

2.0 Why Is Work-Life Conflict An Issue In Canada At This Time?

The Canadian labour market throughout the 1990s could best be described as “tight”. The dominant management strategy employed during this period was one of cost cutting rather than people development and as a nation Canadians were fixated on the economy and securing and keeping jobs rather than achieving balance. The decade was one of tremendous change as employees confronted:

- a reshaping of the workforce (more women, more cultural diversity, aging of the baby boomers),
- a recession (the early 1990's) followed by a “jobless recovery,”
- a diminished social safety net and greater government cutbacks,
- high unemployment rates,
- a greater need for both parents in a family to work to maintain a “decent” standard of living,
- a degradation in the quality of jobs and an increase in non-standard work,
- increased automation of work processes, and
- changing expectations around hours of work.

These dramatic demographic, social and economic changes have led to what has aptly been described as a work and lifestyle “revolution”. While these changes demand that both employees and managers think and behave in new ways they also present opportunities for forward thinking employers and governments to do things differently.

Three set of forces have been identified as shaping the interplay between work and family: demographic/societal, economic, and the changing role of governments (Scott, 2000). The following section provides a brief overview of some of the key environmental influences within each of these categories that influenced work-life balance in the 1990's.

2.1 Demographic/Societal Forces

The face of the Canadian workforce has changed dramatically over the past several decades. A number of the key changes which have been found to be associated with increased work-life conflict are reviewed below.

More Women in The Canadian Labour Force

The story of work-life balance and stress cannot be told without mentioning the growing involvement of Canadian women in the paid labour force and the concomitant shift towards the dual-income family. Between 1977 and 1996, women's labour force participation rate increased from 43% to 57%. In 1998, 58% of women over the age of 25 worked for pay outside the home (Statistics Canada, January, 1999). During the same time period men's participation rate declined from 81% to 74%. In 1998 women comprised 45% of Canada's total labour

More Mothers in The Canadian Labour Force

For women with children (especially young children) the growth in labour force participation rates has been even more dramatic. Between 1976 and 1998 labour force participation rates for mothers with children under age 3 doubled from 32% to 64% (Vanier Institute, 2000). During the same time period the participation rate of women with a youngest child aged 6 to