

use of non standard forms of labour (i.e. contract and temporary workers, part-time employees) increased. Other companies (notably those in the high technology sector) engaged in "boom" and "bust" cycles (i.e. periods of growth alternating with periods of considerable restructuring and downsizing) as products and competition changed.

This downsizing and restructuring had a major impact on human resource practices (i.e. compensation, recruiting, retraining, benefits) with a concomitant decline in employee morale, job security and job satisfaction and increased levels of employee stress. As Scott (2000) notes:

"organizational flexibility has been pursued at the expense of worker flexibility, resulting in heightened work-family conflict."

Research in the area would suggest that in the midst of downsizing and restructuring, an emphasis on work-life balance becomes vitally important for the "survivors."

High Unemployment

Until 1997, the 1990's were characterized by slow economic growth. The unemployment rate was high during most of the decade and only recently has it dropped to pre 1989 levels (Scott, 2000). Lowe (2000) notes that for most of the decade the unemployment rate hovered around 9%, approximately twice the level that economists used to consider full employment. The Vanier Institute (1997) reports that in 1994 alone, one in four Canadian families experienced a period of unemployment for at least one family member.

Growth in Non-Standard Forms of Work

Concomitant with the restructuring and downsizing that occurred in Canada in the '80s and '90s was a growth in the use of non-standard forms of work (Scott, 2000). More employees worked in part time, temporary or contract positions at the end of the millennium than in 1989 (CLMPC, 1997; Statistics Canada, 1998). The following data, taken from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey and Statistics Canada's Survey of Work Arrangements (quoted in Lowe and Schellenberg, 1999) illustrate this point:

- in 1997, 11% of Canadian employees were employed in temporary jobs. About half of these workers were in contract or term positions while approximately one third held casual jobs
- the number of people employed part-time rose from 12.5% of the workforce in 1976 to 19.0% in 1997,
- the percent of jobs lasting six months or less has increased significantly in recent years, and
- between 1976 and 1997, the share of part-time workers who took their job because they could not find a full-time position increased from 11% to 32%.

More recent work by Lowe (2000) points out that those in low paid and low skilled jobs are most likely to be affected by these trends and that many in this group are being excluded from the good jobs that are now being created by virtue of their education and skills.

What has this got to do with work-life conflict? A number of researchers express concern about the quality of many of these non-standard jobs (Scott, 2000; Lowe and Schellenberg, 1999). The fact that only 20% of employees in such positions are covered by employer sponsored pension, health or dental plans (versus 60% of those in full-time or permanent