

Wage Gap Contributor: Family Responsibility

A shifting labour force is changing the way we do business.

Today women represent almost half the workforce but they are still expected to nurture the family and meet its needs, whether or not they work outside the home. This can result in a struggle to balance work and family responsibilities which is identified as a key contributor to the wage gap.

A Changing Workforce

The Canadian workplace has changed dramatically over the past 40 years.

Women in the Workforce: Female participation rate in the workforce has doubled from 31% (1965) to 59% (2011).

Dual-Income Earners: Families with both parents working have risen dramatically from 33% (1965) to 72% (2002).

The 'Sandwich Generation': Employees caring for both an elderly family member and children have increased from 9.5% to 15% within the past decade.

Advancement of Technology: The evolution of technology has made it possible for employees to be 'connected' to their jobs at all times.

Employment Status: Employees who believe in the idea of a "job for life" are on the decline. Today's employees average three careers and eight jobs over their career lifespan and the majority of employees do not work the 'standard' working hours (Monday to Friday, 9 to 5).

Source: Government of Canada.



Workplace Impacts

Impacts from high work-family conflicts include:

- Higher work-related stress levels
- Increased absenteeism rates
- Increased turnover
- Lowered job satisfaction
- Decreased productivity
- Poor employee health

What is Work-Life Balance?

Work-life balance is a state of well being that is achieved when a person is able to manage his/her responsibilities at work, at home, and in their personal lives with minimal negative or stressful impact.

Did You Know?

Employees experiencing high work/life conflict have absenteeism rates more than two times those of other employees. The direct costs of absenteeism due to high work-life conflict have been estimated to be in the \$3 to \$5 billion range per year.

Source: Duxbury, Linda and Chris Higgins (2003). Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report. Health Canada.

Why Implement Work-Life Initiatives?

Many employers now recognize the value of addressing work-life balance conflicts at the workplace. Employers have indicated a number of reasons why they've implemented work-life balance initiatives or family-friendly policies at the workplace. Top reasons include:

- ✓ To attract and retain skilled employees;
- ✓ To improve employee productivity, job satisfaction and commitment;
- ✓ To reduce employee stress, absenteeism, turnover and health care costs;
- ✓ To support employees and families;
- ✓ To increase competitive advantage.

Makes Good Business Sense

Like so many other companies, the need for successful recruitment and retention is an ongoing human resource issue. HSBC Bank Canada decided that in order to effectively recruit targeted talent, it needed to change its workplace culture to be more supportive and flexible through enhancing its work-life balance policies.

A study conducted by Price Waterhouse Coopers in 1999 of more than 2,500 students found that the majority of respondents had indicated that achieving a balance between work and personal life was a priority upon entering the workforce. HSBC's biannual employee satisfaction surveys in recent years had also seen more concerns regarding work-life balance.

"Something that continues to be a focus and concern to all of us is the issue of how we balance our work and home life. We all work very hard and it is of the utmost importance that we maintain a healthy balance between the two. It was clear both in your response to survey questions and in the comments section that we all share this concern," said Martin Glynn, President and CEO, HSBC Bank Canada, in response to the results of the survey.

HSBC offered a range of policies and programs for employees including "Choices", an intranet site dedicated to wellness, a stress management CD, and enhanced policies on job sharing, flexible hours, learning centers, leaves of absence, and emergency child care.

Key Elements of HSBC's Commitments include:

- Managerial responsibility for employee satisfaction,
- Making the connection between quality of work-life and recruitment,
- Concentration on effective implementation,

In 2000, HSBC Bank of Canada placed in the Globe and Mail's Report on Business magazine as one of the "35 Best Companies to Work For".

Source: Summary from "Work-Life Balance: Organizational Profile – HSBC Bank of Canada", Human Resources Social Development Canada (HRSDC), Government of Canada. To read the full corporate profile visit: <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca>

Myths vs. Realities

Myth #1: Give them an inch and they'll take a mile.

Reality: Create supportive work environments and employees will 'go the extra mile'.

Myth #2: Work-life initiatives and flexible work arrangements are inequitable.

Reality: Standardized traditional work arrangements and one-size-fits-all programs are inflexible and inequitable.

Myth #3: If I say yes to one person, I will be inundated with requests.

Reality: Most employees want or need traditional work arrangements.

Myth #4: People on 'flexible work arrangements' or who use the Work-Life Balance programs are less committed to the organization and the client.

Reality: Supportive managers achieve high levels of employee commitment.

Myth #5: Flexible work arrangements and work-life initiatives are not available or appropriate for managers or professionals.

Reality: Supportive work environments are not restricted to individuals with a specific work history, job, family or marital status.

Source: Vanier Institute of the Family

An Opportunity for Economic Growth

It has been proven that a healthy workplace is a more productive workplace. With a shifting workforce demographic, many progressive employers are looking to 'family-friendly' initiatives as a strategic business tool to become more competitive and effectively deal with recruitment and retention issues. By closing the wage gap, New Brunswick will move towards a more competitive economy and progressive society.

Want To Know More About The Wage Gap?

Visit our website at: www.gnb.ca/economic_security

For more information, contact us:

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