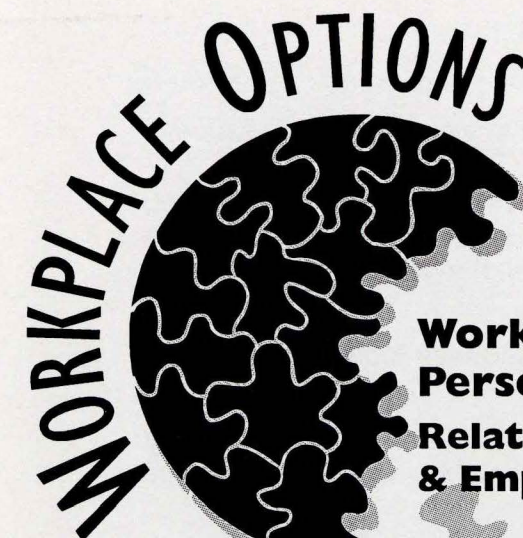
• **Impact of Family Responsibilities on Job** (Experienced within last year)

	Yes		No		N/A	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1. Reduced number of hours worked each week	944	70	229	17	154	11
2. Rearranged work hours	758	56	434	32	132	10
3. Refused overtime or extra hours	823	61	383	28	123	10
4. Refused travel	778	58	150	11	398	30
5. Refused promotion	891	66	39	3	398	30
6. Turned down interesting work assignments	974	72	54	4	298	22
7. Was distracted and productivity was affected	879	65	349	26	98	7
8. Worried about elderly relative while at work	756	56	374	28	199	15
9. Worried about children while at work	641	48	437	32	249	19
10. Produced lower quality work	168	13	1,082	80	78	6
11. Had problems with supervisor	185	14	1,064	79	80	6
12. Had problems with co-workers	281	21	975	72	67	5

• **Personal Perceptions of Advancement Opportunity**

	Poor		Fair		Good	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
-white women	223	17	394	29	695	54
-minority women	275	22	382	28	620	50
-white men	135	13	337	25	837	62
-minority men	203	16	403	32	673	53
-for you	34	26	412	31	560	43





**Workplace and  
Personal Life Research:  
Relationships between Employer  
& Employee Surveys**

**Purpose**

To determine the relationships between employer and employee perceptions of work-life issues.

**Sample**

Surveyed 1,329 employees in 17 businesses representative of the Midwest in size and type of business.

**Highlights**

- Most common benefit was personal/family leave (can be used in many ways beyond care of children).
- About half of the employers offered some type of flexibility to employees and this benefit was perceived as most important by employees.
- Those firms with a higher percent of professional employees were more likely to offer assistance with dependent care and economic benefits plus have more positive organizational climates.
- Professionals, managers and administrators reported lower burnout, higher overall health status and ability to cope with stress.
- Overall, employees reported an average ability to cope with stress.
- A majority of employees reported a positive corporate culture indicating their business place was a good place to work from the perspective of work-life issues.
- As flexibility increased, job-related stress and health concerns decreased.
- The more supportive the corporate culture, the lower the reported impact of personal issues on job performance and the higher their ability to cope with stress.
- Employees reported above average supervisor support in areas of work-life compared to other national studies of large corporations.



## **Concerns**

Only 10 percent of all businesses had conducted any type of work-life needs assessment.

Fewer than 10 percent offered any supervisor training related to work-life balance issues.

Burnout, job satisfaction and job demands contributed to employee intentions to quit, particularly for those under age 40.

Economic benefits (salary, health insurance, disability insurance) were rated as average and as not consistently available for all employees.

Employees reported more stress and health concerns related to their jobs than they did due to their private lives.

Most policies such as flextime were offered on a case-by-case basis and not consistently to all employees. Unequal access to support by employees contributed to an increase in reported problems.

Employers were less likely to report unequal access to work-life supports as a problem when compared to employee reports.

Few employers recognized the potential for increased productivity and decreased turnover to be found by addressing work-life issues in business planning.

## **Recommendations**

Conduct work-life needs assessment before initiating policies/benefits.

Begin by adopting low-cost policies and benefits such as information and referral services, flexible scheduling, wellness programs and financial planning.

Provide supervisory training related to work-life issues. This item serves as one of the most powerful predictors of worker attitudes and behavior.

Sponsor employee workshops and trainings identified as key needs from organizational assessment.

View work-life issues not as an individual employee problem (learning to manage my stress) but rather as a shared problem which can be addressed from both employer and employee perspectives and be mutually beneficial. For example, training in stress management is less effective when work environment refuses to change.

Evaluate current policies and programs. Look for relationships between policies and productivity, absenteeism and turnover.

Acknowledge workplace and personal life concerns of *all* employees. Avoid discriminating against single employees and inequities within benefits. Recognize personal life of all employees, regardless of family composition.

Be aware of changing demographics and their impact on your business bottom line.

Quality workforce, quality workplace, quality private life and quality community are all linked together.

In situations of low unemployment, companies have the opportunity to consider work-life issues from a strategic perspective and provide targeted benefits such as flexibility.



**Following premises are supported by the Midwest research and other national studies:**

Employee job satisfaction is related to employer productivity.

Job satisfaction can be predicted by the employer's reported difficulty in hiring, the work-life culture, employee stress and health concerns due to job, family and burnout.

When job satisfaction is assessed and addressed from *both* employer and employee perspectives, productivity and profitability increase. Viewing employees as an important asset requiring ongoing support will yield benefits unseen by businesses that solely focus on profits.

*"It might appear at the moment, when economic competitiveness is such an obsession, that Americans can't afford to think about the family if it will in any way hinder our economic efficiency. Nothing could be more shortsighted. In the long run our economic life... depends on the quality of people."*

Robert Bellah, "The Good Society"



*Child-care leave isn't the only reason why employees need time off so companies are creating strategies to favor all workers.*

## Alleviating the price of leave

Jon Knutson, THE FORUM

**P**erhaps the greatest challenge now facing American business is the growing need to help employees balance work and personal life.

Should an employee with a sick child be allowed to spend the day at home? Should an employee get time off to take an elderly parent to the doctor?

Traditionally, companies have said no. Tough to blame them; it's hard to make money when your employees aren't on the job.

But research by Deb Gebeke, a family science specialist at North Dakota State University, and NDSU colleagues Sarah Jacobson and Harriette McCaul, suggest that companies might do well to reconsider.

Their research indicates that offering things like flex time, job sharing, home-based offices, telecommuting and dependent care may reduce absenteeism and turnover and increase productivity.

There's plenty of evidence nationwide that suggests the same thing. For example, a small textile plant in the Southwest cut its annual turnover rate from 40 percent to 7 percent after it began a child-care program. Each \$1 spent on the program saved the company \$6 in cost containment.

And well run, powerhouse businesses such as GMAC and Merck have found they can improve profitability by eliminating, or at least reducing, the factors that cause absenteeism and turnover.

Some recommendations from Gebeke and Jacobson for businesses that want to help employees balance work and personal life:

- Carefully assess your situation before initiating policies and benefits.
- Start with low-cost policies and benefits such as information and referral services, wellness programs and financial planning.
- Train supervisors in work-life issues.
- Don't view work-life issues as a problem for individual employees but as a shared problem to be addressed by both employees and the employer.
- Evaluate current policies and programs and look for relationships between policies and productivity, absenteeism and turnover.
- Realize that work-life issues are important to all employees, not just those with children.

"We're seeing a backlash among employees who don't have children," Jacobson said.

Employees with children apparently are seen by some childless colleagues as getting special treatment.

"Businesses have to be careful to deal with this without creating divisions," she said.

She makes the important point that elder care, not child care, will soon become the most pressing concern of many American workers. Baby boomers will finish raising their children—and then find themselves spending more time caring for their aging parents.

The issue of elder care would seem particularly important in the Fargo-Moorhead area. We all know the community is full of people who grew up in eastern North Dakota or western Minnesota and whose aging parents still live there.

Once, at least in our part of the country, there wasn't much separation between family life and work. Many families worked together in their fields or in their small businesses. The link between work and life was simply taken for granted.

But then came factories and corporations and office buildings. Dad, and more recently Mom, left home each morning and returned in the evening. The link between work and life seemed gone.

But of course it's still there, still affecting employees' morale, concentration and productivity.

It won't be easy for companies to help their employees balance work and life. But the smart firms are going to try.

"It might appear at the moment, when economic competitiveness is such an obsession, that Americans can't afford to think about the family if it will in any way hinder our economic efficiency. Nothing could be more shortsighted. In the long run our economic life...depends on the quality of people."

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