

Work-Life Balance Fact Sheet



HAVE YOU HEARD PEOPLE SAY THIS BEFORE?

There are often two main aspects associated with work/life balance – the first is lack of time and scheduling conflicts, and the other is feeling overwhelmed, overloaded or stressed by the pressures of multiple roles.

Research for Regulators indicate that there are four broad categories associated with work life balance:

- **Role overload:** This form of work-life conflict occurs when the total demands on time and energy associated with the prescribed activities of multiple roles are too great to perform the roles adequately or comfortably.
- **Work-to-family interference:** This type of role conflict occurs when work demands and responsibilities make it more difficult to fulfill family-role responsibilities (e.g., long hours in paid work prevent attendance at a child's sporting event, preoccupation with the work role prevents an active enjoyment of family life, work stresses spill over into the home environment and increase conflict with the family).
- **Family-to-work interference:** This type of role conflict occurs when family demands and responsibilities make it more difficult to fulfill work-role responsibilities (e.g., a child's illness **prevents attendance at work, conflict at home makes concentration at work difficult**).
- **Caregiver strain:** Caregiver strain is a multi-dimensional construct defined in terms of "burdens" in the caregivers' day-to-day lives, which can be attributed to the need to provide care or assistance to someone else who needs it.

Balance is also one of the identified psychosocial risk factors that can impact an individual's mental health.

WHAT ARE WORK/LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES?

Simply put, work/life balance initiatives are any benefits, policies, or programs that help create a better balance between the demands of the job and the healthy management (and enjoyment) of life outside work.

Work/life initiatives can potentially deal with a wide range of issues including:

- on-site childcare,
- emergency childcare assistance,
- seasonal childcare programs (such as March break or Christmas),

- eldercare initiatives (may range from referral program, eldercare assessment, case management, a list of local organizations or businesses that can help with information or products, or seminars and support groups),
- referral program to care services, local organizations, etc.,
- flexible working arrangements,
- parental leave for adoptive parents,
- family leave policies,
- other leaves of absence policies such as educational leave, community service leaves, self funded leave or sabbaticals,
- employee assistance programs,
- on-site seminars and workshops (on such topics as stress, nutrition, smoking, communication etc),
- internal and/or external educational or training opportunities, or
- fitness facilities, or fitness membership assistance (financial).

WHY SHOULD A WORKPLACE CONSIDER THESE PROGRAMS?

The need for balance is essential. Studies on work/life balance programs have reported such benefits as:

- attracting new employees,
- helping to retain staff,
- building diversity in skills and personnel,
- improving morale,
- reducing sickness and absenteeism,
- enhancing working relationships between colleagues,
- encouraging employees to show more initiative and teamwork,
- increasing levels of production and satisfaction, and
- decreasing stress and burn-out.

HOW DOES A WORKPLACE IMPLEMENT WORK/LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES?

Work/life balance plans cannot be a one size fits all model. There are many factors to consider such as the different generations at work, age, culture, family needs, and socioeconomic status.

Work/life balance initiatives can be part of a complete health and safety and/or a health promotion program in the workplace. The initiatives can be written as part of existing health and safety policy, or particular guidelines can be referenced in the overall company human resources policy or the collective agreement (if applicable).

Meeting both the employees' and overall business needs requires a significant commitment from senior management. Each workplace should tailor its work/life policies to suit their own particular needs and corporate culture. This 'best fit' should be done with frequent consultation with employees. As with other health and safety programs, for work/life initiatives to be successful and sustainable, both employers and employees must take responsibility for making the program work effectively. An evaluation or feedback systems should also be part of that process.

It is very important to remember that for many workers balancing work/life demands is just one of the many challenges they face on a regular basis. While most people would agree that these issues should be addressed, they may not know where they can be resolved. A program dealing with work/life issues could, for example, be part of a complete health and safety program. However, it should not take away resources or distract attention from addressing other health and safety concerns or hazards that may be present in the workplace.

WHAT ARE SOME STEPS TO TAKE WHEN SETTING UP A PROGRAM?

When starting, it is best to appoint an individual or in some cases, form a joint work/life balance committee. To research needs and to implement the program, suggested steps to take are as follows:

1. Assess the workplaces' current situation and objectives.
 - Survey employees, supervisors, and managers.
 - Ask about needs, concerns, etc. Find out about bottom line or underlying concerns (e.g., employees report not being able to cope with workplace stress. What is the true source of this stress?)
2. Get buy-in from all levels. Educate all members of the workplace about the benefits and challenges of introducing these programs. Be clear on the intentions and goals of the program. Provide any necessary training and/or education to help these address concerns.

Some common concerns or challenges that may need to be addressed include the misconceptions that:

- people should keep their personal lives at home,
 - being present equals being productive/ hours at work equals performance/results,
 - benefit programs can make people happier, but not more productive,
 - family-friendly policies are soft human resources issues, mainly for women,
 - management will lose control,
 - it's only for non-managerial positions,
 - one program is good for everyone, or
 - participation will be a career-limiting move.
3. Be clear how hours, productivity and deadlines will be monitored. Address fears and apprehension expressed by both employees and managers. Be sure that workload issues are resolved and set realistic targets.
 4. Create a policy or guideline:
 - Clearly state its use and purpose.
 - Be clear about the impact on vacation time, compensation and other benefits, if any.
 5. Initiate a trial period and/or pilot studies.
 6. Monitor, re-survey, and make any adjustments that are necessary.
 - Act on recommendations for modification or for further enhancements.

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