

## **Recruitment and retention**

Interest in work-life balance has also been fueled by the concerns of employers as they seek strategies to attract and retain committed and productive employees. As demographers predicted in the late 1980s (Johnston and Packer, 1987), the new millennium has brought with it a shortage of educated and skilled labour as baby boomers retire and the number of Canadians entering the labour force shrinks. The average age of employees in Canada is higher than at any time in recent history and available forecasts suggest that the shrinking of the labour force entry pool will continue well into the new century (Statistics Canada, 1997a). The problem is further compounded by the fact that the education and skills of many seeking employment are often inadequate for the new types of jobs that are vacant (i.e. specialized skill requirements).

At this point in time the demand for labour now exceeds the supply in many areas (i.e. IT, teachers, nurses). Furthermore, the reduced supply of entry level workers will make finding, keeping and developing skilled employees a top priority in the years ahead. These trends, more than any other, has awakened employers to the business risks inherent in ignoring the needs of this new workforce; a need which includes balance and places a high priority on a meaningful life outside of work (Duxbury, Dyke and Lam, 2000). Recent research (i.e. Duxbury, Dyke and Lam, 2000; Conger, 1998) would suggest that many younger employees are attracted to an organization by its policies and practices supporting work-life balance. As such, employers are now more motivated than ever to explore options that give employees more flexibility and control and are adopting programs which are designed to help employees balance work and life (i.e. flextime) under the assumption that they will improve recruitment and retention (Lowe, 2000).

Recruiting a good workforce is only part of the puzzle. Organizations also have to ensure that workers stay and flourish. Companies with high turnover pay a significant price. It has been estimated, for example, that the costs of replacing professional employees can be up to five times the employees' annual salary (VanderKolk and Young, 1991). These costs do not include indirect costs associated with accumulated human knowledge, lost future potential, and poor morale in areas with high turnover. Employee retention helps the company contain the costs associated with identifying, recruiting, retaining and moving talent. Indirect costs associated with client dissatisfaction are also higher in companies with high turnover (Gionfriddo, and Dhingra, 1999). Provision of a supportive work environment which emphasizes balance has been shown to partially stem the flow of good employees out of an organization.

## **Changing attitudes around work**

North America's baby boomers hold decidedly different values regarding the place of job or career in their lives than did workers in previous generations (Kamerman & Kahn, 1987; Galinsky et al., 1991; Vanderkolk & Young, 1991). Research indicates that today's workers value a greater balance in terms of gender roles, greater equality for women, an acceptance of diverse family structures, and are committed to flexibility, individualism and diversity (Kamerman & Kahn, 1987). The business practices that motivated the homogeneous, male breadwinning workforce of the past, therefore, may simply not work for today's employees (Galinsky et al., 1991). Growing evidence indicates that many "baby boomers" are willing to trade off the fast track for a life with a better balance between work and their personal interests and needs (Galinsky et al., 1991).