



**WORKING TIME AND WORK-FAMILY BALANCING:
A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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**Canada Research Chair on the Socio-Organizational Challenges of the
Knowledge Economy**

by

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Note 2 : More recent work on this issue can be found in the bibliography, amongst which many research reports and articles done since 2000.



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Abstract

In view of the increasing difficulty confronting workers who wish to balance work and family in different ways throughout their career and their life course, it appears that private and public policies have not, to date, been able to face this challenge. Our article presents data which aim at a better understanding of the causes and implications of the difficulties of work-family balancing throughout the life course, and investigates some concrete means designed to alleviate the difficulties. The data presented come from different surveys on working time and family issues. It is argued that if working time is addressed with the objective of restructuring or reducing it, it is possible to significantly lessen the tension between the sphere of work and that of family and individual life. This does not necessarily solve the problem completely, as it does not ensure a better gendered division of labour between men and women within the home and within paid employment, but offers some elements which alleviate the difficulties. Our paper will conclude with a few principles which appear essential in work-family balancing programs. It should be noted however that we feel that the majority of these programs are only partial solutions to a more equal gendered division of labour, as to a certain extent, they often contribute in segmenting work and family and support the further concentration of women in family roles, while men are not forced to increase their family responsibilities.

More recent and detailed elements can be found in the bibliography.



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Introduction

Owing to major developments now affecting employment (e.g. technological change, higher participation rate of women, the frantic race towards flexibility and competitiveness, the resulting destandardization of jobs and work schedules, etc.) as well as developments affecting the family (e.g. the increased number of dual-earner families, a new definition of men and women's roles within some families, new types of families, etc.), the work and family spheres are becoming less and less compartmentalized. Today more than ever, if balance is lost within one sphere, the other is affected as a consequence. In the long run, conflicts within the job, family and personal life have harmful effects on the individual, in terms of personal satisfaction as well as in terms of work performance. The issue is very large and complex and we will not try to cover all aspects of the question here. We will rather concentrate on the issue of working time, and aspects related to the work sphere, on how they can pose problems or present elements of solution. We will present data which aim at a better understanding of the causes and implications of the difficulties of work-family balancing throughout the life course, and investigates some concrete means designed to alleviate the difficulties. The data presented come from different surveys on working time and family issues, as well as information collected from interviews with workers and Human Resources managers within a few firms.

It will be argued that while working time poses problems for the work-family balancing issue, if working time is addressed with the objective of restructuring or reducing it, it is possible to significantly lessen the tension between the sphere of work and that of family and individual life. This does not necessarily solve the problem completely, as it does not ensure a better gendered division of labour between men and women within the home and within paid employment, nor automatically increase the participation of men in family responsibilities, but offers some elements which alleviate the difficulties.

In the first part of the paper, we will present data on polarization of working hours and destandardization of jobs. In a second part, we will present data on perceptions of time and consequences of difficulties in work-family balancing for individuals and for firms, and look at preferred modes for dealing with this. Finally, we will conclude on the importance of working time in the work-family balancing issue and, on the basis of firms' experiences, we will develop on possibilities for a renewed working time policy which would contribute in alleviating difficulties related to employment and family.

1. Polarization of working hours and destandardization of jobs

One of the main transformations observed on the labour market over recent years has to do with polarization of working hours. While the historical reduction of working hours is often noted, this hides an important transformation in the distribution of hours, that of polarization of working hours, particularly since the 1981-1982 recession. As concerns the evolution of the distribution in working hours in Canada between 1976 and 1995, the following facts emerge (full tables and figures are available from authors, but could not be included here for lack of space):

- The percentage of Canadian workers doing standard hours (30 to 40 hours) during one week has decreased in an important way.
- The percentage of workers doing short hours (less than 30 hours) has increased.



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- The percentage of workers who have long hours (over 40 and over 50 hours) has also increased significantly.

The situation in Québec is quite similar and also presents a situation of polarization of working hours. For the period from 1975 to 1994, the following observations can be made:

- The percentage of workers doing standard hours (30 to 40 hours) has decreased from 33,5 % to 31,9 %.
- The situation is slightly different from that of Canada as concerns relatively long hours (from 40 to 49), as they decrease in Québec from 42,1 % to 37,8 %.
- The proportion increases for short hours (less than 30 hours), from 15,6 % to 19,5 %.
- Finally, as concerns very long hours (50 hours and over), the proportion increases from 8,8 % to 10,8 %.

Let us note that the polarization of working hours, while it has attracted less attention than the debate on the historical increase (Shor, 1992) or historical reduction in working hours (Rifkin, 1995, amongst others), is not a phenomenon unique to Canada. It has also been observed in the USA amongst other countries. In the United States, the variations observed are almost identical to those observed in Canada for the period from 1979 to 1993, on which we have data. As an indication, let us note that the percentage of male workers doing between 35 and 40 hours per week in their main job has decreased by about 6 percentage points, comparatively to 7 points in Canada. During the same period male workers doing 50 hours and over have increased by 3,5 percentage points in both countries (Morissette, 1995: 52).

Differences by age and gender

In general, women and youth are overrepresented in short hours, that is under 30 hours (Sheridan, Sunter and Diverty, 1996).

- Even if a relatively similar proportion of men (55,7 %) and women (52,3 %) had standard hours in 1995, 2,6 times more women worked short hours (35,7 % against 13,7 % for men), while more men worked long hours (30,6 % men for 12,3 % women).
- As for youth (aged 15 to 24), they are mainly concentrated in short hours. Their presence in these short hours has increased considerably, while it has diminished radically in the other schedules, whether it be standard hours or long hours.

Polarization of working time concerns women and youth more particularly:

- The percentage of different groups in standard hours diminishes from 71 % to 61 % from 1976 to 1993. During the same period, youth's share is reduced more considerably, while women are generally less numerous in the standard hours group.
- The presence of all groups in short hours increases from year to year. Women are traditionally very numerous in the short hours group, while youth see their share increase significantly.
- Men are clearly more present in long hours.



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This has clear implications for the gendered division of labour within the family and within paid employment. It can be implied that men have less free time for domestic work and family responsibilities (care of children and the elderly, etc), while women adapt their working hours in order to be able to cope with domestic and family responsibilities. However, as we will see later, standard daily (9 to 5) schedules are becoming less common so that short hours do not necessarily solve the work-family balancing problem.

Data highlights the fact that men have to a certain extent caught up with women as concerns polarization and destandardization of working hours. From 1976 to 1995, the percentage of men doing standard hours has decreased by 8,5 points, while the percentage for women has decreased by 5,1 points. However, the evolution for men is rather towards an increase in long hours, while it is an increase in short hours for women. If anything, this means that the gap in the gendered division of labour between paid employment and family responsibilities can only be increasing.

It has to be recognized that women more often accept voluntarily short hours than men (Tremblay , 1997), but it is unclear to what extent this so-called voluntary choice is constrained by men's working hours and the traditional gendered division of labour within the family. This is a hypothesis which we are presently pursuing in an ongoing research.

Differences by industry

Polarization also presents itself differently according to industry or sector of activity. As can be expected, there are more and more part time workers in the service sector, while there are more and more long hours in the goods producing sectors. (Sheridan, Sunter and Diverty, 1996).

For men working in the goods producing sectors, the reduction in standard hours (10,1 points) is in favour of long hours (+ 8,3 points). As for the service sector, men have also seen a decrease in standard hours of 6,7 points, but it is more equally shared between short hours (+3,7 points) and long hours (+3,0 hours).

As concerns women in goods producing sectors, the transformation of working hours is similar to the evolution observed for men in the different sectors. Standard hours have diminished, although less than for men during the same period, most likely because women already had less standard hours. The increase is mainly in long hours, an increase of 4 points between 1976 and 1995. This may partly explain the increasing difficulty in work-family balancing. As for the service sector, the reduction in standard hours is also of 4,3 points, but it is distributed differently between long hours (+ 2,5 points) and short hours (+1,7 points).

An important aspect has to be highlighted on the basis of this analysis, that is that while polarization touches all sectors of activity, none is simultaneously touched by an increase and a decrease in hours. Polarization actually translates itself in an increase in long hours in some sectors, that is transports, storage, communications, commerce, business, education, other services and public administration, while there is an unilateral increase in short hours in health and social services, as well as hotels and restaurants and food services.

In the case of Québec, the tendency is basically the same. Short hours are more common in the service sector, while long hours are more common in the primary sectors, in construction as well as in transportation and storage.



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The large increase in short schedules is thus a phenomenon related to the progression of the service sectors over the last decades. The strong concentration of women and youth in the service sector translates into shorter hours for these groups (Tremblay, 1997).

Differences by occupational group

Polarization is also differentiated according to occupational groups. The distribution in working hours is clearly dependant on various factors such as: level of responsibility, qualifications required, cost of training new employees, possibility of doing paid overtime work, possibility of promotion (which will partly explain unpaid long hours in professional and management categories particularly).

In the male categories, standard hours have decreased in all 10 occupational groups. However, polarization does not manifest itself identically in all groups. Managers, professionals and blue collarworkers are mainly concerned by an increase in hours. On the contrary, office workers, salesmen, service employees have seen a move towards short hours.

As concerns women, the decline in standard hours is observed in six out of eight categories. The evolution is towards long hours in professional and management categories, while there is little change in blue collar workers, office workers, sales and services.

The increase in hours appears to be explained either by the possibility of promotion (managers have an increase of 8,2 points in long hours, for a reduction of 8,3 points in standard hours), or by paid overtime (blue collar workers).

Destandardization of work schedules and jobs

The destandardization in work hours translates not only into an increase in short and long hours and a decrease in standard hours (30 to 40 hours), that is a destandardization in length of working hours, but also in destandardization of the moment at which these hours are done. In other words, the standard "9 to 5" schedule is becoming less common.

One might think that this evolution in non standard hours is due to workers' preferences, but the next table indicates clearly that this is rarely the case for full time jobs, and still not so frequently the case for part time workers. The data indicates that over 90 % of full time workers who have non standard working schedules have these schedules because of their job's requirements, while this is the case for over half (53,4 %) of part time workers.

As concerns forms of employment, different sources indicate that a minimum of one third of all workers have standard forms of employment (Tremblay, 1997). If schedules are taken into account, the percentage increases and only one out of three workers has standard employment and schedule, as can be seen in the following figure.

Atypical schedules, if chosen by the workers, can surely contribute in reconciling work, family and personal life, but if imposed by the employer, they can be source of difficulties in work-family balancing. Considering the present tendency towards a destandardization of working hours and schedules, which we have illustrated in the previous pages, it would seem probable that most people would have the impression that they lack time, that it is more and more difficult to have time for different personal activities; we will now turn to data on this aspect, as well as on the evolving composition of family, which also has some influence on this issue.



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2. Perceptions of time and work-family balancing issues

As mentioned previously, different factors have influenced the work-family balancing issues. Amongst the main factors are the evolutions observed in the labour market, mainly the new composition of the work force, where women are more important, the increase in dual earner families, the transformation in family composition. These factors all have an impact on the perceptions of time and difficulties people have in reconciling work, family and personal life, as well as on their work performance.

The new composition of the work force

The time when men worked from 9 to 5, while women worked at home and assumed all domestic and family obligations is, if not a thing of the past, a less frequent situation. The traditional family is less common as data on participation of women clearly indicate. Also, data indicate that not only are women more present in the labour force, but women with young children particularly have seen a significant increase in their participation. Amongst the other transformations which have to be highlighted, let us mention the increase in one-parent families, most often headed by a female worker, as well as the increase in the number of workers who have to take care of elderly parents. Without going into the details relatively to these important social transformations, we will present some data on the main aspects of the transformations.

The increase in participation of women

The following table presents data on the increased participation of women over the last decades. From 1951 to 1995, the participation rate of women has almost tripled in Canada, increasing from 18,3 % to 56,8 % for women aged 25 and over. The increase is even more important for married women, who went from 9,6 % to 61,4 %. This gives a clear indication of the importance of work-family balancing as married women are more likely to have children.

The increase in participation rates of women with preschool children is as impressive as that of married women. Between 1976 and 1991, the participation rate of women with children aged from 3 to 5 years increased from 41 % to 68 % (Conseil consultatif canadien de la situation de la femme, 1994). In the case of women with children under 3, the increase is even more radical as it has almost doubled, going from 32 % to 62 % during the same period. In 1991, two thirds of women whose youngest child was under 6 worked full time.

These trends are not temporary. Estimates for the year 2015 indicate that the increase in women's participation rate will be highest in the group of women susceptible to have children, that is women aged 25 to 44, as it should attain 91 % in 2015. Already in 1995, the participation rate of that group is 77,3 %.

The increase in dual-earner families

The increase in dual-earner families is a consequence of the increase in participation rate of women. In 1996, in Québec, 70 % of biparental families with children had both parents working (Secrétariat à la famille, 1997). Family structure is thus quite different from what it used to be and the number of families where one parent works outside of the home while the other stays at home is rapidly decreasing. It must be mentioned that this is not only



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because women want to work outside the home, but also because most families need the second income, given the evolution of incomes over recent decades.

Data indicate that in order to maintain the same average purchasing power as one 45 hour income permitted in 1970, some 65 to 80 hours were needed in 1992 (Wolff, 1994). Without women's income, the percentage of poor families in Canada would have increased from 9,7 % to 21,4 % in 1994. (Conseil national du bien-être social, 1994).

The transformation of families

Families are a social construct which changes over time. The traditional family with the father as only breadwinner and mother at home is diminishing in importance, while new forms appear. There is an increase in what some call "reconstructed" families (with children from two previous marriages of the present two parents), as well as an increase in families headed by only one parent, most often the mother. In 1993, 13 % of Canadian families were in the latter situation and over 60 % of the parents heading these families were present in the labour market (Conseil national du bien-être social, 1994). Let us add that 82 % of these families were headed by women in Canada and in Québec (CCCSF, 1994: 17; CSF, 1995: 28).). This situation poses specific problems for work-family balancing, as can easily be imagined.

Another reality related to the transformation of families has to do with the increase in number of people who have to take care of elder parents or handicapped persons. Aging is a reality of many industrialized countries. In Canada, the percentage of persons aged 65 and over has increased by 33 % between 1981 and 1991 (CCCSF, 1994) and the aging population translates itself into an aging workforce (Bellemare, Poulin Simon and Tremblay, 1992... 1995).

It is projected that by the year 2030, for the first time in Canadian history, people aged 65 and over will be more numerous than those aged 15 and under. The increase will be highest in the group aged 80 and over, a group which is more susceptible to need more care and to have to rely on family members for this, given the reduction in public services. As was mentioned in a recent Conference Board survey (1994), those who have had children at a later age will be caught in a "sandwich" between the needs of their own children and those of their elderly parents.

There is also an important number of handicapped persons, some 4 million Canadians according to a 1991 estimate and the majority of these (over 90 %) live with their families (CCCSF, 1994). In Québec, the Health and Social Services Department estimated that some 600 000 persons aged 15 and over had some form of handicap which made it difficult for them to accomplish certain tasks; of this number, some 46 % were totally dependant for at least one of the basic necessities of life. (MSSS, 1988). In 1990, a Conference Board survey indicated that of some 700 workers, 16 % had to take care of handicapped persons or of elderly parents.

In such a context, one can understand that some of these workers might need to reduce their paid working time in order to assume their responsibilities. Another survey indicates that 20 % of Canadian workers tried to reduce the pressure imposed by their dual role by modifying their working conditions, while some 10 to 20 % had to leave their job in order to ensure full time care.(Tindale, 1991).

Perceptions of time and difficulties in reconciling work, family and personal life



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Different indicators all lead to the same picture, that is the fact that for many it is becoming more and more difficult to reconcile work with family and personal responsibilities. Research also shows that this has important consequences for family life as well as in professional life.

As concerns family and personal life, Statistics Canada published some interesting data in 1995, on the basis of the General Social Survey. The results from the survey show how there is a certain overload in work, a stronger interference of roles between family and work, how this impacts on family and personal life. The following facts are highlighted in the survey as in the following table (Frederick, 1995):

- About half of respondents in all categories are worried that they do not spend enough time with their families and friends, feel that they often have the impression they haven't done all they should during the day, and say they sometimes cut in their hours of sleep when they lack time.
- Fathers are proportionally more stressed than the other men, but the difference between the groups with and without children is smaller than that between mothers and other women.
- Mothers are the most stressed, as can be seen in the last column to the right.
- Mothers feel more often stressed because of lack of time, in a proportion of 69 %. However, it must be noted that all respondents feel they lack time, all groups being over 50 %.

As can be seen, many dimensions of family and personal life suffer the effects of lack of time, amongst which physiological and psychological health. Another research has led to observations similar to those of Statistics Canada, particularly one conducted by the Quebec Federation of Labour (Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, 1995). This last research indicated that about half of the workers interviewed suffered from some form of "psychological distress", the percentage being twice that observed in the general population according to another survey.

We are clearly far away from the Leisure Society which was expected in the 70s, as more and more people seem to lack time and to feel stressed because of their problems in juggling work and family, let alone have time for personal activities.

Consequences for work performance

The problem of interference in roles is of a reciprocal nature: if work sometimes has a negative influence on family life, family life can also have an effect on work, in the sense that a lack of balance or problems in one sphere necessarily influence the other sphere. In this perspective, it is sometimes difficult to separate the different impacts. Also, while family life may sometimes have negative effects on work performance, some people consider that work helps them keep a balance in life, something which would be difficult if not impossible if they relied only on family life for satisfaction (See article in Chatelaine, 1997).

In a survey conducted by the Conference Board of Canada with 385 employers, respondents said a good part of their human resources management problems were related to conflicts their workers had in relation with professional and family obligations. (Paris, 1989) These problems relate to absenteeism, problems in recruiting and keeping workers, workers coming in late, as well as productivity and performance problems.



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If we add answers saying that a quarter, half or more than half of various HR problems are related to work-family conflicts, we find that some 60 % of employers questioned attribute at least one quarter of all HR problems to work-family conflicts of their personnel.

The relation between absenteeism and the problems in work-family balancing has also been shown by other surveys. In Canada, the number of absences caused by personal or family responsibilities has almost tripled between 1977 and 1990, passing from 1,9 to 5,2 days per year (Akyeampong, 1992). The difference between men and women is clear, as women generally assume care for children and the elderly. Over the same period, the number of days of absenteeism for personal or family reasons has gone from 1,9 to 5,2 per year for women working full time, while it went from only 0,7 to a little under 1 for men. The age of the youngest child has a clear influence: in families where there was at least one child of preschool age, the annual number of days lost was on average 25,1 between 1987 and 1990.

The Conference Board Survey also indicated that many employers attribute over a quarter of their productivity problems (42,2 % of all employers) and of their performance problems (39,5 % of all respondents) to difficulties in balancing work and family.

The Canadian survey on childcare (Lero *et al*, 1992 and 1993) presents many other aspects related to problems encountered by working parents in relation with childcare and work. Amongst other things, Lero indicates that about half of parents (49 %) had difficulty to find or to keep adequate child care services during the past year. They cited the following as the main impacts on their working life:

- impossibility to do overtime as required or as desired;
- worries over childcare while at work;
- reduction in professional commitment due to childcare problems;
- reduction in hours of work;
- refusal of job offers;
- quitting a job because of problems of childcare.

Not only does this imply problems for the workers concerned, but this also reduces the availability of labour for positions, which can cause a problem for employers. Many consider they might have difficulty in hiring and keeping the best workers, because of work-family balancing problems. The Conference Board survey indicates that some 12 % of workers questioned quit jobs because of work-family balancing problems. Women were four times as numerous as men in having done so. The Conference Board survey also indicates that 14 % of workers had thought about quitting their jobs because of family reasons, while 17 % had refused a promotion for the same reasons.

As the cost of hiring an employee is getting higher and higher, up to 93 % of the first year annual wage according to a US study (Catalyst National Study of Parental Leave), more and more employers are preoccupied by the issue of work-family balancing. Employers are thus starting to recognize the fact that workers have families and that the worlds of work and family are not completely separate from each other, each one having an impact on the other. The Conference Board of Canada and the Québec Employers' Federation (CPQ, 1994) both recognize that by implementing measures in order to facilitate work-family balancing, employers are acting in their own interest. More and more employers are considering adopting work-family balancing measures according to a survey conducted



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by Hewitts Associates and Benefits (1989), but it has to be recognized that many still consider family issues are not a business concern.

3. Working time and work-family balancing: options and solutions

The previous sections lead us to an important question, that is the issue of who has to assume responsibility for children, aging parents, and handicapped persons, that is the respective roles of the parents, family, firm and society in all these aspects. This is one of the important questions to be addressed in the following pages.

Work-family balancing: individual or collective responsibility ?

The responsibility for establishing or reestablishing balance between work, family and, if possible, some time for personal life cannot be left to individuals. In particular, the case of mothers alone with children, of which there are many, highlights the importance of going beyond individual responsibility. This is all the more the case if one takes into account intergenerational transfers, and more specifically the fact that these mothers children will, through social programs and transfers, assume some financial responsibility for people without children who will age in the coming years and need the support of public services. Thus, in a perspective of intergenerational and social transfers, as well as in a social solidarity perspective, it appears legitimate to consider collective responsibility towards children in particular. This can also eventually be extended to elderly care, here the legitimacy of collective action resting mainly on social solidarity, rather than on a financial transfer perspective.

As work-family balancing thus clearly appears to be a social problem, the solution is necessarily of a social or collective nature. All social actors have a role to play, not only individuals (men and women), but also the state (municipalities, school system and central government) and employers. While some employers have started to develop daycare or programs to support family activities, they are not yet very numerous to do so. The same goes for municipalities and the school system, who have clearly not gone as far as they could, particularly in terms of diversity and flexibility of services. Let us just mention the problem pedagogical days represent for many parents in terms of daycare for children who are out of school at different times during the year to make it clear that still much has to be done.

In order to intervene, it seems essential to develop a global approach, a series of diversified and coherent means to cover all needs: better daycare, more flexible schedules, development of preschool activities, complementary daycare for pedagogical days and school holidays that often do not correspond to time off for parents, etc. In this regard, public services and the state appear to be called upon to design solutions for all. Still too many parents have to rely on family, grandparents particularly, and this is not possible for all, because of geographical distance or of absence of elderly parents in some cases. Firms could also be called upon to complete support in these ad hoc situations.

In any case, the necessity for a collective support system appears clear and there is still a long way to go on this in Canada as in many other countries.

Hours and schedules: choice and flexibility are essential



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In different surveys, parents were asked to identify preferred modes of work-family balancing amongst different possibilities. The results indicate that many would want on-site daycare, that is 23,3 % of parents having main responsibility for children, according to Lero (1993). However some data indicate that on-site daycare is preferred mainly for small children under 5. The second measure which appears important has to do with working time flexibility: 18,5 % of parents would appreciate flexibility in working hours. The percentage is higher as children grow older, going up to 22,6 % and 23 % respectively for parents with children aged 6 to 9 and 10 to 12.

Part time work is also seen as a solution, but only for 9,4 % of workers. Some 6,3 % would also appreciate the possibility to take time off at different times.

As can be seen, flexibility in working hours is important, and while it can be said that working schedules have become more flexible over the years, the precise forms of flexibility are not always those wanted by workers. Many workers actually suffer from variable schedules and hours that are imposed upon them by their employer, sometimes by the specific conditions of the work being done (as is the case in restaurants, banking and other services, where working hours are dependent on the consumers' presence to a large extent). (Tremblay and Villeneuve, 1997)

Beyond flexibility in working hours, it thus appears clearly that choice of these hours is essential to make flexibility into an advantage and not a problem for work-family balancing.

We mentioned previously the preferences of parents, but other survey results give us an idea of what is actually offered by firms in general. As a figure from Lero (1993) indicates, the vast majority of parents of children under 13 do not have access to flexible hours; only 32,3 % of them do. Other advantages identified in the survey give the following results:

- 53,1 % of parents of children under 13 could have extended maternity leave in Canada;
- 52,9 % could work part time if they wish;
- 24,1 % have access to jobsharing;
- 23,4 % have paid time off for family obligations;
- 12,4 % have supplementary benefits added onto employment-insurance benefits for maternity leave;
- 5,9 % have on-site daycare;
- 4,6 % can bring children to work if necessary.

As can be seen, the most common measures are not necessarily the most advantageous, particularly career-wise. Extended leave and part time often leave women out of the career track of firms and thus represent as much of a problem in terms of work-family balancing. Also, in terms of employment equity, it is clear that these "solutions" mean that women assume the main responsibility in terms of family care as well as in terms of sacrificing a career. These consequences are clear enough to make the percentage of men participating in flexitime options, and particularly in part-time or jobsharing, a very small percentage of all participants.

Canadian firms were surveyed as concerns their views on how different working time arrangements can contribute in solving some human resources problems, and the results are quite interesting, although the survey dates to 1989. It is also interesting to note that the few surveys done on the issue generally date to 1988-1989, and have not been reproduced



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since... What this means in terms of society and firms' interest in the issue of work-family balancing is quite instructive. In Québec, the employers' organisation has produced a few bulletins on the issue, and unions have also shown interest, but there are no other large social surveys on the issue in Canada or Québec that could keep us posted as to whether things have gotten better or worse in the 90's, with a difficult employment situation and slow economic growth.

Getting back to the results from the survey of firms concerning how different working time arrangements can contribute in solving some human resources problems, the following results can be highlighted:

- between 57,8 % and 81 % of firms consider that flexible schedules can aid in solving different HR problems (see table for details);
- jobsharing could solve between 58,5 % and 83,8 % of different HR problems;
- a compressed workweek would solve between 55,4 % and 83,2 % of different HR problems;
- etc.

Of course, some measures are better in reducing specific HR problems such as absenteeism or late entries to work, some have more effect on worker productivity and performance, some more on recruitment, others on stress and employee morale. In other words, specific measures may be better than others to alleviate specific problems, and they have to be chosen for specific problems and contexts.

Basic Principles for work-family balancing

Our review of different studies and surveys, as well as some case studies, permits us to put forward some basic principles which are favorable to work-family balancing, and which should in our view be considered by firms and organisations dealing with such issues. We will go over them quickly in conclusion to this paper.

The first principle is based on the idea of thinking in terms of "work-family program". Surveys and case studies indicate that flexible work schedules are all the more efficient when they are accompanied by a coherent set of different complementary measures which all contribute in facilitating work-family balancing. More and more firms are adopting such a "program" approach. In clear, this means that rather than just having different measures here and there, the firm and its' employees, or their representatives, should take a holistic approach to the problem and consider all angles and all specificities (age of children, marital situation or single parents, problems related to late meetings or out-of town meetings, etc.), rather than present a few ad hoc measures.

Firms like the Bank of Montreal and IBM Canada are examples of firms that have adopted such a "work-family program" approach. The Bank of Montreal offers its employees not only flexible hours, but also the following: on-site daycare, a free 24 hours a day telephone service for childcare services, a free information service for support to elderly parents, and the like. Employees thus feel that not only are a few programs offered but that the firm also has a preoccupation for the ad hoc unexpected situations that are often the most problematic parents have to face.

A second principle has to do with developing measures that are adapted to the different situations. For example, an on-site daycare may seem like a universal ideal solution, but that will not be so for workers who are often on the move, actually working in different places



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or having meetings with clients in different places. Firms should therefore not just select a few programs that appear appropriate to them and offer them without analysing their employees' specific situations.

The reality is that few firms offer many programs, only some 25 % of different measures identified in the literature being relatively frequent in Québec firms, according to Guérin and St-Onge's research. It thus seems that firms chose what appears simplest or most convenient to them and do not necessarily take the time and necessary measures to check out what their personnel really requires. I can also think of a university that surveyed its employees concerning their interest for on-site daycare and decided not to go forward for apparent lack of interest of its employees, without considering any other type of work-family balancing measure. Some 4 years later, still nothing has been envisaged, the subject apparently forgotten once the institution felt it had "made an effort" just by surveying on daycare.

Many firms also leave it up to employees to propose ad hoc solutions to their specific problems. The employee can propose a solution to his or her superior in firms such as IBM, Bank of Montreal, Confédération des caisses populaires Desjardins, and others. If this has the advantage of maximum flexibility, employees need to be supported by their environment and by their superior's attitude in order to feel comfortable in putting forward a solution.

A third principle has to do with preserving marginal benefits to which workers are entitled and with ensuring that work flexibility does not translate into precarious conditions such as more job insecurity, less access to training or promotions, cuts in benefits such as health or retirement programs, etc. IBM and Bank of Montreal documents attest that this must not happen, but of course it is difficult to ensure this is the case for training and promotion opportunities. Many employees of different firms (and many men particularly) still hesitate to ask for jobsharing, part time or reduced hours for fear this will put them on the "mummy" track.

This leads us to the fourth principle which we consider important, that is to ensure equality for women in the labour market, particularly in the context of work-family balancing. This is not an easy objective as it has to do with changing mentalities, with ensuring equal rights to all employees. The more men will participate in different measures of work-family balancing, and the more they will do so explicitly for family reasons, the more management will show its support to such attitudes and choices, the more women and men will feel comfortable in using such measures without fearing for the future of their career. This is clearly a challenge for the future, as different interviews done for a TV series on the subject clearly indicate the situation is not ideal yet.

To this day, flexible hours, part-time, reduced hours and similar measures of work-family conciliation are more often the lot of women. This contributes in perpetuating the traditional gendered division of labour within the family, with women doing more than their share of domestic work and assuming the majority of family responsibilities regarding care, clothing, feeding and education of children, and the reduced paid hours contributing in reproducing the economic and professional inequality between men and women.

We will conclude on this last principle, which in our view is the main challenge of the future as regards the work-family balancing issue. It should however be noted however that we feel that the majority of these programs are only partial solutions to a more equal gendered division of labour, as to a certain extent, they often contribute in segmenting work and family and support the further concentration of women in family roles, while men are not forced to increase their family responsibilities. While men can still be seen as successful



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even if they do not participate fully in family responsibilities and can afford separation between work and family, women still seem to be seen as successful only if they can manage to have enough time available for family responsibilities and emotional nurturing, as is highlighted by Rothausen and Paetzold.

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TABLES

Table 1
Changes in Work Schedules, Canada, 1991-1995

Type of schedule	1991	1995
Normal day schedule	70%	68%
On call	2,6%	2,4%
Rotating schedule	9,2%	10,2%
Irregular schedule	10,2%	10,5%
Regular night schedule	4,9%	5,1%
Night schedule	1,4%	1,8%
Broken hours	0,8%	1,0%
Other	0,9%	0,9%

Source: *Enquête sur les horaires et les conditions de travail*, Statistique Canada, data reported in Lipsett and Reesor (1997).

Table 2
Reasons for working non standard schedules, Canada, 1991-1995

Reason	% of full time employees		% of part time employees	
	1991	1995	1991	1995
Job requirement	86,9	90,2	47,5	53,4
Personal reasons	7,5	5,9	47,1	42,4
Other	5,6	3,9	5,4	4,2
<i>Percentage of all salaried jobs</i>	81,8	82,0	18,2	18,0

Note: Full time is 30 hours and over; part time less than 30 hours in Canadian Data.
Source: Lipsett et Reesor (1997: 7). *Enquête sur les horaires et les conditions de travail*, Statistique Canada.



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Graph 1

Only one in three Canadian workers had a standard job in 1995

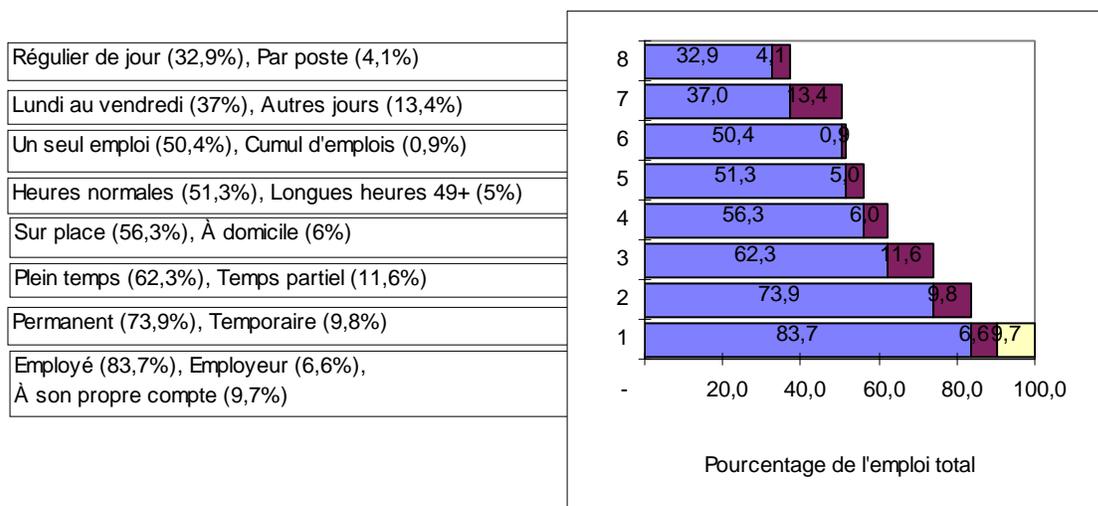


Table 3

Participation rate of women, Canada, 1951-1995

Year	Participation rate of women*	Participation rate of married women **
1951	18,3%	9,6%
1956	20,4%	12,8%
1961	25,5%	20,8%
1966	31,2%	26,8%
1971	35,4%	33,0%
1976	41,3%	42,8%
1981	48,5%	50,5%
1986	53,0%	56,1%
1991	57,0%	63,2%
1995	56,8%	61,4%

Sources:

(*) *Moyennes annuelles de la population active*, publication no 71-220 au catalogue de Statistique Canada.

(**) De 1951 à 1986: données du recensement et de l'enquête sur la population active, publications no 99-553 et 71-001 au catalogue de Statistique Canada.

1991: Statistique Canada, publication no 93-324 au catalogue, données du recensement 1991.

1995: Statistique Canada, publication no 71-220 (1995) au catalogue.



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Table 4
Perception of time for persons aged 25-44 working full time, Canada, 1992

		Men			Women		
		% of positive answers (percentages apply to each category)					
1	(Note: our translation of questions from French version of report)	Not married, without children	Married, without children	Married fathers	Not married, without children	Married, without children	Married mothers
2	Do you plan to slow down in the coming year?	19	20	20	19	30	29
3	Do you consider yourself a workaholic?	35	29	32	28	32	33
4	When you need more time, do you tend to cut on sleeping hours?	56	45	57	48	48	55
5	At the end of the day, do you often feel that you haven't done all you wanted to do ?	47	44	49	49	55	58
6	Do you worry because you don't spend enough time with your family or friends?	45	43	51	45	48	51
7	Are you constantly stressed because you want to do more than you can?	35	35	39	40	38	52
8	Do you feel caught in a daily routine?	44	30	34	35	43	48
9	Do you feel you no longer have enough time to have fun?	28	26	36	34	41	52
10	Do you often feel stressed because you lack time?	50	49	51	58	60	69
	Would you like to spend more time by yourself?	23	25	26	20	31	46

Source: Frederick (1995: 34).



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Table 5
Percentage of problems due to work-family conflict

HR problem	None	Quarter	Half	More than half	Indeterminate
Recruitment	60,7	12,5	3,1	2,3	21,4
Keeping staff	43,2	27,1	2,9	2,9	23,9
Absenteeism	20,5	39,9	12,0	4,3	23,4
Late arrivals	27,1	30,8	12,1	4,9	25,1
Stress	14,0	29,6	19,9	8,8	27,6
Morale	33,9	25,6	10,3	2,3	27,9
Loyalty	51,2	15,9	3,5	1,2	28,3
Productivity	31,2	29,5	9,9	2,8	26,6
Performance	33,0	29,3	7,4	2,8	27,4

Source: H el ene Paris (1989: 11).

Table 6
Preferred advantages and pro-family work modes for parents,
by age of youngest child, 1988

�ge du plus jeune enfant						
Avantage ou mode de travail pr�f�r� ¹	Total ² (N=1 320 000)	Less than 18 months (N=222 000)	18 - 35 mnths (N=183 300)	3 -5 yrs (N=295 700)	6 - 9 yrs (N=362 500)	10 - 12 yrs (N=256 600)
(Percentage of parents who indicated the advantage or work mode would help them most in their role as a parent)						
On-site Daycare	23,3	34,6	31,6	30,5	15,8	9,7
flexible working hours	18,5	12,4	13,3	17,4	22,6	23,0
Part time work	9,4	10,2	11,3	8,9	9,4	7,7
Leaves						
Maternity leave	7,5	14,5	12,0	6,6	4,4	3,5
Other leaves ³	6,3	6,4	5,3	6,5	6,8	6,1
Others	4,5	3,9	4,6	4,2	5,5	3,9
None	30,5	18,0	21,8	25,9	35,4	46,0

¹ Parents could only give one answer.

² Data in this table represent the answers from 1 320 000 working parents who assume the main responsibility in terms of care of children and who worked outside of the home for pay. 96 % of parents answered this question.

³ Includes leaves for taking care of sick children, prolonged leave for the education of children and urgency leaves.

Source: Lero, Goelman, Pence, Brockman and Nuttal (1993: 59).