

WORK/LIFE BALANCE



Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries

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Introduction

The Social Planning Council conducts independent research on social trends, needs, the impact of public policy changes, and other issues relevant to residents of Cambridge and North Dumfries. Over time we have found that issues related to individual and family stress are increasingly being identified in our community. As a result, on May 11th 2005, a Work/Life Balance Business Forum was held at the Cambridge Centre for the Arts. The purpose of this forum was to raise awareness of work/life balance issues, motivate organizations to examine their own corporate practices, and serve as a point of interaction for those wishing to create family-friendly workplaces. This report provides a summary of those discussions.

Things are Different Today

The world we live in is rapidly changing and it's getting harder for Canadian workers to balance their personal and professional responsibilities. As outlined below, a number of factors contribute to the problem.

As researchers Duxbury and Higgins (2001) note: "New technologies are transforming work itself, and global competition is putting increasing pressure on productivity...work is being restructured and working arrangements and employment relationships are changing."¹ This has led to increased job insecurity and "job insecurity has relevance to the work-life conflict in that for many employees, work-life balance takes second place to securing permanent, full-time employment."²

Changing family patterns are having a significant impact as well. Even though "dual-earner families now outnumber single-earner families... and lone-parent families represent 10% of all families,"³ little accommodation has been made in the workplace. "Existing Canadian workplace practices and regulatory models remain largely based on an old industrial model and a social pattern of the able-bodied white male principal income earner working for a single employer on a full-time permanent basis."⁴ The end result is that

today's employees face some unique challenges. Not only must they contend with long hours, heavy workloads, and the insecure nature of their jobs; they must also manage childcare and eldercare responsibilities, and perform hours of unpaid but necessary work within the home. Small wonder that one in three families feel they don't have enough time.⁵

Traditionally many employers have not seen the struggle to balance work and family as their issue, but in fact all this pressure exacts a price. It has been estimated that stress-related disorders resulting from overwork either at home or on the job cost employers a whopping 12 billion dollars each year⁶. If we also consider the shrinking pool of skilled labour and a new workforce whose priorities are radically different from those of their parents⁷, it becomes clear that businesses cannot afford to ignore the satisfaction and well-being of their employees.

BACKGROUNDER:

Economic and societal shifts have impacted Canadian workplaces.

"In 1965, only three out of every ten Canadian workers was female, versus close to half (46%) of the workforce now..."

In 1965, only one quarter of mothers with children under the age of six were in the labour force; now that proportion is 70%...

The Canadian labour force continues to experience less than 1% annual growth with immigration expected to account for all net labour force growth by 2011...

Whereas in 1965, 3/4 of Canadian workers were in a standard, full-time, permanent job, now only one-third of the workforce works standard hours in a standard job...

Temporary work makes up 13% of paid employment. The proportion of Canadians working part time has doubled since 1965 to almost 1 in 5."⁸

What is Work/Life Balance?

“Work-life balance is about developing practices to encourage a culture in which people are happy about being able to meet the demands of work and responsibilities of interests outside work. The employer recognizes that staff may need to change hours, require special leave or other forms of support to enable them to do this properly. Employers are willing to support this because they recognize that the key benefit is improved effectiveness at work”⁹

BACKGROUNDER:

Organizations need to understand what drives employee behaviour. According to Wendy Poirier, national leader of healthcare practice at Towers Perrin in Calgary¹⁰:

Why people join:

1. Company reputation
2. Salary
3. Challenging work

Why people stay:

1. Challenging work
2. Team/colleagues
3. Work environment

Why people leave:

1. Manager/opportunities for advancement
2. Work/life balance
3. Salary

The Work/Life Balance Business Forum

Over time the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries has identified issues related to family and individual stress in our community. In the fall of 2004 a committee was formed to begin addressing these issues. The objective was to work in partnership with progressive businesses and community groups to promote a healthy life balance. Committee representatives included: The Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region, Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, Cambridge Family Early Years Centre, Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being at the University of Guelph, the City of Cambridge, Family Counselling Centre of Cambridge and North Dumfries, and the YWCA of Cambridge. The committee decided that hosting a forum would begin the process of assisting our community in tackling work-life balance and stress as modern trends continue to unfold.

On Wednesday, May 11, 2005, a forum on work/life balance was held in the Toyota Room at the Cambridge Centre for the Arts. Specifically targeting human resource professionals and the business community, the forum sought to:

- increase awareness of issues, trends, and statistics
- increase awareness of work being done to improve balance and reduce stress – and the benefits of these efforts
- provide a venue for networking and sharing local experience
- further develop best practices and strategies
- consider whether any community-wide efforts could be pursued

The thirty-two participants included executive directors, managers and human resource professionals from both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. After presentations by invited speakers, participants were organized into small groups where they identified workplace stressors. They also discussed ways in which employers can help employees decrease stress and increase their ability to balance multiple responsibilities. The forum concluded with each group sharing their answer to the following question:

What can we do together as a community to support work/life balance in Cambridge?

Invited Speakers

Charles Coffey – Executive Vice-President RBC Financial Group

Mr. Coffey spoke about his organization's ongoing commitment to meeting the diverse needs of its employees. He gave an overview of RBC's Work and Family program and provided examples of work/life tools and choices currently offered to employees across the country.

Mr. Coffey articulated a strong business case for helping employees resolve work/life conflict, noting that “Work/life helps RBC respond to the ever-changing nature of the workforce/workplace, recruit and retain employees, increase individual and organizational performance, leverage diversity, reduce stress and short-term absenteeism, as well as gain a competitive advantage.”¹¹

Feedback indicated that participants found this talk informative and were inspired to reflect on their own organizations. There were also many comments on how helpful it was to hear real-life examples.

Nora Spinks – President, Work-Life Harmony Enterprises

Ms. Spinks shared insights gained from over 20 years experience as a consultant to corporations, governments and community organizations. She began with a stand-up exercise that illustrated the many demands made on our time. She identified the three “pillars” of well-being as community, work, and home and noted that the stronger and more stable each is, the easier it is to achieve a sense of balance.

The audience was introduced to the Work-Life Continuum, an organizational assessment and planning tool developed by Work-Life Harmony Enterprises. The continuum provides a framework for organizations wishing to effect cultural change and can be found on the Work-Life Harmony Enterprises website:

<http://www.worklifeharmony.ca/htdocs/htdocs/articles/OrganizationContinuum.pdf>

Participants communicated their enthusiasm for the topic and the speaker via feedback sheets, with the majority of respondents rating this presentation “excellent.”

Summary of Forum Discussions

Following the presentations, participants assembled into five groups facilitated by members of the organizing committee. These small groups provided an opportunity to explore work/life balance issues in this community and begin focusing on solutions. Three questions were assigned and what follows is a summary of the discussion.

Question 1: Rank the top 10 issues from an organizational perspective

Each group was given a set of ten cards describing various work/life challenges. When asked to rate the top issues from an organizational perspective, workload, work pace and long hours were consistently identified as the most challenging issues.

Question 2: What is being tried, or what is something you would like to do in your organization?

Each group discussed various ways in which workplaces could help employees decrease stress and increase their ability to balance multiple responsibilities. Suggested strategies included:

a) Flexible work arrangements

- Flex place (working from a location other than normal)
- Flex time (working less than 37.5 hrs/week)
- Flex hours (working full hours with flexible start and end time)
- Telecommuting
- Job share (two people sharing one full-time position)
- Options around time off (e.g. time off in lieu, leaves of absence, personal days, flexible sick time, etc.)

b) Increased employee control over work

- Day planning/day scheduling (use of specific tools e.g. voicemail, call forward, email, designated times when people do not interrupt each other, etc.)
- Autonomy
- Choice of assignment
- Delegation
- In-box emptied at month end

c) Supportive work environment

- Management works with employees
 - Joint work load committee
- Adequate staffing
 - Outsourcing
 - Hiring extra support staff
- Job design
 - Job restructuring
 - Modified work
- Ongoing training and education
 - Training/development
 - Educational opportunities within organization/on site
 - Workshop to deal with work pace
- Build social support
 - Team approach
 - Group responsibility for overall goals
 - Mentorship
- Benefits
 - EAP
 - Child/Eldercare programs
- Encourage healthy coping
 - Wellness programs
 - Recreational opportunities at work

BACKGROUNDER: Health and Wellness Practices in Waterloo Region¹²

In a recent University of Waterloo survey, human resource practitioners from Cambridge, Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo were interviewed to learn about corporate practices for employee health and wellness. Respondents were primarily from the manufacturing sector, with service and wholesale/distribution also represented.

Of the 18 companies interviewed, 89% acknowledged that health and wellness issues significantly affect employees in their organization.

Initiatives to address these issues included:

Open door policies	94%
Consulting services (counsellors)	78%
Employee assistance plans	72%
Flex time	56%
Fitness centres	22%

Question 3: What can we do collectively to address issues in Cambridge?

Each group was asked to suggest three things we can do as a community to decrease stress and increase people's ability to balance work and home life. During this discussion the following themes emerged:

Sharing/Communication/Awareness

- Increasing community awareness of work-life balance principles
- Forming community wellness partnerships
- Establishing a resource centre for employers (shared programs)
- Sharing information through associations and alliances
- Promoting Cambridge as "Creative City" – diverse, integrated, promoting creative approaches to community

Best Practice Research

- Collecting and producing something on best practices to educate other employers and employees
- Sharing examples of best practice

Political Action

- Lobbying higher levels of government for more flexibility in local work situations

Recognition/Awards

- A community holiday
- Annual think-in (mental health day)

- Social/morale building (internal recognition)
- Recognition event or program

Mutual Respect

- Setting realistic deadlines
- Buy-in from community and acceptance of life circumstances

Feedback from Forum Participants

Forum participants were asked to fill out an evaluation form. Fifteen forms were completed and returned. Overall, people found the forum very valuable. They felt that the small group exercises were relevant to their interest and needs and appreciated the opportunity to share workplace ideas.

In response to a question about what they liked best about the forum, participants wrote comments such as "Our organization has incredible people for employees & we're currently going through a significant evolution. This info will help us plan for more success."

The following themes were suggested for future forums:

- Small business initiatives and resources
- Best practices
- More home-related issues

Next Steps

At a follow-up meeting, there was strong consensus among members of the organizing committee to continue with actions that build on the momentum generated during the forum. The committee developed the following work plan:

Distribute the Forum Report

There is a need to increase awareness of work/life balance issues, and to encourage employers to develop programs and policies to address these issues. Accordingly, copies of this report have been distributed to forum participants and key stakeholders and are available for download free of charge from the Social Planning Council website (www.socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org). Additional hard copies may be obtained by contacting the Social Planning Council at 519-623-1713 or info@socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org

Conduct Follow-Up Evaluations

There is a need to collect information about the longer-term benefits to organizations and their employees resulting from participation in the Work/Life Balance Business Forum. The Social Planning Council will do

follow-up with participants over the course of the next year.

Host a Follow-Up Forum

Pending funding, the Social Planning Council plans to organize a follow-up forum in the spring of 2006, and hopes to offer additional forums to encourage continued discussion.

Conclusion

The purpose of the Work/Life Balance Business Forum was to inform, inspire and begin to engage people in dialogue around this very important topic. Some excellent ideas were generated. The challenge for the community will be to work towards implementing the strategies suggested. We look forward to hearing about the approaches taken to support employees' efforts to balance work and family commitments.

BACKGROUNDER:

"The best employers do more than issue paycheques. They improve life in the workplace and in the surrounding community as well."¹³ Here is a sampling of local employers who "get it" when it comes to work/life balance:

Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada Inc.

*"Toyota Motor Manufacturing's family-friendly benefits are... above-average. For employees who take maternity leave, Toyota Motor Manufacturing provides a generous top-up to 65% of salary for the first 52 weeks of their leave. Other family-friendly benefits include: free family coverage on health plan."*¹⁴

Co-operators General Insurance Company

*"Employees with pre-school children have access to a subsidized (The Co-operators pays up to \$7,540 each year per employee) daycare facility located nearby...for female employees who take maternity leave, the Co-operators provides a generous top-up to 100% of salary for the first six weeks of their leave. Other family-friendly benefits include: flexible start and finish hours; shortened work week (fewer hours); compressed work week (same hours, fewer days); telecommuting and working from home; reduced summer hours; 36-hour work week; job sharing; free family coverage on health plan; and academic scholarships for employees' children."*¹⁵

Royal Bank of Canada

*"The Royal Bank of Canada has an extensive Work/Family/Life Program under which it has integrated existing family supportive policies including family related leaves and a maternity leave salary top up. More importantly, the bank stresses a culture which values and encourages flexibility, and believes that this is more effective than any mandate. It also notes that flexibility and commitment are highly correlated, and that putting the view that "employees have lives" into practice is positively linked to productivity. Work/Family/Life related training is therefore an integral part of the bank's leadership development programs."*¹⁶

Endnotes:

¹Duxbury, L, and Higgins, C. (2001). *Work-Life Balance in the New Millennium: Where Are We? Where Do We Need To Go?* Canadian Policy Research Networks Discussion Paper W/12. p.6. Retrieved from:

<http://www.cprn.com/en/doc.cfm?doc=52>

²Ibid p.7-8.

³Social Development Canada (undated). *Voices of Canadians: Seeking Work-Life Balance*. Backgrounder Issues Report. Retrieved from:

http://www.sdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=/en/lp/spila/wlb/vcswb/03backgrounder_issues.shtml&hs=wnc

⁴Social Development Canada (undated). *The Changing Face of Canadian Workplaces – Why Work-Life Balance is an Issue*. Retrieved from:

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⁵Centre for Families, Work, and Well-being, University of Guelph (2005). *Facts About Canadian Employees*.

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⁷Weidner, J. (7 Sep 04) *It's all about Balance; Younger workers are redefining world of work*. The Record (Kitchener, Cambridge and Waterloo)

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⁹Working Families. (2004). *Employer Fact Sheet 5*. Retrieved from:

http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/asp/employer_zone/factsheet_s/pdfs/FS5%20%20Trustees%20and%20Work.pdf

¹⁰London Economic Development Corporation. (2004). *Top Employers – Benchmarking Best Practice*. Notes taken by LEDC from the 2004 Canada's Top 100 Employers Summit held in Toronto 11-12 March 2004. p.12. Retrieved from:

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<http://www.rbc.com/newsroom/news5.html#2005>

¹²Ferris, L. and George, M. (2004). *Health and Wellness: A Snapshot of Waterloo Region*. University of Waterloo. Retrieved from:

<http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/worc/wellness/>

¹³Macklem, K. (2003). *Top 100 Employers*. Retrieved from MacLean's website:

http://www.macleans.ca/webspecials/article.jsp?content=20031020_67488_67488

¹⁴Yerma, R. (2005). *Canada's Top 100 Employers*. Toronto: Mediagroup Canada Inc., p. 342.

¹⁵Ibid, p.113.

¹⁶CAALL Ad Hoc Committee on Work-Life Balance. (2002). *Work-Life Balance: A report to Ministers responsible for Labour in Canada*, p. 35. Retrieved from HRSDC Canada website:

<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/spila/wlb/pdf/wlbc-ctvpc-en.pdf>

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This issue paper is a summary of the discussions that occurred at the May 11th 2005 business forum on work/life balance in Cambridge.

The Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries actively and impartially participates in building and strengthening our community by promoting social change through innovation, research, analysis, and facilitation.

The Social Planning Council has also published other research reports on topics such as:

- 2005 Community Trends in Cambridge and North Dumfries
- Food Security
- Immigration and Employment
- Multiculturalism
- Employment and Training Issues
- Poverty and Basic Needs

For more information about this paper or about other related research, please contact:

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