

A WorldatWork Survey Brief



Flexible Work Schedules

A Survey of Members of WorldatWork and AWLP
October, 2005

About WorldatWork and WorldatWork Membership Surveys



*The Professional Association for
Compensation, Benefits and Total Rewards*

WorldatWork is the world's leading not-for-profit professional association dedicated to knowledge leadership in compensation, benefits and total rewards. Founded in 1955, WorldatWork focuses on human resources disciplines associated with attracting, retaining and motivating employees. Besides serving as the membership association of the professions, the WorldatWork family of organizations provides education, certification (Certified Compensation Professional – CCP®, Certified Benefits Professional® – CBP and Global Remuneration Professional – GRP®), publications, knowledge resources, surveys, conferences, research and networking. WorldatWork Society of Certified Professionals and Alliance for Work-Life Progress (AWLP) are part of the WorldatWork family.

WorldatWork regularly surveys its membership of compensation, benefits and total rewards practitioners regarding current issues and topics, best practices and common professional practices. The majority of WorldatWork members are at the manager responsibility level or higher, have more than 10 years of experience in the human resources profession, and work in the corporate headquarters of a company based in North America with more than 1,000 employees. The association routinely receives a voluntary response rate from members in the 15 percent to 20 percent range, a response rate that generally ensures the respondents are representative of the WorldatWork membership as a whole.

About AWLP

Alliance for Work-Life Progress (AWLP) is the leading not-for-profit professional association committed to the development and advancement of the field of work-life effectiveness. Founded in 1996, AWLP strives to improve the professionalism of those working in the work-life arena and influence better integration of work and family life. In addition to serving as the membership association and thought-leader for the profession, AWLP also addresses work-life issues through publications, forums, surveys and as an education provider, including certificate courses. An affiliate organization of WorldatWork, AWLP has its headquarters in Scottsdale, Ariz.

About the RRI

The Regional Research Institute for Human Services is the research component of the Graduate School of Social Work at Portland State University, Portland, Oregon. Founded in 1972, its aim is to improve the manner in which social services and service delivery systems are designed, managed, and evaluated.

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Survey Brief

WorldatWork, the Alliance for Work-Life Progress and the Regional Research Institute for Human Services at Portland State University

October 2005

Introduction & Methodology

In August 2005, WorldatWork, The Alliance for Work-Life Progress (AWLP) and the Regional Research Institute for Human Services at Portland State University conducted a survey to identify trends in work-life policies and practices. Survey participants were asked about the prevalence and use of flexible work arrangements, as well as their level of knowledge about various work-life and dependent-care issues.

For the purposes of this survey, “flexible work arrangements” refer to choices about the time and/or location that work is conducted (Rau, 2003)¹. For example, altering starting and quitting times or working from home are both considered flexible work arrangements. Here, a “formal” flexible work arrangement is written into organizational policy and the employee and supervisor must follow organizational procedure, while “informal” flexible arrangements are based on supervisory discretion and can be undocumented (Eaton, 2003)².

Surveys were emailed to 4,645 WorldatWork and AWLP members, and 552 participants completed the survey. Results of individual questions are presented in the “Detailed Survey Results” section. Please note that totals may not always equal 100 percent due to rounding differences.

Executive Summary

Flexible work schedules and work-life supports create opportunities for both employees and employers. Employers appreciate the boost in productivity and morale while employees reap the benefits of structuring work around their lives instead of the other way around. Although flexible work scheduling can be a win-win situation under the right circumstances, it goes against the traditional Western work culture. In the U.S. specifically, the customary work ethic has always boasted long hours and face time at the office as essential ingredients of the recipe to success. How much has the modern Western work culture welcomed flexibility as a viable business strategy and how far do we still have to go?

While results of this study indicate workplace cultures in the U.S. are trying to incorporate flexibility and enhance work-life integration for some employees with particular needs, there are more steps to take before flexible schedules evolve beyond isolated, individual perks. Employees who disclose a personal reason for a flexible work request are more likely to have it approved in three out of four organizations, although something more than “I would like more control over my schedule” appears necessary. Requests due to medical, child care or other urgent personal matters are likely to be approved, perhaps because a “good enough reason” is required to trump the traditional presumption about when, where and how we work.

¹ Definition adapted from Rau, B. (2003). *Flexible work arrangements: A Sloan work and family encyclopedia entry*. Retrieved May 20, 2003 from http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_template.php?id=240.

² Formal v. Informal Definition taken from Eaton, S. (2003). If you can use them: Flexibility policies, organizational commitment, and perceived performance. *Industrial Relations*, 42 (2), 145-167.

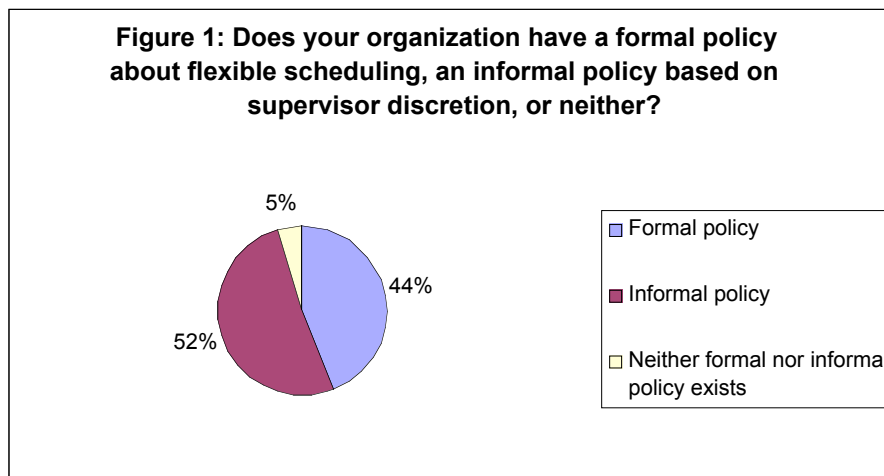
A mounting awareness of the need for work-life balance is beginning to erode the traditional business adage that counseled employees to leave their personal lives at home. Over half of participants regard their organizational cultures as receptive to handling personal issues on company time, although 40 percent say the attitude is highly dependent on individual supervisors, suggesting the potential for multiple cultures to exist in one workplace. In order for organizations to fully capitalize on the benefits of flexible work, employees will need visible acknowledgement and encouragement from organization leaders.

Other highlights of the survey include:

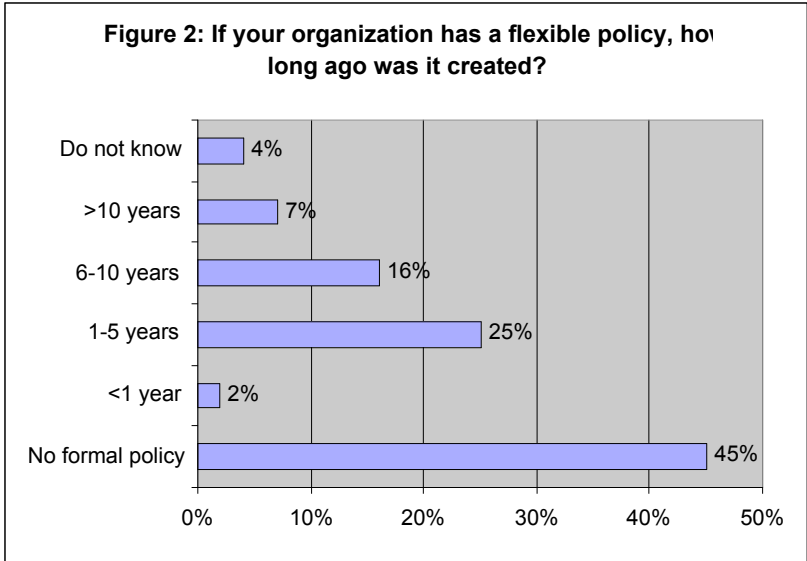
- Nine in 10 organizations participating in this survey offer a flexible scheduling program, and more than half of flexibility programs operate informally. Forty-four percent have a formal policy, while about 5 percent do not have a flexible work program.
- About one in three participants maintain their work culture does not encourage employees to work flexible schedules, even though they are offered.
- The most common way for employees to request a flexible work arrangement in nine out of 10 organizations is to verbally contact the immediate supervisor.
- What factors are most important to employers when considering a flexible work request? Most frequently, employers weigh the impact on coverage, the ability of the employee to complete their duties, and the impact on customers most heavily when deciding whether to grant a flexible work request.

Detailed Survey Results

Flexible work arrangements operate on an informal basis in more than 50 percent of organizations, although only 44 percent have implemented formal policies and procedures (See Figure 1.) Only about 5 percent do not have either type of policy.



Formal flexible work policies are fairly new to most organizations. About one in four organizations created their programs in the last five years, and another 16 percent added them in the last six to 10 years. (See Figure 2.) Only about 7 percent of policies have aged more than 10 years, and a full 45 percent still have no formal policies regarding flexible work.



Which employees are eligible for flexible work schedules? Salaried employees have the widest array of flexible arrangements at their disposal, at least on an informal basis. (See Figure 3.) About half of the organizations surveyed report their salaried employees can exercise flextime on a daily basis, and slightly more than half can telecommute. Hourly employees have somewhat more restricted access to flexible work. About one in three organizations offer flextime to hourly employees, including daily flextime, on an informal basis. Telework, defined as working from home on a full-time basis and rarely visiting the worksite, is not available for any employees at a majority (60 percent) of organizations. Employees also lack access to job sharing either formally or informally in 60 percent of the organizations surveyed.

Figure 3: Which of the following flexible work arrangements is available in your organization? (Check all that apply.)³

	Salaried		Hourly		Not Available
	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal	
Flextime	37%	49%	29%	31%	15%
Daily Flextime	13%	53%	8%	30%	33%
Compressed workweek	24%	23%	23%	16%	46%
Telecommute	28%	54%	15%	19%	19%
Telework	18%	16%	9%	6%	60%
Part-time work schedules	36%	27%	32%	20%	28%
Job Share	19%	10%	14%	9%	61%

Although salaried employees have an edge in exercising flexible work schedules, a majority of organizations make flexible benefits available to different types of employees. (See Figure 4.) Eight in 10 employers offer flexible arrangements to professional employees. Clerical/administrative, technical and managerial employees can access flexible work arrangements in three out of four organizations.

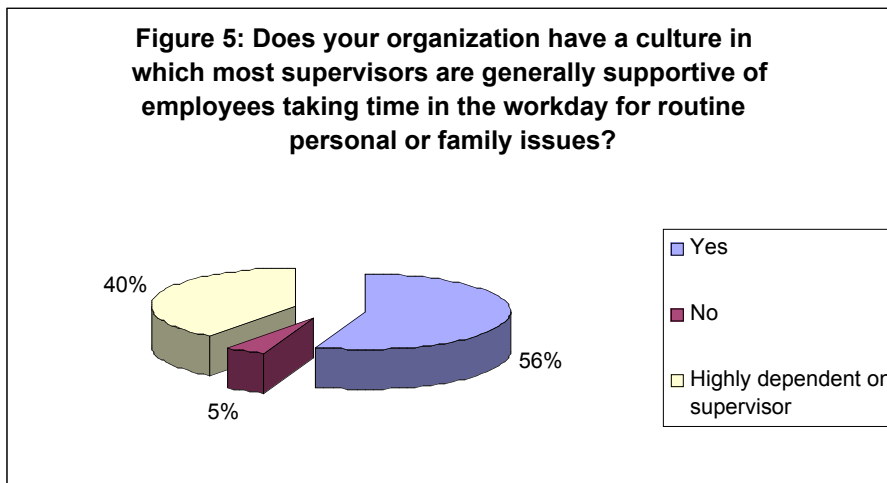
³ Items adapted from the *Workplace Flexibility Index*. Bond, J.T., Thompson, C., Galinsky, E., & Prottas, D. (2003). Highlights of the National Study of the Changing Workforce. New York: Families & Work Institute.

Asking whether flexible arrangements are accessible and whether more than 50 percent of employees in the category exercise flexible scheduling are two different questions. Indeed, access is more typical than majority practice. (See Figure 4.) Only a small percentage of employers report that flexible schedules are used by more than 50 percent of employees in each category. For example, 15 percent of organizations report that more than 50 percent of their professional employees actually flex their schedules.

Figure 4: Which of the following types of employees have access to and/or use flexible work arrangements in your organization? (Check all that apply.)

	Accessible	Used by more than 50% of employees	Not applicable
Clerical/Administrative	73%	13%	19%
Technical	74%	14%	16%
Professional	84%	15%	10%
Managerial	78%	14%	14%
Sales/Customer Service	54%	11%	28%

Flexible work arrangements may be accessible, but workplace culture can play a huge role in determining whether employees actually make use of the opportunity. About 56 percent of organizations report their culture is supportive of employees taking time at work for personal issues, although a sizable minority (40 percent) say the level of support is highly dependent on individual supervisors. (See Figure 5.) Given the potential number of departments, a schism within organizations may exist where some employees feel flexibility and work-life supports are acceptable while others believe the practices are frowned upon. Only 5 percent acknowledge that their organizations do not support employees taking time at work for routine personal or family issues.



Although flexible work arrangements exist within a majority of organizations, employees may not feel free to utilize the option. Employees may perceive a gap between the offer of flexibility and the acceptability of actually practicing it. About one in three HR professionals report that their cultures do not encourage the use of flexible work arrangements. (See Figure 6.)

Figure 6: From your perspective, what is the primary reason employees do not use flexible work arrangements?

Even though the organization offers them, the culture doesn't encourage the use of flexible work arrangements	34%
Flexible work arrangements do not meet employee needs	11%
Employees don't know about flexible work arrangements	5%
Do not know	13%
Not Applicable	19%
Other	18%

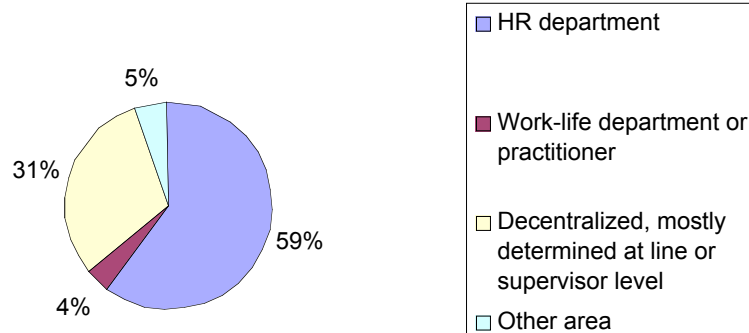
Supervisors play an important role in arranging flexible schedules. As depicted in Figure 7, almost 90 percent of survey respondents cite contacting the immediate supervisor as the most common way to plan a flexible schedule. Less than half ask employees to e-mail their direct supervisors, and 36 percent request employees verbally contact human resources.

Figure 7: Which of the following are ways employees can request flexible work arrangements? (Check all that apply.)

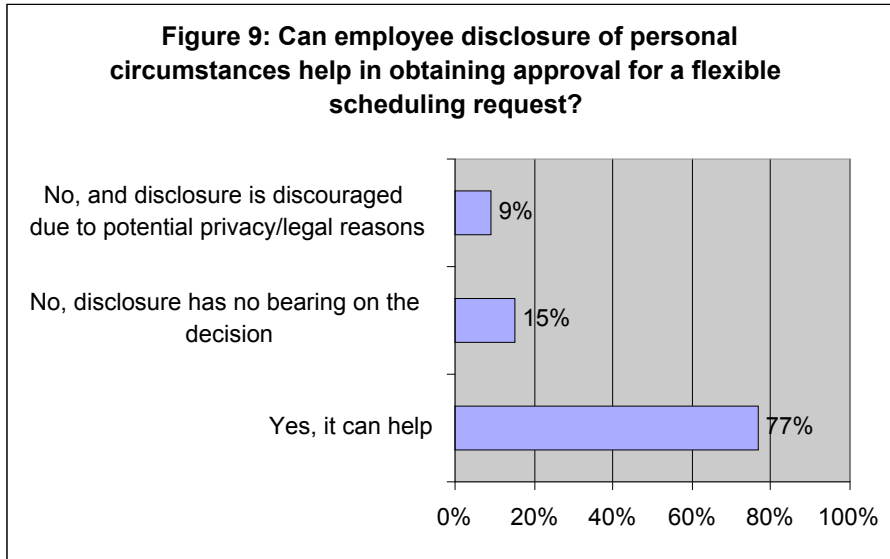
Verbally contact immediate supervisor	89%
E-mail direct supervisor	49%
Verbally contact human resources	36%
E-mail the HR department	23%
Complete standardized paperwork	22%
Verbally contact coworkers	5%
File a request form on-line	5%
Verbally contact work-life department	4%
E-mail work-life department	3%

Establishing policies and practices related to flexible work resides with HR departments in the majority of organizations surveyed. (See Figure 8.) While HR professionals may be responsible for formal policies and practices, many flexible programs operate on an informal level, with supervisors approving and implementing the schedules. About one in three respondents indicate that their flexible work program is decentralized, with decisions made at the line or supervisor level.

Figure 8: Where does the primary responsibility for policies and practices related to flexible work arrangements reside in your organization?



Employees who discuss why they need a flexible schedule increase the likelihood of securing approval for the request in three out of four organizations. (See Figure 9.) Flexible scheduling may not be such an acceptable option that it can be secured automatically or without any particular reason, although about 15 percent of organizations indicated disclosure has no bearing on the decision. Nearly one in 10 do not want to hear the personal reasons behind the request out of concern for potential liability.



Flexible scheduling has practical implications for both the employee and the employer. We asked participants how much weight they assign certain factors when evaluating a flexible work proposal. The results are shown in Figure 10. The most dominant considerations involved the employee’s ability to meet job responsibilities, impact on coverage and impact on customers. The nature of the job duties was afforded significant weight in 78 percent of organizations. A majority also weighs employee’s past performance and supervisor’s recommendation heavily.

Figure 10: In your organization, how much weight is given to the following factors when the average employee’s proposal for flexible work is being evaluated?

	Little weight	Some weight	Significant weight	Not applicable
Employee's ability to continue job responsibilities	<1%	6%	90%	4%
Impact on customers	<1%	8%	86%	5%
Impact on coverage	2%	9%	85%	4%
Employee's job duties	2%	17%	78%	3%
Supervisor's recommendation	3%	24%	68%	5%
Employee's past job performance	5%	30%	60%	5%
Length of time employee needs arrangement	12%	38%	43%	6%
Reason for request	12%	39%	41%	8%
Employee retention	12%	49%	34%	5%

Disclosure of the personal reasons prompting a flexible work request helps many employees secure their employer’s approval. Does disclosure of any reason make approval more likely, or are employers likely to respond more favorably to certain types of reasons than others? Survey participants were asked how likely they were to grant flexible work requests given a variety of different reasons. (See Figure 11.) Granting a flexible schedule request due to terminal illness of a family member was “very likely” to be approved in 56 percent of organizations, and short-term child-care difficulties would “likely” earn approval in 50 percent of organizations. Employees who

ask to work flexible schedules so they can seek drug or alcohol treatment would “likely” be granted permission in eight out of 10 organizations, while asking for flexible work to support a family’s members drug rehabilitation would “likely” receive approval in about six out of 10 workplaces.

Parents whose children are experiencing behavioral difficulties at school may find their employers somewhat ambivalent about granting a flexible work schedule on that justification. About 44 percent of employers were neither “likely” nor “unlikely” to grant a flexible schedule for a parent whose child was acting out at school and 43 percent were swayed in neither direction for a parent whose child was expelled from school. Employers were least likely to grant flexible schedules for employees training for a marathon — six in 10 participants said their organizations would be “unlikely” or “very unlikely” to grant such a request. Employers also would be less likely to approve a flexible schedule so an employee can care for a sick animal.

Figure 11: The following are some reasons employees give when requesting flexible work arrangements. Please rate how likely approval would be granted for each reason.

	Not likely at all	Unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Likely	Very likely to grant request
Short-term child-care difficulties	2%	4%	13%	50%	32%
Short-term child illness	1%	1%	7%	40%	50%
Family member with health issues	<1%	1%	13%	45%	41%
Terminal illness of family member	<1%	<1%	9%	34%	56%
On-going chronic health condition of employee	<1%	2%	13%	40%	44%
Child with on-going chronic health condition	<1%	2%	16%	43%	38%
Elderly parent needing care	<1%	5%	22%	47%	26%
Child acting out at school	4%	12%	44%	29%	11%
Training for a marathon	23%	35%	30%	9%	3%
Child therapy appointment	3%	4%	22%	46%	25%
Physical therapy for employee injury	2%	2%	11%	40%	46%
Child expelled from school	6%	13%	43%	25%	13%
Drug or alcohol treatment for self	2%	2%	15%	37%	44%
Drug or alcohol treatment for family	3%	7%	32%	39%	19%
Care for sick animal	20%	25%	36%	14%	5%
Child with disability needing care	1%	2%	18%	44%	35%
Mental health treatment for self	2%	2%	15%	38%	44%

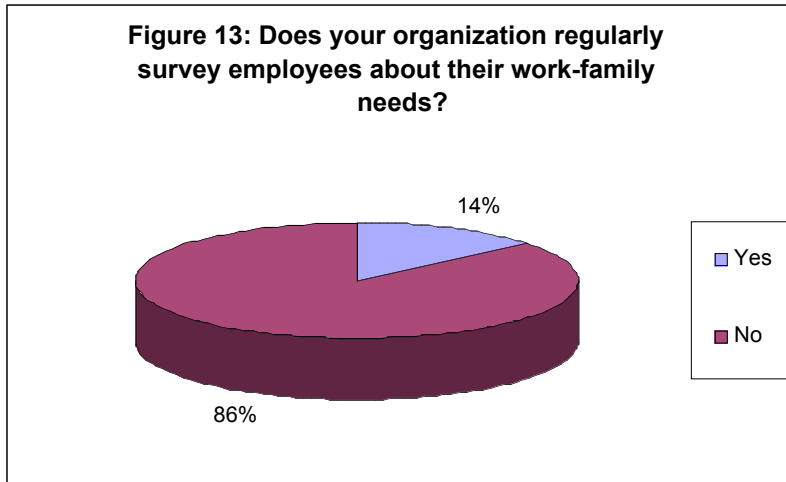
Mental health treatment for family	3%	5%	26%	41%	26%
Self-development (courses, education, lessons)	5%	9%	33%	38%	15%

Flexible work schedules can make good business sense for an organization. A variety of outcomes can result from implementing a flexible work program, and survey participants were asked to anticipate how their leadership would weight the significance of various business results. (See Figure 12.) Three out of four organizations said improving employee satisfaction would be given at least strong consideration, and 72 percent strongly value employee retention. More than half found increasing employee productivity persuasive. Given the effect of stress on productivity, it was surprising that 60 percent of employers perceived declining employee mental health as weak, or holding no weight one way or the other. Perception of fairness among employees also did not sway employers for, or against, implementing flexible work schedules.

Figure 12: From the perspective of your organizational leadership, how strong are the following business reasons for allowing employees to have flexible work schedules?

	Very weak	Weak	Neither strong nor weak	Strong	Very Strong
Improves employee retention	3%	5%	21%	45%	27%
Improves employee productivity	4%	8%	31%	37%	21%
Improves employee job satisfaction	3%	3%	17%	52%	25%
Decreases employee stress	3%	8%	31%	42%	16%
Decreases employee mental health problems	3%	11%	46%	29%	10%
Improves employee commitment	2%	5%	22%	50%	22%
Improves quality of life for employees and families	2%	4%	21%	47%	26%
Improves recruitment of a diverse workforce	4%	11%	31%	36%	19%
Improves employee engagement	3%	7%	29%	44%	18%
Improves employee work-life balance	2%	5%	21%	46%	27%
Improves employee morale	2%	4%	18%	52%	25%
Decreases employee absenteeism	2%	7%	29%	45%	16%
Improves perception of fairness among all employees	4%	15%	42%	28%	10%
Increases the public image of being an employer of choice	5%	8%	30%	40%	17%
Increases social responsibility	6%	13%	42%	28%	11%

Flexible work arrangements operate informally in a majority of organizations. An assumption that flexible work can be worked out on a case-by-case with individual supervisors may explain the lack of formal inquiry about employees' flexibility needs. If employee needs are handled at the line or supervisor level, a formal survey of employee needs may be identified as unnecessary and duplicative. As shown in Figure 13, 86 percent of organizations in this study do not regularly ask employees about their flexible scheduling needs.



Where do HR professionals go to learn about their employees' dependent care needs? Figure 14 demonstrates that most often, they reach out to organizations that are familiar to them such as HR professional organizations (20 percent) and employee assistance providers (EAPs) (28 percent.) About 16 percent cite child and eldercare resource services as the best informants. Very few HR professionals turn to professional training or rely on personal experience, both of which were marked by less than 1 percent of participants.

Figure 14: What is the single best resource for information regarding employees' dependent care issues? (Check one response only.)

EAPs	28%
HR professional organization	20%
Child and eldercare resource/referral service	16%
Colleagues	8%
Personal experience	5%
Parent/employee advisory group	3%
World wide web/Internet	3%
Continuing education	<1%
Professional training	<1%
Not applicable	10%

HR professionals also feel fairly comfortable in their level of knowledge about various dependent-care issues. For example, three out of four survey respondents believe they are at least "knowledgeable" about parenting, and 68 percent believe they are at least "knowledgeable" about child development from birth through age 12. (See Figure 15.) They report being less informed about child disabilities and mental health (38 percent each) and adult disabilities (39 percent.)

Figure 15: Please rate your personal level of knowledge about the following topics related to dependent care.

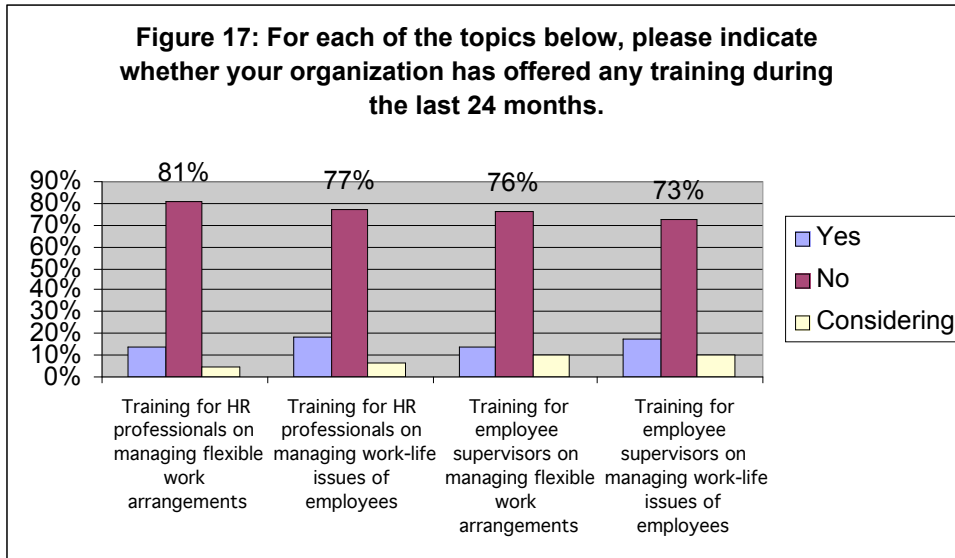
	Almost no knowledge	Not much knowledge	Neither knowledgeable or uninformed	Somewhat knowledgeable	Very knowledgeable
Child development, birth-12	9%	10%	13%	44%	24%
Adolescent development, 13-21	10%	14%	21%	42%	13%
Parenting	7%	8%	12%	46%	28%
Eldercare responsibilities	6%	17%	19%	43%	15%
Adult disabilities	11%	21%	29%	33%	6%
Child disabilities	12%	22%	29%	33%	5%
Adult mental health	9%	18%	26%	40%	8%
Children's mental health	12%	22%	29%	33%	5%

Employees with questions about benefits are often directed to their HR department. Knowledge about local resources, especially as they relate to employee benefits, seems to be comfortable ground for survey participants. (See Figure 16.) Eight in 10 respondents state they are “familiar” or “very familiar” with health-care resources, 63 percent with child care, and 61 percent with employee stress management resources. Respondents felt least familiar with child mental health-care options (43 percent), eldercare (47 percent) and work-life integration (49 percent.)

Figure 16: Please rate your level of familiarity with resources in your community addressing the following work-life issues of employees.

	Very unfamiliar	Unfamiliar	Neither familiar or unfamiliar	Familiar	Very familiar
Employee stress management	5%	12%	22%	48%	13%
Child care	4%	13%	20%	47%	16%
Parenting	4%	15%	26%	43%	12%
Work-life integration	5%	15%	30%	37%	12%
Health care	2%	6%	11%	48%	33%
Adult mental health care	5%	17%	25%	41%	12%
Drug and alcohol treatment	5%	15%	25%	43%	12%
Children's mental health care	6%	21%	29%	35%	8%
Eldercare	6%	17%	30%	35%	12%

High perceptions of comfort with dependent care and flexible scheduling needs may account for the relative lack of training that is offered to managers or supervisors. As shown in Figure 17, 81 percent of organizations have not offered training about flexible work arrangements for HR professionals in the last two years, and three out of four have not trained HR employees on work-life issues. Supervisors have not been offered training about flexible scheduling or work-life matters in about three quarters of organizations surveyed.



In order to get a sense of the workplace culture regarding dependent-care needs, participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements reflecting attitudes toward personal issues. The results indicate that respondents believe their workplaces are fairly sympathetic to dependent-care needs and flexible work. For example, 84 percent of respondents reject that their organization has an “unwritten rule” forbidding employees to deal with personal issues at work. Another 75 percent dispute the statement that their organizations look unfavorably on employees who put family needs ahead of their job.

Somewhat inconsistently, 39 percent also indicate that employees are reluctant to ask for flexible work arrangements. What accounts for this perceived hesitation? As shown in Figure 6 above, one in three participants believes employees do not exercise flexible scheduling because the culture ultimately does not support it.

It’s possible that while organizations are theoretically amenable to flexible scheduling and other work-life supports, employees may be waiting on acknowledgement from organizational leadership of their genuine acceptability. If key leaders do not openly vocalize their dedication to work-life integration and flexible scheduling, or practice it themselves, employees may remain reluctant to take the initiative.

Figure 18: For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree, when you think about your organization⁴.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree
There is an unwritten rule at my place of employment that you can't take care of family needs on company time.	49%	35%	13 %	3%
At my place of employment, employees who put their family or personal needs ahead of their job are not looked on favorably.	37%	38%	22%	4%
If you have a problem managing your work and family responsibilities, the attitude at my place of employment is, "You made your bed, now lie in it."	51%	34%	13%	2%
At my place of employment, employees have to choose between advancing in their jobs and devoting attention to their family or personal lives.	30%	40%	24%	7%
In this organization, parents are encouraged to take time off work to care for their children with ongoing health issues.	7%	31%	45%	17%
In this organization, employees are reluctant to ask for flexible work arrangements.	26%	36%	32%	7%
In this organization, it is okay for parents to receive phone calls at work regarding their children with ongoing emotional or behavioral challenges.	4%	8%	47%	41%
Supervisors in this organization are supportive of the needs of employees who have children with disabilities.	3%	8%	54%	35%
Coworkers in this organization are not supportive of parents of children with emotional or behavioral challenges.	36%	45%	16%	4%

⁴ First four items are the work-family culture scale, Families & Work Institute, National Study of the Changing Workforce.

Respondent Demographics

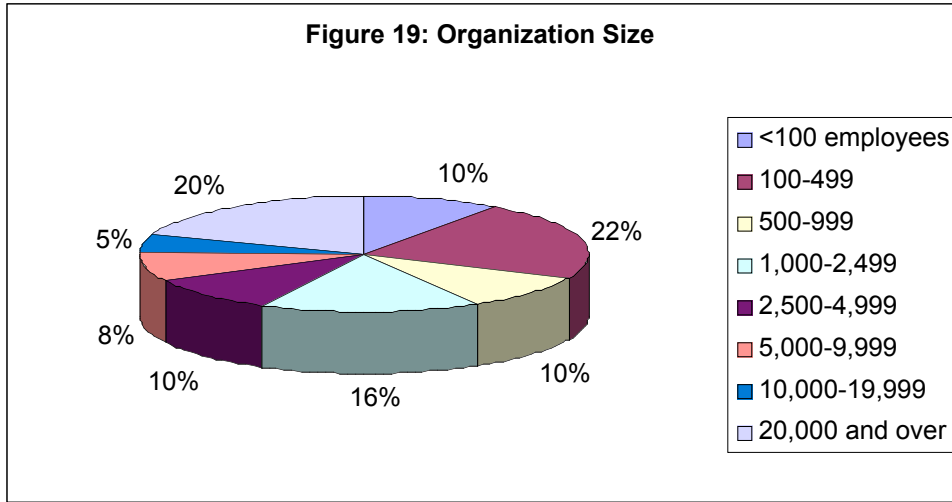


Figure 20: Type of Industry

Manufacturing	16%
Finance and insurance	16%
Other	16%
Professional, scientific and technical	12%
Health care and social assistance	6%
Information	6%
Other services (except public administration)	6%
Utilities	5%
Public administration	4%
Retail	4%
Educational services	2%
Transportation and warehousing	2%
Accommodation and food service	1%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	1%
Administrative support, waste and remediation	<1%
Agriculture	<1%
Construction	<1%
Management of companies and enterprises	<1%
Mining	<1%
Real Estate, rental and leasing	<1%
Wholesale Trade	<1%