

Table 1: Overview of availability of employee-supportive programs in Canada  
 Figure 7: Availability and Use of Work-Life Benefits, Duxbury and Higgins, 2001

While differences in samples and methodology preclude direct comparisons from study to study, this overview does allow us to make several observations regarding the level of employer responsiveness to work-lifestyle issues in Canada. First, it should be noted that the employer survey (Paris, 1989) suggests a much higher level of organizational involvement in work-lifestyle initiatives than do any of the employee surveys. The disparity in findings is likely attributable to two factors:

1. Samples of employers are typically not representative of the broader population due to the very low response rates associated with these studies (i.e. the Paris study yielded a response rate of 25%).
2. Executives tend to indicate that their organizations offer a given benefit if they offer it to *any* of their employees (i.e. a company representative may say that telework is available at his or her firm, when only one or two professionals have been granted this option)

Whereas employer surveys offer important insights into the organization's perspective on work-lifestyle issues, this type of response bias, combined with the low response rate typical of this type of study, means that employer surveys can grossly overestimate the availability of employee-supportive benefits.

Surveys in which *workers* are asked whether or not they have access to various initiatives, therefore, are probably the better indicators of the true prevalence of work-lifestyle initiatives. The 5 employee surveys presented in Table 1 reveal that:

- Access to employee-supportive work arrangements in Canadian workplaces is low
- Initiatives which involve work schedule flexibility are much more prevalent than those which involve work location flexibility.
- Schedules involving work hour reductions are more common among women (the Lero et al sample, which was restricted to those with primary responsibility for childcare was 95% female)
- Public sector employees appear to have greater access to flexible arrangements than do private-sector workers (same trend apparent in 2001 data but not shown in this paper)
- Workplace child care centers are extremely uncommon in Canada.
- The availability of "family friendly" practices has not increased over time (it appears, in fact, to have diminished), and
- Employers appear to be more likely to offer employees unpaid time off to deal with family and personal problems than paid time off. This is consistent with the "myth of separate worlds" approach to management.

The above discussion leads us to make the following specific recommendations with respect to how organizations can address the issue of work-life balance:

1. Organizations need to devote more of their efforts to improving "people management" practices within their organization. They can increase the number of supportive managers within the organization by giving managers at all levels: