
Work-Life Balance Challenges and Solutions: Overview

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ABSTRACT

In organizations and on the home front, the challenge of work/life balance is rising to the top of many employers' and employees' consciousness. In today's fast-paced society, human resource professionals seek options to positively impact the bottom line of their companies, improve employee morale, retain employees with valuable company knowledge, and keep pace with workplace trends. This article provides human resource professional with an historical perspective, data and possible solutions for organizations and employees alike to work/life balance. Three factors global competition, personal lives/family values, and an aging workforce present challenges that exacerbate work/life balance. This article offers the perspective that human resource professionals can assist their companies to capitalize on these factors by using work/life initiatives to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Work/family: a term more frequently used in the past than today. The current trend is to use titles that include the phrase work/life, giving a broader work/life connotation or labelling referring to specific areas of support (e.g., quality of life, flexible work options, life balance, etc.) Work/family conflict: the push and pull between work and family responsibilities. Work/life balance from the employee viewpoint: the dilemma of managing work obligations and personal/family responsibilities. Work/life balance from the employer viewpoint: the challenge of creating a supportive company culture where employees can focus on their jobs while at work. Family-friendly benefits: benefits that offer employees the latitude to address their personal and family commitments, while at the same time not compromising their work responsibilities.

Work-life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and other activities that are important to us - including spending time with family, taking part in sport and recreation, volunteering or undertaking further study. Research suggests that improving the balance between our working lives and our lives outside work can bring real benefits for employers and employees. It can help build strong communities and productive businesses. In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, work/life balance has become a predominant issue in the workplace. Three major factors contribute to the interest in, and the importance of, serious consideration of work/life balance:

Global competition; 2) renewed interest in personal lives/ family values; and 3) an aging workforce. Research suggests that forward-thinking human resource professionals seeking innovative ways to augment their organization's competitive advantage in the market- place may find that work/life balance challenges offer a win-win solution.

THE GENESIS OF WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Work/Life Balance

In a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal. Phrases and words serve as cultural signposts to explain where we are and where we are going. The term "work/life balance" was coined in 1986, although its usage in everyday language was sporadic for a number of years. Interestingly, work/life programs existed as early as the 1930s. Before World War II, the W.K. Kellogg Company created four six-hour shifts to replace the traditional three daily eight-hour shifts, and the new shifts resulted in increased employee morale and efficiency. Rosabeth

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Moss Kanter’s seminal book (1977), *Work and Family in the United States: A Critical Review and Agenda for Research and Policy*, brought the issue of work/life balance to the forefront of research and organizations.

In the 1980s and 1990s, companies began to offer work/life programs. While the first wave of these programs were primarily to support women with children, today’s work/life programs are less gender-specific and recognize other commitments as well as those of the family. Work/life balance initiatives are not only a U.S. phenomenon. Employees in global communities also want flexibility and control over their work and personal lives. However, for the purpose of this article, the research and surveys presented focus on work/life balance in the United States.

Defining Work/Life Balance Life is a balancing act, and in American society, it is safe to say that almost everyone is seeking work/life balance. But what exactly is work/life balance? We have all heard the term, and many of us complain that we don’t have enough of it in our lives. Among men and women alike, the frustrating search for work/life balance is a frequent topic of conversation, usually translated into not enough time and/or support to do, to handle, to manage our work commitments or personal responsibilities. “Juggling competing demands is tiring if not stressful and brings lower productivity, sickness, and absenteeism, so work/life balance is an issue for all employees and all organizations.”

BENEFITS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Benefits for you

Employees in companies already implementing work-life practices enjoy significant benefits such as:

- Being able to effectively manage multiple responsibilities at home, work and in the community without guilt or regret.
- Being able to work in flexible ways so that earning an income and managing family/other commitments become easier.
- Being part of a supportive workplace that values and trusts staff.

People want to be able to have:

- A good quality of life
- An enjoyable work life and career progression
- training and development
- Good health
- Affordable childcare or eldercare
- Further education
- More money
- Time to travel
- Time with friends and family
- Time to do sports and hobbies
- Time to do voluntary work

Work/Life Balance: Challenges and Solutions

Work/life programs: programs (often financial or time-related) established by an employer that offer employees options to address work and personal responsibilities. Work/life initiatives: policies and procedures established by an organization with the goal to enable employees to get their jobs done and at the same time provide flexibility to handle personal/family concerns.

Work/family culture: the extent to which an organization’s culture acknowledges and respects the family responsibilities and obligations of its employees and encourages management and employees to work together to meet their personal and work needs.

Personal Lives and Family Values to the Forefront the Indian work ethic remains intact, yet in recent years personal and family lives have become critical values that most of the Indians are less willing to put on hold, put aside, or ignore, for the sake of work. Over time, the American workforce has begun to change course from being willing to spend every hour working to learning to manage the

complexities of modern living. In addition, the impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11 has led many people to re-evaluate their lives and consider the meaning of work. Consequently, Indians are looking for options that allow for both a personal and family life, and many seek ways to have it all. As a result, the Indian management philosophy that expects employees to put work first, ahead of personal lives and family commitments, is becoming less accepted. In a 2001 survey conducted by the Public Policy Centre, 82% of men and 85% of women ages 20 to 39 placed family time at the top of their work/life priorities. In a 2006 study by Madras University and the University of Periyar, 90% of working adults said they are concerned they do not spend enough time with their families.

The Changing Face of Family With the growing diversity of family structures represented in the workforce in the new millennium, it is important that human resource professionals better understand the interface of work and family relationships and the resulting impact in the workplace. Research by Parasuraman and Greenhaus (2002) documented that segments of the workforce may be subject to unique work/family pressures, yet often have few sources of support. The under-representation of these groups of individuals with potentially difficult types of work/family pressures represents a major gap in work/family research and employers' understanding of their needs. Typically, studies have focused on employed men and women who are married or living with a partner or those with children. Omitted from research are single-earner mothers and fathers, single and childless employees with extensive responsibility for eldercare, blended families with children from both partners' prior marriages, families with shared custody of children, and grandparents raising their grandchildren. Swift, L. (2002). Work-life balance important in relief world, too. Reuters AlterNet. Retrieved January 30, 2003, from <http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefsources> Parasuraman, S., & Greenhaus, J. H. (2002). Toward reducing some critical gaps in work-family research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 12, 3, 299-312. From both the employer and employee viewpoint, the changing nature of what constitutes family is one of the complications of today's society.

As human resource professionals design policies and programs to address employee retention, job satisfaction, employee morale, and productivity, this research warrants serious consideration. A Pivotal Study In their highly acclaimed book, *Work and Family—Allies or Enemies*, Friedman and Greenhaus (2000), two leaders in work/life balance, bring forth new evidence to help us understand choices we make as employers and individuals regarding work and family.⁵ This pioneering study of more than 800 business professionals considered values, work, and family lives and found that “work and family, the dominant life roles for most employed women and men in contemporary society, can either help or hurt each other.”⁶ To handle work/life balance, Friedman and Greenhaus emphasize that working adults learn to build networks of support at home, at work, and in the community. Conflict between work and family has real consequences and significantly affects quality of family life and career attainment of both men and women. The consequences for women may include serious constraints on career choices, limited opportunity for career advancement and success in their work role, and the need to choose between two apparent opposites an active and satisfying career or marriage and children. Many men have to trade off personal and career values while they search for ways to make dual-career families work, often requiring them to embrace family roles that are far different, and more egalitarian, than those they learned as children.

This research reveals a compensatory effect between two forms of psychological interference: work-to-family and family-to-work. Specifically, support from two domains (partner and employer) has a significant impact on one another. The impact of partner support is greater when business professionals feel their employers are unsupportive of their lives beyond work. Conversely, for employees with relatively unsupportive partners, the employer family-friendliness reduces role conflicts more than partners. Thus, one source of support compensates for the lack of the other. Looking at behavioural interference of work on family, the picture changes. In this case, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts: the combined impact of employer and partner support leads to a greater Reduction in conflict than does independent employer or partner support.

Stress and the Consequences for Employer and Employee We live in stressful times, and each of us deals with stress every day. In the past three years, an increasing number of employees surveyed indicate they are struggling with work/life balance. A work/life balance survey conducted in 2002 by True Careers states that 70% of more than 1,500 respondents said they don't have a healthy balance between their personal and work lives.

“Holding a Job, Having a Life: Strategies for Change” 2001 study by the Work Institute of America points out that employee-driven solutions help reduce overtime, stress, and workloads, and increase

flexibility and family and leisure time. Scientists agree that in moderate amounts stress can be benign, even beneficial, and most people are equipped to deal with it. However, increasing levels of stress can rapidly lead to low employee morale, poor productivity, and decreasing job satisfaction. Some of the specific symptoms that relate directly to productivity in the work environment are abuse of sick time, cheating, chronic absenteeism, distrust, embezzlement, organizational sabotage, tardiness, task avoidance, and violence in the workplace. Other serious repercussions are depression, alcohol and drug abuse, marital and financial problems, compulsive eating disorders, and employee burnout.

Dr. Bruce S. McEwen, director of the neuroendocrinology laboratory at Rockefeller University, has been studying stress for more than three decades. As he notes, “blaring car alarms, controlling bosses, two-career marriages, six-mile traffic jams, and rude salesclerks were simply not part of the plan.” Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), offered by many employers, are an excellent resource for employees under stress. EAPs provide a myriad of services, from drug and alcohol abuse counselling to addressing family and marriage problems, financial and legal difficulties, and stress-related problems. In addition, in line with the times and the increasing stress levels in our society, a new profession has emerged: work/life Friedman, S. D., & Greenhaus, J. H. (2000). *Work and family—Allies or enemies? What happens when business professionals confront life choices?* New York: Oxford University Press. Ibid. *The heavy cost of chronic stress.* (2002). *New York Times*. Retrieved December 17, 2002, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/17/health/psychology/17STRE.html>

Professionals

The concept of work/life professionals originally developed as an extension of wellness programs (established as early as 1933) and EAPs (created in the 1940s). The Alliance for Work/Life Progress (<http://www.awlp.org>), the national association for work/life professionals, leads and promotes work/life initiatives in business, academia, and the public sector to support a healthier work/life balance between work, personal, and family life. Work/life programs represent a largely untapped workplace solution that have the potential to significantly address stressful work environments.

The Employer’s Perspective: Return on Investment (ROI) An employer’s commitment to work/life initiatives is influenced by the perception of whether or not such initiatives have a positive return on investment. In recent years, employers increasingly realize that the quality of an employee’s personal and family life impacts work quality and that there are concrete business reasons to promote work and family integration. **Diversity and Work/Life Balance** While some companies may view diversity and work/life balance as separate functions, the business case for managing diversity is, in large part, the same for work/life balance. Both diversity and work/life initiatives promote employee commitment, improve productivity, lower turnover, result in fewer employee relations challenges, and decrease the likelihood of unethical business practices.

Diversity and work/life initiatives can be found at the core of the new social contract being negotiated between employers and employees. “The basic outline of the social contract, as it has emerged during the past several years, calls for workers to commit their best contributions and greatest energies to the job in return for interesting work, respectful treatment, developmental opportunities, and an environment that responds to individual needs. Where those provisions conflict (e.g., the degree of commitment and energy expected by employers versus the flexibility required by employees), the expertise of both diversity management and work/life professionals will be critical to find win-win solutions.” **Is Your Organization Culture-Ready for Work/Life Initiatives?** “A common thread that links the reasons work/life benefits go unused is organizational culture.” Before establishing work/life initiatives, it is important to know if the organization’s culture is open and ready to support work/life programs. The path to determining culture readiness may be as formal as using an employee survey assessment or as simple as a thoughtful judgment made by the organization. The following provides food for thought regarding whether an organization is ready to begin work/life initiatives. As with most change initiatives, work/life programs require support from senior management. In addition, for the work environment to be ready for work/life benefits, it is helpful to have a “corporate culture that encourages employees to look at business in an entirely different way and supports and accepts employees as individuals with priorities beyond the workplace.”

“Life cycles are another consideration. People need different things at different times of their lives,” explains Sandra Burud, Ph.D., principal of Bright Horizons Family Solutions, discussing the business strategy of work/life initiatives. “In the factory days, everything was standardized and synchronized

... that’s when the original benefits package was designed. It doesn’t fit anymore,” states Burud. “Furthermore,” she continues, “employers are realizing that work should be intrinsically interesting and satisfying to employees, and these are the folks who produce the best work. The manager’s job is to get out of the way. The move from extrinsic rewards to intrinsic rewards has an impact on work/life initiatives.” One of the challenges of work/life initiatives—from both the employer and the employee viewpoint—is equitability, which has been cited as a major concern Fineman, M. (1999). Why diversity professionals should care about work/life balance. *Mosaics*, 5, 6, 6-7. 9 Reynolds, H. B. (1999). Work/life initiatives require cultural readiness. *Employee Benefit Plan Review*, 54, 6, 25-26. 10 Ibid. 11 Parus, B. (2000). Measuring the ROI of work/life programs. *Workspan*, 43, 9, 50-54.

Sources: EAPs and/or Eldercare

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Employee Assistance Programs: http://www.health.org/./workplace/fedagencies/employee_assistance_programs.aspx

Society for Human Resource Management: <http://www.shrm.org/surveys> Employee Assistance Professionals Association: <http://www.eapassn.org>

The Online EAP Directory: <http://www.eap-sap.com/eap/> Elder Focus: <http://www.edlerfocus.com> Labour Project for Working Families: <http://violet.berkeley.edu/~iir/workfam/home.html>

Regarding Work/Life Initiatives

When organizations are establishing work/life programs, it is important to consider the purpose of the programs and whom they serve. For example, do the work/life programs serve all employees or are they aimed toward employees who are parents or who are dealing with their elderly parents? Another aspect of judging organizational readiness for work/life programs is the employees’ view of perceived support of the organization. The 1999 study by Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness at the City University of New York and University of Rhode Island considered the links between an organization’s work/family culture, the extent to which employees used work/life benefits, the extent of work/family conflict, and the employees’ intention to stay with their company.¹³ To determine the culture readiness of an organization for work/life initiatives, the researchers developed a series of questions to measure supportive work/life culture, addressing perceived managerial support, negative career consequences for devoting time to family concerns, and organizational time demands and expectations that interfere with family responsibilities. The study revealed that more work/family benefits translated to greater commitment, less work/family conflict, and less intention to leave. Interestingly, the study results confirmed anecdotal evidence that a supportive work/family culture is closely related to work attitudes and perceived managerial support linked with less intention to leave the organization. Communication is Key Communication about work/life programs is essential. Although an organization may offer a rich menu of work/life benefits, the desired effect—yielding positive business results—is unlikely to occur if employees do not know about the programs or understand them. Human resource professionals should consider four critical questions:

- 1) Does the company culture truly support work/life benefits?
- 2) Does the management philosophy, starting with senior management, sincerely endorse work/life benefits?
- 3) Do managers and supervisors understand the impact work/life balance has on their workforce; and
- 4) Are employees aware of and do they understand the company’s work/life programs? If a company already offers work/life benefits, the next step may be to repackage and recommunicate them so employees see how these benefits offer ways to manage work/family conflict. In addition, developing a human resources strategy that is clearly integrated with the company’s mission will demonstrate how committed the organization is to employee needs.

The following are suggestions to promote work/life programs: Review the human resources strategy to see if it supports the company’s mission. Through questionnaires or focus groups, find out what employees feel about work/life balance. Align work/life initiatives with HR strategy (e.g., employer of choice). Create a work/life award program using noncash incentives aligned with business objectives.

Can Work/Life Initiatives be Measured?

Work/life initiatives create positive employer branding, promote being an employer of choice, foster organizational citizenship, and support diversity initiatives. Building a strategic business case for

work/life initiatives requires hard data documenting positive results on the balance sheet. Toward this end, there have been a number of studies dedicated to the financial impact of work/life programs in the last decade. One such study (1997) was conducted by WFD (formerly Work/Family Directions) with research focused on work/life programs with a number of clients (e.g., DuPont, Johnson & Johnson, Hoechst Celanese, IBM, and others). At DuPont, for example, “employees who used the company’s work/life programs were 45% more likely to agree strongly that they will ‘go the extra mile’ and are least likely to feel overwhelmed or burned out.”

Data from Hoechst Celanese documented that “some 60% of those surveyed reported the ability to balance work with personal and family responsibilities was of great importance in their decision to remain with the company.” There are several key factors to be considered in measuring ROI of work/life programs: the audience, the culture, designing the data collection process, integrating findings and making projections, and identifying the company’s primary goals. For many organizations, however, quantifying the data presents the greatest challenge. The best place to start is to consider five key areas:

- 1) Employee time saved;
- 2) Employee retention;
- 3) Increased motivation and Ibid.

Thompson, C. A., Beauvais, L. L., & Lyness, K. S. (1999). When work-family benefits are not enough: The influence of work-family culture on benefit utilization, organizational attachment, and work-family conflict. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 54, 392-415. Landauer, J. (1997, July). Bottom-line benefits of work/life programs. *HR FOCUS*, 74, 7, 3-4. Ibid. productivity;

- 4) Absenteeism; and
- 5) Decreased health care costs and stress-related illnesses. Employee Time Saved One of the most direct and measurable financial benefits of work/life initiatives is the amount of time saved by employees by using assistance, such as an EAP, to address and solve personal problems.

WFD conducted research with clients across industries with 300 employees and documented that an average of 17 hours per year were saved when employees used a consulting service that provided counseling, referrals, and research in areas such as parenting, education, childcare, adoption, and eldercare. According to this research, a minimum of 80% of this saved time would have involved employees working on their personal problems during the day, since most assistance organizations are only open during regular business hours. Employee Retention The cost of employee turnover and accompanying loss of valuable company knowledge can be significant. Work/life programs offer a solution to retention woes. A prime example is IBM’s 1992 workforce survey that documented “the highest performers are the most likely to consider their ability to balance work and personal responsibilities in a decision to stay with the company. Employees overall rated work-balance issues as sixth of 16 factors that keep them with the company.”¹⁶ Increased Motivation and Productivity Research indicates that company commitment to work/life initiatives is closely aligned with employee motivation and productivity. A study focusing on work, well-being and stress illustrates this link finding that “45% of men and 50% of women would turn down a promotion if the new position would leave them with less time for their personal or family life.”¹⁷ Absenteeism Research has documented that work/life programs can reduce absenteeism. Johnson & Johnson “found that there was a 50% decline in absenteeism among employees who used flexible work options and family leave policies.”¹⁸

Decreased Health Care Costs and Stress-Related Illnesses with increasing company focus on the high cost of health care, work/life programs are becoming an intelligent choice to help lower the number of health care claims. According to the American Institute on Stress, 1 million workers are absent due to stress-related complaints, and American firms lose more than 5 million workdays annually due to illness, more than half stress-related. A 1992 study by North-western National Life Insurance Co. found that “72% of all workers surveyed experienced three or more stress-related illnesses ‘somewhat or very often.’”¹⁹

The entire story regarding work/life programs, however, cannot be told strictly by quantitative measurements. To present a solid argument for work/life policies and programs, the positive yet hard-to-measure factors of work/life initiatives corporate reputation, public relations, improved community relations, increased employee loyalty, and enhanced recruitment should also be considered.

Family-Friendly Benefits

“Family-friendly firms have a significant impact on the lives and careers of business professionals who work in them.” A review of more than 30 surveys regarding work/life balance published from 1997 to 2003 reveals that the number of employers who offer family-friendly benefits has dramatically increased. According to the SHRM® 2003 Benefits Survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (www.shrm.org/surveys—available late June 2003), the percentage of employers offering family-friendly benefits continues to increase.²¹ The survey documents that the top five family-friendly benefits offered are: Dependent care flexible spending accounts (71% of respondents). Flexitime (55% of respondents). Family leave above required leave of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) (39% of respondents). Telecommuting on a part-time basis (34% of respondents). Compressed workweeks (31% of respondents). In 2002, the Work/Life Today Survey conducted by the Alliance for Work/Life Progress revealed that an Ibid. Gottlieb, B. H., Kelloway, E. K., & Barham, E. (1998). Flexible work arrangements: Managing the work-family boundary. New York: John Wiley & Sons. Landauer, J. (1997, July). Bottom-line benefits of work/life programs. HR FOCUS, 74, 7, 3-4. Ibid. Friedman, S. D., & Greenhaus, J. H. (2000). Work and family—Allies or enemies? What happens when business professionals confront life choices? New York: Oxford University Press.

Society for Human Resource Management. (2003). SHRM® 2003 benefits survey. Alexandria, VA. Average of 56% of employees used work/life benefits when offered. This survey indicated that the top two benefits provided were EAPs and flexible schedules.

It should be noted, however, that each survey is organized differently, whether it be family-friendly or work/life. For example, the SHRM® 2003 Benefits Survey covers EAPs under the health section. With the ever-increasing number of surveys and studies available that focus on family-friendly benefits, human resource professionals who are considering offering work/life programs, or expanding current work/life initiatives, have substantial and convincing data to support their positions.

Work/Life Balance Trends The challenge of work/life balance in our society is unlikely to disappear. Identified and discussed as follows are four work/life balance trends. Awareness of these trends will place the human resource professional in a position to better educate management and work closely with employees. New Research The topic of work/life balance is getting a great deal of attention in the academic and corporate worlds, and new research is continually being conducted. The following is an example of new research in the growing field of work/life balance. A 2003 study reveals that employees are often preoccupied with work when not working, and when in the company of family and loved ones, experience an inability to be meaningfully engaged in nonworking spheres.

As researcher Ezzedeem explains, “modern work has become knowledge based, fluid, and intellectual; overworked people think about work all of the time. For many people, work has become cognitively intrusive.” To understand work/life balance, Professor Swiercz and Doctoral Candidate Ezzedeem of The George Washington University developed and tested a cognitive approach, the “Cognitive Intrusion of Work.” In simple terms, this means that work/life balance is not just about finding “physical time” to do all that needs to be done. Instead, and more importantly, it is about the “cognitive space” necessary to process, organize, and respond to the thinking demands of life within a complex society. Ezzedeem and Swiercz found that the cognitive intrusion of work results in lower job satisfaction, less happiness, a greater incidence of work/life conflict, and more frequent burnout. Furthermore, their findings challenge long-held assumptions about the role of personality, gender, family status and age with regard to work/life balance. They found that the experience of intrusion transcends demographics and personality and is rooted instead in the design of the job and the organizational culture of the employer. Commenting on the potential impact of this research on organization policies and practices, Professor Swiercz states, “this research not only gives employers a new benchmarking tool, it also provides a new theoretical basis for understanding this important social issue from a research perspective.” Eldercare one of the most significant trends in work/life balance is the increasing focus on eldercare. Researchers point out that work/life professionals anticipate eldercare will become a major issue in the coming years. According to census data, 13% of Americans are age 65 or older, and by 2030, 20% of Americans (about 70 million) will be over age 65. The population age 85 and older is the fastest-growing segment of the older population, growing by 274% over the past 25 years.

In addition, the Labour Project for Working Families states that 40% of people caring for elders also have childcare responsibilities. These trends have led to the baby boomer generation being known as the “sandwich generation.” A growing number of companies offer work/life programs addressing eldercare. According to the SHRM® 2003 Benefits Survey, while not as mainstream as childcare programs, some organizations offer various forms of eldercare. Eldercare programs include eldercare referral service (20% of respondents), emergency eldercare (3% of respondents), subsidy of eldercare cost (2% of respondents), and paid eldercare (1% of respondents). The 2001 study by Hewitt Associates points out that some employers offer dependent care programs that include help with childcare expenses and assistance with eldercare. Employee Assistance Programs can play an important role in an organization’s eldercare program. Some of the lesser-known benefits of an EAP are referrals to community programs and contacts regarding eldercare issues. Human resource professionals could significantly increase EAP usage by learning more about EAP eldercare support and communicating this to in perspective: Use of work/life benefits on the rise. (2002). IOMA’s Report on Managing Benefits Plans, 02, 8, 7-9. Ezzedeen, S. R., & Swiercz, P. M. (2002).

Rethinking work-life balance: Development and validation of the cognitive intrusion of work scale (CIWS)—A dissertation research proposal. Proceedings of the 2002 Eastern Academy of Management Meeting. Society for Human Resource Management. (2002). Work-life balance. Workplace Visions, 4, 1-8. Labor Project for Working Families. (2002). Retrieved March 18, 2003, from <http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~iir/workfam/home.html> employees. Through these actions, HR professionals can emphasize the importance of EAPs to management and at the same time leverage EAP benefits to employees. Work/Life Balance in the Relief World In the “relief world,” comprised of organizations with employees and volunteers that provide service and care to communities in need locally and worldwide, the demands of an aging population in the coming decade are increasing the current strong competition for qualified individuals upon which relief organizations depend. “Not only will there be fewer young, keen and free-to-travel individuals who will want to be convinced that agencies are caring, ‘best-practice’ employers, but more skills and experience will be possessed by older staff likely to have families and other commitments and thus different priorities for their work/life balance.” therefore, organizations that provide relief services may experience increasing difficulty staffing and retaining employees due to the pull of family commitments at home. Furthermore, the challenges of work/life balance will no doubt impact recruitment, retention and willingness to serve in hardship locations. In view of these factors, voluntary organizations and aid agencies whose missions and services are critical in many parts of the world may well have an even greater need for work/life programs to attract and retain staff. Total Life Planning Total life planning is a new and innovative approach to work/life benefits and helps employees examine important aspects of their professional and personal lives and understand how they relate. Their goal is “to encourage employees to look at their lives as a whole and assess relationships, emotional and physical wellbeing, careers, spirituality, and their personal financial situation. From these programs, employees can assess their available choices to improve balance in their lives and develop an individualized life plan ... the most successful programs set a goal-oriented environment with a meaningful and transformational component for each individual.”

The concept of total life planning represents a paradigm shift in our society. One of the major benefits is renewed employee energy, enthusiasm for work, and increased productivity. Total life planning programs may be offered in conjunction with benefits such as health, life, and disability insurance, or on a stand-alone basis. However, not all organizations may wish to consider total life planning, as it brings topics into the workplace that have traditionally been considered private.

CONCLUSION

Work/life programs have the potential to significantly improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and retain organizational knowledge, particularly during difficult economic times. In today’s global marketplace, as companies aim to reduce costs, it falls to the human resource professional to understand the critical issues of work/life balance and champion work/life programs. Be it employees whose family members and/or friends are called to serve their country, single mothers who are trying to raise their children and make a living, Generation X and Y employees who value their personal time, couples struggling to manage dual-career marriages, or companies losing critical knowledge when employees leave for other opportunities, work/life programs offer a win-win situation for employers and employees.

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