

Preparing for the New Century: Innovative Work and Family Strategies

Innovative Policies and Workshop Report

In June 2009, Cornell University hosted a small national workshop of human resource professionals, academics and policy makers to talk about emerging work/life issues and explore innovative work and family strategies that can effect widespread change in public policy and corporate practices. The workshop, *Preparing for the New Century: Innovative Work and Family Strategies*, explored: 1) the challenges, 2) what the research shows on current practices, and 3) innovative new programs. For a full report of the workshop, and of trends affecting work-life policy in the new century see Shellenback and Warner 2009.

Innovation in work-life policy focuses on increased flexibility – for workers and for employers. A vibrant debate occurred with work life consultants celebrating employer flexibility and enhanced worker choice, while researchers chronicled the transfer of risk to the weakest, lowest wage employees who lose work place protections and control over their schedules. “Flexibility for whom?” became a key concern.

Another concern was what would happen to work-life policies in this new century. Would they disappear as more workers become “independent” contingent workers; or would they be expanded to enable more responsive working arrangements that reduce commuting, enhance productivity and support better work-life balance?

A final debate was on the role of public policy. Would the US move toward policy standards for sick leave, parental leave and health care coverage, or would these continue to be left to a highly uneven set of employer-based policies that are insecure and inconsistent across the population. Those who need these protections most (women, low wage workers) are least likely to receive them.

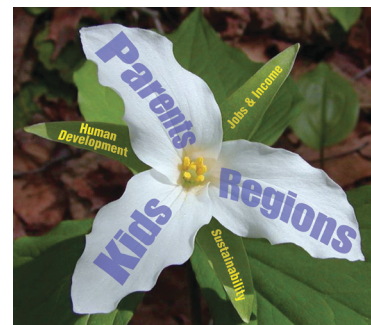
Mildred Warner, Professor,
City and Regional Planning
Cornell University, November 2009

The workshop then shifted to discussion of innovative practices. Cornell University profiled a new work-life child care benefit for all its employees – from janitors to professors - and presented an evaluation showing increased productivity and loyalty as a result of the investment. A similar project with home health care and low wage hospital workers in NYC showed equally positive worker productivity results. These work-life benefits are not a luxury, they are a core part of organizational mission and strategy for leading 21st century institutions. But will they also become a part of public policy – to create a more level playing field for all workers and employers in the economy?

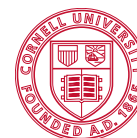
Conference attendees developed a framework public policy and for linking employer work-life policies to core institutional mission and to management buy in and training. Recommendations from the workshop are given below.

Public Policy - Integrating Social and Economic Wellbeing, Enforcing Minimum Standards

- Right to Ask for Paid Time Off or Flexible Work Arrangements – Model on Americans with Disabilities Act or Religious Accommodation
- Flexible Spending Accounts: Raise \$5K limit. Allow use even if spouse does not work. Allow use of both FSA and Dependent Care Tax Credit for low and middle income families.
- Establish minimum standard for employers for paid time off
- Explore possibilities for more work-sharing arrangements that would allow flexibility to work part-time for a broader group of employees.
- Employee Free Choice Act



Linking Economic Development and Child Care Project



Cornell University

- Promote community level strategies: living wage campaigns, community benefit agreements
- Support for “benefit banks” (voluntary donations of donate sick and vacation time for co-workers in need)
- Remove or reduce minimum hours eligibility for Unemployment Insurance, TANF, Child Care Subsidy, Housing Subsidy

Institutional Strategy – Link Human Resource Policy to Core Institutional Mission

- Align recruitment and retention, cultural competence, diversity, inclusiveness with core mission
- Make the business case: elder care and child care increase employee productivity, reduce absenteeism, lower replacement costs, save on training
- Recognize the social value of support infrastructure—staff, operations—so benefits are extended to them
- Build a broad coalition of stakeholders, management, employees, union, customers, stockholders, community
- Use progressive policies as part of a branding and competition strategy
- Managing the institution efficiently will lower costs
 - ◆ *Flexibility policies assist with emergency and disaster planning/response*

- ◆ *Save on real estate costs*
- ◆ *Increase product coverage – over time and space*

Management Buy In and Training

- Need clear institutional policy
 - ◆ *Articulates the broader institutional view and reason for policy*
 - ◆ *Establishes standards, protects lower ranked staff*
 - ◆ *Gives managers guidelines, prevents self serving behavior and discrimination*
- Value of research and making the business case
 - ◆ *Show the link to core mission*
- Need individual champions
 - ◆ *Need leadership from the top*
 - ◆ *Provide training for top managers*
- Need managerial training
 - ◆ *Supervisors are nervous about what is legal to ask with respect to family/personal issues*
 - ◆ *Help supervisors see the possibility of doing things in a different way*
 - ◆ *Change mindsets, let managers see their ability to manage flexibility as an asset in their personal managerial toolkit. This will lead to identity-based motivation*
 - ◆ *Pay attention to how adults learn*
 - ◆ *Crisis can open minds to new approaches*

Address supervisory challenges of remote or flexible work options

- ◆ *Recognize reality of cognitive bias in employee evaluation*
- ◆ *Provide training in cultural competency*
- ◆ *Consider 360 degree feedback for performance evaluations*
- Link top managers' job performance evaluations to team management prowess which includes consideration and utilization of work/life programs and flex work practices.
- Involve collective bargaining representatives, or worksite

committees with broad representation of employees to improve education, outreach and buy-in from line workers. Reduce feeling of "us" vs. "them".

- Connect senior leadership with stories that will speak to them.

Other specific ideas:

- Parental Leave – must be accompanied by resources so departmental units do not have to directly bear the cost of implementing the policy
- Pay attention to ease of administration - child care benefits are much harder to implement outside the Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) framework
- Make sure low income employees receive more through the FSA (>\$1500) than they would through the Dependent Care Tax Credit as they cannot use both.
- Create part-time positions with benefits. We do this for retirees (phased retirement), why not for younger workers who would like to balance work, family and life?
- Recognize networks of care and support through policies which do not limit benefits just to next of kin.
- Provide occasional use flex (particular days, events, times of life).

- Use parental leave as a model for leaves for elder care and end of life care giving.
- Create a free-lancers' union for group benefits.
- Give awards – to honor risk takers, profile innovations, and promote more innovation.

Resources:

Morrissey, Taryn and Mildred E. Warner (2009), "Employer-Supported Child Care: Who Participates?" Journal of Marriage and Family, forthcoming.

Shellenback, Karen and Mildred E. Warner 2009. "Integrating Care, Work and Community: New Policies for a New Economy, A Report from the Cornell University Conference: Preparing for the New Century: Innovative Work and Family Strategies."

Shellenback, Karen 2009. "Child Care & Cornell Child Care Grant Subsidy Program Survey: Impact on the Cornell Community, Summary Report."

All reports available at http://economicdevelopmentandchildcare.org/technical_assistance/work_life

Support for this research made possible in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The Committee for Economic Development was a cosponsor of the workshop.

