

5.1 What Can the Organization Do?

Recognition of the needs of the new workforce has prompted a number of Canadian organizations to investigate ways in which they might play a part in helping their employees obtain a better integration of their work and non-work lives. The types of support offered and the level of organizational commitment to work-lifestyle issues, however, varies widely across companies. The broadest definitions of supportive employer policies include the provision of traditional employee benefits, such as a decent living wage, health insurance, and the right to a paid vacation (Kingston, 1990; Vanderkolk & Young, 1991; Johnson et al., 1997). Although it is acknowledged that these traditional benefits are indeed necessary if employees are to meet their most basic needs, it is our contention that such benefits are not sufficient in terms of relieving the heavy burden on today's employee. This paper, therefore, will focus only on benefits that fall into one of four categories which represent a more common definition of the term "supportive" (Galinsky, 1991; Paris, 1989):

- work-lifestyle benefits and services;
- leave benefits;
- alternative work arrangements;
- supportive work environments

Following is a brief overview of each of these benefit categories. These summaries are by no means exhaustive, but are intended to familiarize the reader with the scope of initiatives that have been offered by employers. Descriptions of these initiatives have been pieced together from a number of sources. Readers interested in more information are referred to the original sources: Johnson et al, 1997, Friedman & Johnson, 1996; Galinsky et al., 1991; and Lord & King, 1991.

Work-lifestyle benefits and services

Work-lifestyle benefits and services include a wide variety of options, ranging from the more familiar employee assistance program (EAP) to direct supports for dependent care, such as on-site daycare or respite programs. Key work-life benefits include:

- Resource and referral services which provide employees with information on the availability of child or elder care services in the community and counsel employees as they make their choices. Services are either provided directly by the employer, or contracted with an outside agency who can provide information and resources.
- On-/Near-site child care are employer-sponsored centers located on or near the worksite. Centers can be owned and managed either by the employer or by a third party. Corporate involvement ranges from the provision of start-up money to complete coverage of operating costs for the center and subsidies for lower-income employees. Consortium child care centres are similar to on- or near-site centers, but are established and operated by a group of employers for their employees.
- Voucher systems allow the employer to pay part of the worker's child care cost at a program selected by the employee. Employees may be reimbursed, or the care provider may be paid directly.
- Emergency/sick child care provides care for children who are mildly ill or in instances where a regular child care arrangement has broken down. Sick child care may be offered in the employee's home or attached to an existing child care center.
- Respite care provides full or partial reimbursement of the costs associated with hiring a caregiver so that employees with responsibility for caring for a dependent adult family member can have a break.