

# **Work-Life Conflict: A Significant and Growing Workplace Issue – The Case for Achieving Work-Life Balance**

*Paper Prepared by Glynis Andersson and Kate Milne for TFEU Bargaining Committee, November 2007*

## **Introduction**

Work-life conflict is a growing and significant workplace issue – an issue that surfaces almost daily in the press, and one that has been extensively studied in Canada and around the world. Work-life conflict has the potential to severely impact the operation of organizations whose leaders choose ignore the needs of employees to achieve balance in their lives. However, as many experts have pointed out, astute organizations can realize a “win-win” solution benefiting both employers and employees by implementing policies and practices that allow for flexibility and alternative work arrangements.

## **Review of the Literature**

A review of the literature finds that today’s workers rate work-life balance policies as very important and that organizations implementing work-life balance policies see a return on their investment through increased productivity, less absenteeism, better employee health, easier recruitment and improved retention.

For example, in a recent study sponsored by the Canadian Policy Research Networks, survey respondents rated seven job features as very important. Among them was work-life balance. (Lowe, 2007) In discussing the research on work-life balance, work-life policy researcher Graham Lowe says, “Flexibility has become a byword for work-life balance. It is widely assumed, and supported by research, that providing workers with more control over their work schedules enables them to better meet their personal and family needs and indirectly contributes to productivity.” (Lowe, 2007) Similarly, in his review of the research, Lowe states, “An extensive body of research on work-life conflict documents how the relationship between work and family affects an individual’s health as well as their performance in work and family roles.” (Lowe, 2006)

Work-life conflict researcher Linda Duxbury says, “We have ascertained that high work-life conflict has a negative impact on the organization’s bottom line, impairs an employee’s health (both physically and mentally), reduces participation in and enjoyment of family roles, negatively impacts employees’ abilities to enjoy and nurture their families and increases health care costs.” (Duxbury 2007)

## **Work-life Conflict – What Is It and What Can We Do About It**

Following are comments by researchers and experts in the field of work-life balance and work-life conflict that illustrate the extent of the problem. They call upon organizations to take the lead in addressing the challenges we face today as well as those that are on the horizon by implementing work-life balance policies.

### **Work-life Conflict – What it Means**

- Focus group participants in a study conducted by The Work Foundation described work-life imbalance as “feeling a lack of control and autonomy over where, when and how you work.” Themes that emerged from the group were higher levels of illness, strain on relationships at work and at home, and dilemmas involving decisions between opportunities for career advancement and spending more time with family.” (Visser and Williams, p.14)
- In terms of the negative impact that work-life conflict has on mental health, Lowe provides the following list: “reduced general mental health and well-being, dissatisfaction with life, stress, psychosomatic symptoms, depression, general psychological distress, use of medication, alcohol consumption, substance abuse, clinical mood disorders, clinical anxiety disorders, and emotional exhaustion.” (Lowe, 2005, p.7)

### **Role overload and Job Stress:**

- Role overload – having too much to do in the amount of time to do it – is the #1 predictor of prescription drug use in Canada. Prozac is now the most prescribed drug. (Duxbury, 2007)
- Sixty per cent of Canadians report high levels of role overload (Duxbury, 2007)
- “Chronic job stress has emerged in what you might call epidemic terms.” (MacQueen, 2007 quoting Bill Wilkerson, CEO of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, p.2)

### **Our changing lives:**

- “Canadians are living complex lives. Work and family are NOT separate any more.” (Duxbury, 2007)
- “Workdays are longer, and for most families, including three-quarter of those with children, both parents work. What used to be three peoples’ work is being done by two with nobody home when the child is sick. Families are smaller, but they’re also scattered. The ‘sandwich generation’ is often simultaneously handling both child and elder care.” (MacQueen 2007 quoting Donna Lero, Jarislowsky Chair in Families and Work at the University of Guelph)

### **Technology and work intensification:**

- “Jobs may not be as physically laborious as they were but they’re more relentless. A lot of people now are identifying techno-stress and the 24/7 workday, which we didn’t have

even 10 or 15 years ago, this feeling of being constantly plugged in, of checking email 500 times a day.” (MacQueen 2007 quoting Shannon Wagner, clinical psychologist and specialist in workplace stress research at the University of Northern B.C.)

- Percent of respondents who said technology has increased workload rather than decreased it – 70%. Percent who said technology has increased stress levels – almost 70%. (Duxbury, 2007, p. 10)
- Canada is number 3 in the world in terms of intensification of work (Duxbury, *ibid.*)

### **Employee Retention in a Tight Labour Market**

- In a recent presentation, Duxbury discussed at length, the impact of demographics, both nationally and internationally, on the current labour market, warning of the impending labour shortage. She pointed out that here in Canada, we are entering a “sellers market for labour” and that employee wellbeing is now key to recruitment and retention.” She also noted that while the “labour force grew by approximately 226,000 per year for the last 25 years, ... by 2016 annual growth will be near zero.” (Duxbury, 2007)
- In terms of role overload, Duxbury claims that employees with high role overload are “13 times more likely to be thinking of leaving their current employer because their work expectations are unrealistic,...and 5 times more likely to be thinking of leaving their current employer because they want more time for their family and/or themselves.” (Duxbury, *ibid.*)
- Graham Lowe also notes that employees whose job conditions do not meet their expectations in terms of “work-family balance and flexibility are more likely to have looked for a job in another firm in the past year.” (Lowe, 2005, p.9)
- Hewitt Associates, a well-renowned global human resources firm, put out a press release last year with this title: “Hewitt Associates Survey Reveals Flexibility Key to Addressing Labour Shortage.” Within the press release, the authors claim that “More than half (52 per cent) of companies said arrangements such as flexible hours and benefits will have the most positive impact in helping them find and keep strong employees.” (Hewitt Associates, Press Release, June 15, 2006)

### **Costs of work-life conflict**

- Workload is the #1 predictor of absenteeism (Duxbury, 2007, p. 22)
- High work-life conflict costs Canadians approximately **6 to 10 billion** dollars per year, high role overload alone amounts to \$3 billion per year. (Duxbury, *ibid.*, p.23)
- “Stress is part of an explosion in workplace mental health issues now costing the Canadian economy an estimated \$33 billion a year in lost productivity, as well as billions more in medical costs.” (MacQueen, 2007, p.1)
- Even Prime Minister Stephen Harper said that with almost one million Canadians suffering from a mental health disorder, “it’s now the fastest-growing category of disability insurance claims in Canada.” (MacQueen, 2007)
- Presenteeism, defined as being present at work physically but not being productive, is the silent scourge of productivity according to Paul Hemp, a writer for *Harvard Business Review*. It is estimated to cost Canadian employers \$22 billion a year. (MacQueen, 2007)

- Work demands have even resulted in families having fewer children, and in some cases not starting a family (Duxbury, *ibid.*, p. 29)

### **Costs Of Doing Nothing**

- Implicit in the research on the high costs of work-life conflict, is the cost of doing nothing; simply ignoring the problem. The costs in this case are three-fold:
  - Costs to the employee in terms of increased stress, depression, burnout, and physical illness,
  - Costs to the organization including dissatisfied and disengaged employees, higher absenteeism, increased medical benefit costs as well as the costs of recruiting and training new employees.
  - Finally, there are significant costs to society and our health system in terms of treating stress, stress-related physical illness, depression, substance abuse and addictions.
- Duxbury's research shows that employees with high work-life conflict are about 30 % more likely to be absent from work, and are more than twice as likely to take "mental health days" (40% vs 18%). (Duxbury, 2007)
- According to Toronto psychiatrist Dr. Irvin Wolkoff, "The World Health Organization predicts that over the next 20 years, depression – not all mental illness, just depression – will be the second largest health burden on earth; number two after cardiovascular disease." (Hervieux, 2006, p. 1)

### **Work-Life Balance, Policy and Practice – What Employers Can Do**

- In terms of addressing work-life balance issues overall, Duxbury says "employers need to focus their efforts on four sets of initiatives:
  - increase the number of supportive managers within the organization,
  - provide flexibility around work,
  - increase employees' sense of control, and
  - focus on creating a more supportive work environment." (Duxbury, 2001).

According to Duxbury, implementing these initiatives would result in employees developing increased organizational commitment, increased job and life satisfaction, decreased job stress, and decreased depression, and ultimately improve the organization's bottom line. (Duxbury, 2007)

- Graham Lowe, speaking on the issue of work-family conflict and the role of the employer says, "Based on the evidence, public policy must move in the direction of greater employee choice and flexibility over work time." (Lowe, 2005, p. 10)

- Lowe also points out, “Among those individuals finding it harder to balance work and family, the single most important change that would help them achieve a better balance is a manageable workload (cited by 48 percent), followed by **flexible work hours** (46 percent) and **being able to choose the days they work** (44 percent). Again, these are consistent themes in work-life balance research.” (Lowe, *ibid.*, p. 44)

So far, this paper has covered the following:

- Review of the literature
- Discussion of the meaning of work-life balance and work-life conflict
- Examination of the reasons why work-life balance has become such an important issue, including some discussion about demographics and the labour market, especially with regards to employee recruitment and retention
- Examples of the prohibitive costs of work-life conflict or work-life imbalance to the employee, employer, the health care system, and society as a whole
- Discussion of the costs involved in ignoring the issue, and
- Brief overview of steps that employers can take to enhance work-life balance within the organization, thus improving the bottom line.

At this juncture, we wish to take a more in-depth look at two policies which the research shows can have very positive impacts in terms of work-life balance, increasing the health and engagement of employees, and greatly improving the health of the organization – telecommuting and flexible schedules.

## Telecommuting

### *Benefits for employers*

**Cost savings:** The main savings are in premises costs, office overheads and labour. Companies adopting telework methods achieve significant reductions in total office occupancy. Work can be carried out wherever the appropriate skills are available at the optimum mix of costs and other factors. In some circumstances recruitment costs can also be reduced, as can the costs associated with high staff turnover (attrition) rates. An ITAC study showed companies could save upwards of \$5,000 a year per teleworker in office space costs (Pratt, 2004). A cost-benefit analysis calculator can be accessed at [http://www.jala.com/homecba\\_input.php](http://www.jala.com/homecba_input.php)

**Increased productivity:** Productivity increases of 40% have been reported, though a range of 10%-40% is probably more typical across a large-scale programme. Teleworkers avoid travel time and the interruptions of an office environment. In successful programmes, employees respond well to the signal of trust and confidence indicated by the employer's adoption of more independent work styles encouraged by teleworking. Both teleworkers and their managers consistently report significant productivity gains. For example, Telus experienced productivity gains by employees by an average of 20 per cent (Morton, 2007)

**Skills retention:** Employees who might otherwise leave can remain in their jobs, for example when the family moves because of a job change by another family member who works in a non-telework company. Employees who take a career break can continue working part time and remain up to date with the business and its methods. Employees who take maternity leave can continue to undertake some tasks and require less retraining when they return to work full time. In the poll of about 10,000 U.S. workers, 73% of remote and home-based workers said they were satisfied with their company as a place to work, compared with 64% of office workers (Coombes, 2007)

**Organisation flexibility:** In the event of restructuring and reorganisation people can continue to work without disruption to their personal lives. People work in dispersed teams that can be assembled and reassembled as the needs of the enterprise change. Teams representing the best skills and experience for a particular project can be created, regardless of geography and time zones and with a minimal need for extra travel (European Telework Online, 2000).

**Flexible staffing:** In activities that generate peaks and troughs of workload, telework can enable staff to work hours to match peak workload, without the staff concerned having to travel. In limited hours working the travel element can otherwise become as long as the work time. In some cases staff can be on "standby time" at home at retainer rates and then paid at higher rates when needed for active work (Recruitment and Retention, 2006).

**Resilience:** Organisations with effective teleworking programmes are more resilient in the face of external disruption - for example transport strikes, severe weather, natural disasters or terrorist action (European Telework Online, 2000).

## ***Benefits for individuals***

**Reduced travel time and costs:** This is the most obvious benefit and, for many teleworkers, a primary motivation. In our surveys, most teleworkers have used at least part of this time to get more work done, in contrast to the "relaxed lifestyle" image painted by the media implying lack of productivity in a telework setting. (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

**Less disruption to family life:** An effective telework and flexible working programme reduces the need for relocation to take up "career moves" and other job changes (European Telework Online, 2000).

**Better balance of work and family life:** Even though the teleworker may put in more hours of effective work, he or she can still expect to see more of the family and can more easily participate in home responsibilities such as ferrying children, shopping etc. While a 45 minute commute every day might not seem like much, the time adds up. Based on a 260-day work year, that means 195 fewer hours spent with the family in 2005 than in 1986. That's almost five, 40-hour work weeks (Anthony, 2007).

**Participation in the local community:** An important benefit for many teleworkers is being "on the spot" to participate in community activities - for example as a school governor or in local clubs and societies, at a time when commuters are still *en route* (European Telework Online, 2000).

**Flexible hours:** A flexible approach to working hours often accompanies the successful teleworking programme and flexible telework approach can mean individual freedom to stop and start according to what works best (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007)

## ***Social and economic benefits***

**Reduced total travel and consequent pollution:** The same transport-telecommunications substitution study also confirmed that teleworkers do generate a worthwhile net reduction in total car travel. In California and some other states, there are legal or fiscal programmes aimed at encouraging telework as part of a battery of anti-pollution measures (Cal/EPA Telework Program, 2007).

**Access to work for people with specific difficulties:** Telework can also enable access to work, training and social interaction for people who have specific problems - for example those with disabilities that make it difficult to travel to work or to do a normal nine-to-five working day; single parents who need to be at home for the children; carers with responsibility for an elderly or sick relative. Again, special measures may be needed to make such access realisable (Tahmincioglu, 2003)

## *Companies with telecommuting policies*

Many companies and organizations have already implemented successful telecommuting programs. Here is some information and excerpts from collective agreements and/or language:

### 1) Telecommuting - **Delta municipality**

**Telecommuting:** A Letter of Understanding provides for a telecommuting pilot project. **The employer will designate the employees or positions that can telecommute and the maximum amount of telecommuting will be 2 days per week.** The employer will pay for Internet charges and equipment for employees with a telecommuting assignment.

[http://www.fairnessforcivicworkers.ca/www/news/Details\\_of\\_Delta\\_civ](http://www.fairnessforcivicworkers.ca/www/news/Details_of_Delta_civ)

### 2) **ICBC & COPEU**

Telecommuting is defined as “recurring scheduled work that is done from a location remote to the regular designated worksite(s)”. Such locations would include the employee’s home or a satellite office. The Corporation and the Union support a part-time telecommuting pilot to start during the term of this Collective Agreement.

<http://www.lrb.bc.ca/cas/WSM6.pdf>

### 3) **Telus**

In May, **TELUS launched TELUS Telecommuting to save business customers thousands of dollars per participating employee while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and smog, easing strain on transportation infrastructure and enriching employees' lives.** TELUS Telecommuting is a suite of communications services that allow business clients to work out of their homes. The services - high speed Internet; virtual private networks; a variety of phone options; and collaboration services such as web, audio and video conferencing - allow workers to create virtual offices at home.

Working with businesses, TELUS is creating telecommuting programs tailored to their unique operations and often passing significant savings and preferred pricing to participating employees. Programs may include purchase of residential Internet services through payroll deduction, and employee discounts on services such as TELUS Home Networking, a wireless LAN solution.

To help businesses measure the impacts of employees working at home, TELUS partnered with Calgary's Teletrips. They have developed a web-based system where teleworkers enter information such as their vehicle's make, the distance they travel to work and then periodically enter the days they teleworked. The system then automatically calculates the pollution avoided, time saved and how much money the employee saved in fuel and maintenance costs, risk mitigation reports, and other value-added information that corporations want to include in their corporate responsibility reports.

Source: *TELUS launches three new security solutions*

<http://www.digital50.com/news/items/PR/2005/05/04/TO251/telus-reports-first-quarter-results.html>

**4) Vancouver Island Newspaper Guild**  
**LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING No. 4**  
**Telecommuters**

The Employer agrees to consider requests from employees who wish to Telecommute.

The Company shall assist the Telecommuter in meeting all WCB requirements.

The Company will assist the Telecommuter with equipment requirements necessary to facilitate the Telecommuting arrangement. Such assistance may include purchase of required equipment and the repair of stated equipment or the repair of the employee's personal equipment.

The Company will provide any declarations required by Revenue Canada detailing the Telecommuting arrangement.

The Company shall identify in writing, the current Telecommuters, to the Guild. Thereafter, the Company shall identify in writing, the Telecommuters on a quarterly basis to the Guild.

<http://vving.ca/letters.shtml>

**5) Association of Administrative and Professional Staff (AAPS)& UBC**

**Clause 10.3 Workplace Options**

An employee may be granted flexible working arrangements which do not have a negative impact on business operations. These arrangements shall be mutually agreed and voluntary and shall be negotiated between the employee and administrative head of unit. Examples of such arrangements include but are not limited to **flextime, flexdays, job sharing and telecommuting.**

[http://www.hr.ubc.ca/collective\\_agreements/AAPSagreement.html](http://www.hr.ubc.ca/collective_agreements/AAPSagreement.html)

**6) BCGEU and Justice Institute of British Columbia (06/2010)**

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING #5**

**TELEWORK**

The Parties agree that the Labour/Management Committee will review the Telework Policy recommended via the BCGEU and Provincial Government Master Agreement, with a view to recommending to the bargaining principals:

- a policy with respect to Telework;
- guidelines and training materials regarding implementation of telework projects for use by manager and employees; and
- a process to monitor any telework projects involving bargaining unit members.

<http://www.psea.bc.ca/docs/JIBC->

[BCGEU%20July%201,%202006%20to%20June%2030,%202010.pdf](http://www.psea.bc.ca/docs/JIBC-BCGEU%20July%201,%202006%20to%20June%2030,%202010.pdf)

**7) Assiniboine Credit Union Limited**

[www.assiniboine.mb.ca](http://www.assiniboine.mb.ca)

200 Main St, 6th Floor, Box 2 Station Main, Winnipeg, MB R3C 2G1

Chapter from 100 top employers

<http://www.eluta.ca/einfo?nga=1&rk=75954ed4c888502d820ac4abeb86b0ad&ri=f11429163dc38613d6ab08eb008793d0>

ACU's family-friendly benefits are rated as **average** (within Canada's top 100 employers.) Employees with pre-school children have access to a daycare facility located nearby. If an employee takes a compassionate leave to look after a family member, ACU provides a top-up to 100% of their salary for up to 2 weeks. Other family-friendly benefits include: flexible start and finish hours; shortened work week (fewer hours); compressed work week (same hours, fewer days); telecommuting and working from home.

#### **8.) Conexus Credit Union**

[www.conexuscu.com](http://www.conexuscu.com)

1960 Albert St, PO Box 1960, Station Main, Regina, SK S4P 2T4

<http://www.eluta.ca/einfo?en=Conexus+Credit+Union&ri=51b52dd474ea15dac472ead28620cd0c&rk=24ffd6b97af822afdc0d0aeb1afe6e59>

Conexus' family-friendly benefits are rated as **average** (within Canada's top 100 employers.) Employees with pre-school children have access to a daycare facility located nearby. Other family-friendly benefits include: flexible start and finish hours; shortened work week (fewer hours); compressed work week (same hours, fewer days); telecommuting and working from home; formal earned days off program.

## Flexible Schedules

Implementing flexible schedule policies can be a zero-cost item to the employer, yet such policies can yield major benefits including improvement in employee morale leading to greater employee commitment and engagement; improvement in employees' physical and mental health leading to greater productivity; less absenteeism, lower health plan costs, and significant improvement to recruitment and retention.

### *Benefits for employers*

- A large British survey finds a positive association between family friendly benefits and most measures of firm outcomes including **financial performance, labour productivity, less absenteeism, and quality of work.** (Ferrer and Gagne, 2006 quoting study by Gray, H., 2002)
- A study published in *Industrial Relations* claims that “family supportive practices involving flexibility **increase commitment** on the part of the workers, therefore **increasing productivity and reducing turnover.**” (Ferrer and Gagne, 2006 quoting study by Eaton, S., 2001)
- In examining the research evidence overall, Lowe finds that “flexible schedules can produce **significant benefits to the firm.** (Lowe, 2005, p.9) He also points out that a number of studies show “that giving employees more control over work schedules and time may contribute to process efficiency. (Lowe, 2005, p.8)
- Many studies have examined employee **recruitment and retention** within the context of work-life balance policies such as flexible schedules. Duxbury notes that **high work-family conflict is one of the top reasons for leaving an employer.** (Duxbury 2007). In a 2006 survey by Hewitt Associates, **flexibility was found to be the key in addressing employee recruitment and retention.** “**More than half (52 per cent) of companies said arrangements such as flexible hours and benefits will have the most positive impact in helping them find and keep strong employees.**” (Canadian Employers Struggle...p. 1) Lowe, in citing the research evidence in this area, says “There is **cumulative evidence that work-life policies can have positive effects on retention,**” and that “**Work-to-family conflict predicts intentions to quit.**” (Lowe 2005, p.8)

### *Benefits for employees*

- **Lower work-family conflict** – “Employees with the greatest work time and location flexibility have lower levels of all three types of work-family conflict, even when hours of work are controlled.” (Lowe, 2005, p. 47 quoting Duxbury, 2003)
- **Ease the pressure of caregiving** – One of the top demographic trends in Canada is the increasing number of workers with caregiving responsibilities. “In 2002, **over 1.7 million adults aged 45 to 64 provided informal care to almost 2.3 million seniors** with long-term disabilities or physical limitations.” (Pyper, 2006, p. 5 quoting study by Stobert and Cranswick, 2004)

- **Improved work-life balance** - EKOS Research Associates surveyed Canadian workers asking them about strategies that would help them achieve greater work-life balance. The respondents listed the following as the top four – 1) **manageable workload**; 2) **choose my work hours**; 3) **choose my work days**; 4) **compressed workweek**. (Lowe 2005, p.45 citing EKOS survey, *Rethinking Work*)

### *Social and Economic Benefits*

- In addition to our responsibilities as employers and employees, we also have an obligation to do what is within our sphere of influence in order to create healthier communities and a healthier nation. As mentioned earlier, the **World Health Organization recently listed depression as the 2<sup>nd</sup> major health issue world-wide**, second only to cardiovascular disease. In Canada there are currently **1 million Canadians suffering from a mental health disorder** and this is now **the fastest growing category of disability claims**. (MacQueen 2007, p. 1). Anything that can be done to reduce conflict between work and family, such as allowing flexible schedules, would address some mental health issues.
- Duxbury claims that **caregiver strain alone costs the Canadian health system \$1.5 billion annually** and that **families are deciding to have fewer children** simply because they are unable to meet the demands of work and family. (Duxbury 2007). With the **impending labour shortage**, especially as baby-boomers retire, this is likely to lead to disastrous consequences, unless we take action now.
- Flexible schedules can also **reduce greenhouse gas emissions** by allowing employees to travel to and from work outside the peak of the rush hour and by allowing compressed work weeks, cutting back on commutes to and from work.

### *Prevalence of Flexible Schedules*

- Ferrer and Gagne, using data from the Workplace Employee Survey, a large nationally representative sample of employers and their employees, found that **flexible time was available to 54% of female workers and 58% of male workers**. (Ferrer and Gagne, 2006, p.9). These numbers have probably increased significantly as the data for the survey was from 1999-2002.
- Lowe notes that in general, flexible work-family arrangements have increased in most industrial nations over the last 2 decades. (Lowe, 2005, p.9)
- The press release by Hewitt Associates notes that many of the organizations that responded to their survey **already offered flexible arrangements** and their plan was to **expand such policies** over the next several years. (Canadian employers struggle, 2006)

## *Examples of Flexible Schedule Provisions in Collective Agreements*

Many collective agreements have clauses providing for flexible hours of work which allow employees greater decision-making in work time organization. Allowing employees to choose their hours of work leads to greater employee satisfaction which in turn provides cost savings to the employer.

A wide variety of solutions have been crafted by different unionized workplaces that address the need to provide more flexibility with regard to timing of hours worked. Perhaps most common among these solutions, is the flexible work schedule that **allows employees to choose their start and finish times**. Here is an example of some clauses that cover daily work hours:

- **Subject to operational requirements as determined from time to time by the Employer, an employee shall have the right to select and request flexible hours between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. and such request shall not be unreasonably denied.** (Government of Canada and Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (Auditing Group) (1999-2000))
- **The regular work day includes two (2) core periods, defined as the periods when the employee's presence is mandatory.**

**The core periods are as follows:**

- 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.;
- 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.
- 

**The regular work day includes three (3) flexible periods, defined as the periods when the employee's presence is optional.**

**The flexible periods are as follows:**

- 7:00 to 9:30 a.m.;
- 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.;
- 3:30 to 6:00 p.m.

(Hydro-Québec et le Syndicat professionnel des ingénieurs d'Hydro-Québec) (1992-1996)

- **Employees will pre-select their start/finish times and duration of the lunch period (...) for management approval for a two (2) week interval with pre-selection to occur not later than Wednesday of the week immediately preceding the two (2) week interval. Such approval will not be unreasonably denied.**

**In the event two or more employees pre-select the same start/finish and/or lunch times, and all employee selections cannot be accommodated due to operational requirements, selections will be approved on a seniority basis.** (Insurance Corporation of British Columbia and Office & Professional Employees' International Union, Local 378) (1996-1999)

**Compressed work weeks** are yet another means of providing employees with the flexibility needed to achieve greater work-life balance, and in the case of many older workers, allowing them to fulfill caregiving responsibilities for a loved one. The following is an example of contract language:

- **The flexible work week provided clerical employees under this section is intended to allow the work week of such employees to be scheduled as any combination of hours in a four (4) or five (5) day period, Monday to Friday inclusive, to a maximum thirty-two (32) hour work week. Work schedules will be determined by the department head; but, wherever possible, consideration will be given to employee preferences.** (Board of School Trustees of School District no. 36 (Surrey, B.C.) and Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 720) (1995-1998)

Allowing employees to decide among a 4-day compressed week, a 9-day compressed 2-week period, and a regular 5-day week, provides maximum flexibility if viewed in terms of work weeks. However, some organizations have thought “outside the box” in terms of work hour configurations. For example, BC Hydro provides employees with a “**reduced work week leave**” (rwwl) – offering 17 RWWL days per year in lieu of a 35-hour week.

- **The hours of work shall be the equivalent of thirty-five (35) hours per week. This will be done by working a normal week of five (5) x seven and one-half (7 ½) hour days and allowing seventeen (17) days a year Reduced Work Week Leave (RWWL) in lieu of the thirty-five (35) hour week. (...) [F]ull-time employees may elect by 1 December of each calendar year to take a cash payment in lieu of time off for any of the seventeen (17) RWWL days to be earned in the following calendar year.** (British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority, et al., and Office and Professional Employees’ International Union, Local 378) (1997-2002)

Another innovative way of providing work hour flexibility is to develop contract language around “**annualized**” hours. Here is an example:

- **The normal work week for professionals who have an annualized schedule does not contain a predetermined number of hours or days of work. The annual number of hours of work is one thousand eight hundred and twenty (1,820) between May 1 of one year and April 30 of the following year. (...) Under this agreement, professionals may work more or fewer hours than those in a normal work week (35 hours), provided operational requirements permit, in accordance with their assigned duties and personal aspirations. (...) If, under exceptional circumstances and with the authorization of the professional’s immediate superior, the total hours worked exceeds one thousand eight hundred and twenty (1,820) at the end of the year (May 1 to April 30), fifty per cent (50%) is added to the excess and the time is banked...** (Ville de Montréal et Syndicat des professionnels de la ville de Montréal et de la communauté urbaine de Montréal) (1998-2001)

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the arguments put forth in this paper, draw heavily on the overwhelming research evidence that supports work-life balance policies. Policies and contract language built around telecommuting and flexible schedules recognize the changing needs of employees throughout the life-cycle, and are a benefit to employers, employees, and society as a whole.

In a changing economy, and with changing demographics, addressing work-life balance with flexible schedules and telecommuting pays dividends for employers, employees, the environment and for society as a whole.

Innovative and forward-thinking organizations are adopting work-life balance policies and collective agreement language. The BCTF should expand and improve its focus on work-life balance.



## References

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