

Executive Summary

The Families and Work Institute's 1998 Business Work-Life Study (BWLS) is one of the first and most comprehensive studies of how U.S. companies are responding to the work-life needs of the nation's changing workforce. Funded by Allstate Insurance Company, The Chase Manhattan Bank, The Commonwealth Fund, Freddie Mac Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, and Travelers Foundation, the 1998 BWLS surveys a representative sample of 1,057 for-profit (84 percent of the sample) and not-for-profit companies (16 percent of the sample) with 100 or more employees. It was developed to complement the Families and Work Institute's 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW), which surveyed a representative sample of employees in the U.S. labor force. In the 1997 NSCW, we found that employees with more supportive workplaces as well as better quality jobs are more likely than other workers to have:

- higher levels of job satisfaction;
- more commitment to their companies' success;
- greater loyalty to their companies; and
- a stronger intention to remain with their companies.

The 1997 NSCW also found that employees with more demanding jobs and less supportive workplaces experience:

- more stress;
- poorer coping;
- worse moods; and
- less energy off the job—all of which jeopardize their personal and family well-being.

Additionally, we found that when employees' personal and family well-being is compromised by work, they experience more negative spillover from home to work, which diminishes their job performance.

“This study provides a benchmark for companies to assess how they stack up today in 1998.”

—**Joy Bunson**

*Senior Vice President,
Organizational
Development,
The Chase Manhattan
Bank*

The 1998 BWLS enables us to assess the extent to which businesses are addressing some of the factors we have identified as predictive of workers’ productivity and well-being. Specifically, we ask:

- To what extent do companies provide benefits, programs, and policies and create supportive workplace environments that address the work-life needs of their employees?
- What are the characteristics of companies most likely to provide this assistance and support?

Major findings related to each of these questions are summarized here and elaborated in the full report.

Question 1

To What Extent Do Companies Provide Work-Life Programs and Policies and Supportive Workplace Environments?

Flexible Work Arrangements

Of the eight flexible work arrangements considered, companies with 100 or more employees most frequently allow workers to take time off work to attend school and child care functions (88 percent) and to return to work on a gradual basis following childbirth and adoption (81 percent). More than two-thirds of employers allow traditional flextime and more than half allow employees to move back and forth from full-time to part-time and to work at home occasionally. Less common are job sharing, regular work at home, and daily flextime. However, job sharing and regular work at home are the flexibility options most likely to be under consideration by companies not currently offering them.

Only 18 percent of companies offering one or more flexible work arrangements perceive the costs of their investments in these policies as outweighing the benefits, while 36 percent perceive these programs as cost-neutral and 46 percent perceive a positive return on their investments.

“This study demonstrates that business must adopt flexible programs if they are to be competitive.”

—**Bernard Milano**

*Executive Director,
KPMG Foundation,
KPMG Peat Marwick
LLP*

Table A: Flexible Work Arrangements

Does your company allow employees ...	Yes	No, But Considering
To periodically change starting and quitting times?	68%	9%
To change starting and quitting times on a daily basis?	24	7
To return to work gradually after childbirth or adoption?	81	7
To move from full-time to part-time and back again while remaining in the same position or level?	57	5
To share jobs?	37.5	17
To work at home occasionally?	55	6
To work at home or off-site on a regular basis	33	14
To take time off for school/child care functions	88	Not Asked

(n=1057)

Leaves

Except for companies meeting the legal exemption of having fewer than 50 employees within a 75 mile radius of one of their worksites, companies interviewed for the 1998 BWLS are mandated to comply with the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993. This law requires that 12 weeks of unpaid, job-guaranteed leave for childbirth, adoption, foster care placement, a serious personal medical condition, or care of a child or spouse with a serious medical condition be granted to employees who have worked at least 1,250 hours over the preceding year.

Between 7 and 10 percent of companies with 100 or more employees nationwide provide fewer than 12 weeks of leave of different types, while 15 percent through 33 percent provide 13 weeks or more (Table B). Among companies offering fewer than 12 weeks, we estimate that two percent or fewer are clearly out of compliance with the law, based on having only one site and 100 or more employees at that site. Although additional companies are likely to be out of compliance, survey data do not permit accurate estimates of this number. On the other hand, a large number of the 37 percent of companies in this sample with an average of fewer than 50 employees per site are undoubtedly complying with the law, even though they may not be required to. Again, we are unable to estimate the actual percentages.

“This study looks at those factors that predict employees’ ability to commit to their companies and to deliver business results. Since the connections are so apparent and strong, it is hard to understand why there isn’t an even higher prevalence of these practices among companies.”
—Francene Rodgers
Founder and CEO,
WFD

Table B: Summary of Leave Policies

Leave Policy	Less than 12 Weeks	12 Weeks	13–26 Weeks	More than 26 Weeks	Median and Mean Number of Weeks
Maternity Leave	9%	58%	25%	8%	Median: 12 wks Mean: 17 wks
Paternity Leave	10	74	13	3	Median: 12 wks Mean: 14 wks
Adoption, Foster Care Leave	10	74.5	13	3	Median: 12 wks Mean: 14 wks
Care of Seriously Ill Children Leave	7	78	11	4	Median: 12 wks Mean: 14 wks

(n=1057)

“For many years employees have brought work issues and problems home with them and have been told at work to keep their personal problems outside the office. Today, however, employers are realizing that those home issues must be dealt with to ensure the most productive workers.”

—Charles Raymond
President,
Travelers Foundation

Although paid time off to care for mildly ill children is not required by law, 49 percent of companies with 100 or more employees allow employees to take some time for this purpose without having to use vacation days or losing pay.

Women on maternity leave are the most likely of all workers to receive some pay during leave (Table C). Most companies (81 percent) fund this pay by a general temporary disability insurance plan.

Only 17 percent of companies think the costs of leave programs exceed the benefits, while 42 percent think leave programs are cost-neutral and another 42 percent perceive a positive return on investments in these programs.

Table C: At Least Some Replacement Pay during Leave

Leave Policy	At Least Some Replacement Pay
Maternity Leave	53%
Paternity Leave	13
Adoption/Foster Care Leave	12.5

(n=1057)

Use of Flexible Time and Leave Policies Without Jeopardizing Advancement

Only 10 percent of company representatives responding to the 1998 BWLS survey feel that the use of flexible time and leave policies jeopardizes employees' opportunities for advancement. In contrast, the Institute's 1997 NSCW found that among employees of private-sector companies with 100 or more employees nationally, 40 percent agreed somewhat or strongly that using flexible schedules and taking time off for family reasons impedes job advancement. Although the questions are not identical in the two surveys, the difference between employers' and employees' views is large enough to suggest that there is significant disagreement between employers and employees on the extent to which use of flexible policies harms advancement.

Child Care Assistance

Not unexpectedly, companies are more likely to provide low- or no-cost child care options (such as DCAPs) than those that are more costly (Table D). The number of

"The discrepancy between the company's perception and the employee's perception of how flexible arrangements affect career advancement shows there is a need for more education internally."

—**Katharine Hazzard**
*Manager,
 Work/Family Programs,
 John Hancock Financial
 Services*

Table D: Child Care Assistance

Does your company provide...	Yes	No, But Considering
Access to information to help locate child care in the community?	36%	12%
Child care at or near the worksite?	9	12
Payment for child care with vouchers or other subsidies that have direct costs to the company?	5	5
Dependent care assistance plans (DCAPs) that help employees pay for child care with pretax dollars?	50	Not asked
Reimbursements of child care costs when employees work late?	4	Not asked
Reimbursement of child care costs when employees travel for business?	6	Not asked
Child care for school-age children on vacation?	6	2.5
Back-up or emergency care for employees when their regular child care arrangements fall apart?	4	4.5
Sick care for the children of employees?	5	3
Financial support of local child care through a fund or corporate contributions beyond United Way?	9	Not asked
Public/Private partnership in child care	5	Not asked

(n=1057)

companies considering new options, such as resource and referral (12 percent) and on- or near-site child care centers (12 percent), suggests that there could be growth in employer-supported child care in the coming years.

Among companies offering any child care benefit, 24 percent perceive negative returns on their investments, seven to eight percentage points higher than the percentages reported for flexible work arrangements and family leave policies. Another 40 percent perceive child care assistance programs to be cost-neutral and 36 percent think the benefits of these programs outweigh their costs.

Elder Care Assistance

While 23 percent of companies with 100 or more employees currently offer elder care resource and referral services, only 9 percent offer long-term care insurance for family members and only 5 percent make direct financial contributions to elder care programs in the communities where they operate. Another 5 percent are considering resource and referral services, while 2 percent are considering direct financial support for local programs. Most notably, 12 percent of companies are considering long-term care insurance for family members, a benefit of growing interest to the aging workforce and population at large (Table E).

Among companies offering any form of elder care assistance, 19 percent perceive the costs for these programs as outweighing benefits, somewhat lower than the 24 percent who perceive a negative return on investments in child care assistance and in line with the 17 and 18 percent who perceive a negative return on investments in flexible work arrangements and family leave policies. In addition, 60 percent view investments in elder care programs as cost-neutral, while 21 percent perceive positive returns on their investments.

Table E: Elder Care Assistance

Does your company provide....	Yes	No, But Considering
Elder care resource and referral services?	23%	5%
Long-term care insurance for family members?	9	12
Direct financial support for local elder care programs?	5	2
(n=1057)		

Helping Employees Resolve Family Problems

More than one-half of companies (56 percent) provide Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that address work-life issues. In addition, one quarter (25 percent) provide work-life seminars or workshops at the workplace (Table F).

Table F: Resolving Family Problems

Does your company provide ...	Yes	No
An Employee Assistance Program designed to help employees deal with problems that may affect their work or personal life?	56%	44%
Workshops or seminars on parenting, child development, care of the elderly, or work-family problems?	25	75

(n=1057)

Programs for the Teenage Children of Employees

Twelve percent of companies with 100 or more employees offer some type of program for the teenage children of employees (Table G). Most frequently offered are EAPs (5 percent) and counseling (3 percent), suggesting that some companies have expanded the scope of their EAP/counseling programs to specifically address the problems and needs of teenagers and their families.

Table G: Programs for Teenagers

Employer Characteristic	Provide	Do Not Provide
Any Program	12%	88%
After-School Programs	0.5	99.5
Financial Support for Community Programs	1	99
Seminars/Workshops	2	98
Summer Programs	0.3	99.7
Employee Assistance Programs	5	95
Referral Information Services	1	99
Scholarship Programs/ Educational Assistance	1	99
Counseling	3	97
Other	1	99

(n=1057)

“Despite a great deal of progress in corporations’ responding to employee work-life needs, the vast majority remain unresponsive to employee needs. In light of intense competition for attracting and retaining employees, barely a third offer even the most rudimentary services such as information and referral for child care (even less for elder care.) For issues such as employees having to deal with adolescents, or children home alone, they are virtually non-existent. So is the glass half empty or half full?”

—Brad Googins

Director,

Center for Corporate
Community Relations,
Boston College

Supportiveness of Supervisors and the Workplace Culture

Company representatives were asked to assess the supportiveness of their workplaces (Table H). More than half responded “very true” to statements assessing whether men and women who must attend to family matters are equally supported by the organization (66 percent) and whether supervisors are encouraged to be supportive of employees with family problems (55 percent). Far fewer responded “very true” when asked about whether management takes employees’ personal needs into account when making business decisions (31 percent) and whether the company makes a genuine effort to inform employees of the availability of work-life assistance (19 percent).

Table H: Supportiveness of Supervisors and the Culture

Statements about Supportiveness	Very True	Somewhat True	Not Very True Not True at All
Supervisors are encouraged to be supportive of employees with family problems and to find solutions that work for both employees and the organization	55%	41%	4%
Men and women who must attend to family matters are equally supported by supervisors and the organization	66	30	5
The organization makes a real and ongoing effort to inform employees of available assistance for managing work and family responsibilities	19	44	37
Management takes employees’ personal needs into account when making business decisions	31	51	18

(n=1057)

Company Efforts to Develop Supportive Supervisors

Companies with 100 or more employees are most likely to train supervisors in managing diversity and least likely to have a career counseling or management/leadership program for women—62 percent versus 22 percent, a striking difference of 40 percentage points (Table I). Falling between these extremes are training for supervisors to respond to the work-family needs of employees and the consideration of how well supervisors manage work-family issues when making job-performance appraisals.

Table I: Programs for Supervisors and Career Development

Program	Provide	Do Not Provide
Train supervisors in responding to work-family needs of employees	43%	57%
Train supervisors in managing diversity	62	38
Consider how well supervisors manage the work-family issues of employees in making job performance appraisals	44	56
Career counseling program or a management/leadership program for women	22	78

(n=1057)

“Companies that actively create a supportive environment with work-life programs and practices are contributing positively to their employees’ morale and dedication. Those that take employees’ personal needs into account when making business decisions, even if not implementing formal policies, are also making a significant difference in the lives of their people. The two avenues should not be mutually exclusive.”

—Beth McCarty
Vice President,
Corporate Accounts,
Ceridian Performance
Partners

Health Care Benefits

Health insurance coverage for oneself and one’s family is the single most valued benefit among U.S. workers, who rely almost exclusively on their employers for coverage. Ninety-seven percent of companies with 100 or more employees provide personal health insurance coverage for full-time workers, but only 33 percent offer full or prorated benefits to part-time workers (Table J). Ninety-five percent offer family coverage, with 87 percent paying at least part of the premium for family members. Fourteen percent of companies offer health insurance coverage for unmarried partners who are living together. Fifty-one percent of companies offer wellness programs for employees and their families, and 37 percent provide space and milk-storage facilities for mothers who are nursing infants.

“From a marketplace perspective, it is encouraging to see that more companies are moving toward more flexibility with their work/life benefits. There is, however, still work to be done. For example, more companies are offering flexible work arrangement options, but few are providing health care coverage for part-time workers.”

—Nancy Berry
 Director of Welfare
 and Work/Life,
 Allstate Insurance
 Company

Table J: Health Care Benefits

Does your company provide ...	Yes	No
Personal health insurance for full-time employees?	97%	3%
Health insurance for part-time employees on a full or pro-rated basis?	33	67
Health insurance that includes coverage for family members?	95	5
Full or part payment of premium for family members?	87	13
Health insurance coverage for unmarried partners who live together?	14	86
Wellness program for employees and their families?	50.5	49.5
Space and storage facilities at work that allow women who are nursing to continue to do so by expressing milk?	37	63
(n=1057)		

Benefits to Enhance Economic Security

Of the benefits considered in this study, companies with 100 or more employees are most likely (90 percent) to offer 401(k) or 403(b) retirement plans, with for-profit companies using the former and nonprofits the latter (Table K). Moreover, 91 percent of companies operating individual retirement plans also make contributions to them. Next most popular are temporary disability insurance plans (70 percent of companies), for which 84 percent of companies pay all or part of the premium. Forty-eight percent of companies provide defined-benefit plans, and 24 percent offer scholarships or other educational assistance for the children of employees.

Table K: Benefits to Enhance Economic Security

Does your company provide ...	Yes	No
Temporary disability insurance (TDI)	70%	30%
Full or partial payment by company of TDI premiums	84	16
Defined/guaranteed benefit pension plan	48	52
401(k) or 403(b) individual retirement plan	90	10
Company contribution to individual retirement plan	91	9
Scholarships or other educational assistance for the children of employees	24	76
(n=1057)		

Company Involvement in Community Life

Eleven percent of companies with 100 or more employees are engaged in some type of partnership with local or state government to assist employed people in the community to meet their family and personal responsibilities (Table L).

Seventy-three percent of companies with 100 or more employees allow their workers to volunteer in community activities—to an unknown extent—during work hours.

Table L: Public-Private Partnerships

Type of Initiative	Involved	Not Involved
All types	11%	89%
Child Care Programs	5	95
Parent Education and Support Programs	7	93
Health Care Programs	6	94
Welfare to Work Programs	7	93
Education Programs	9	91

(n=1057)

Question 2

What Are the Characteristics of Companies Most Likely to Provide Work-Life Programs and Policies and Supportive Work Environments?

Industry

Industry is the most frequent predictor of work-life support, with the finance/insurance/real estate services standing out as the most generous of industries in most areas, while the wholesale and retail trades emerge as least generous time and again. The 1998 BWLS also reveals that professional and “other” services and, in some cases, manufacturers are more likely to provide certain types of work-life assistance.

Company Size

The next most frequent predictor of work-life assistance and a supportive work environment is company size. Overall, 25 percent of companies in the 1998 BWLS have

“There is real potential to broaden the impact of work-life programs through public-private partnerships.”

—**Peg Sprague**
*Group Manager,
Community
Development,
WFD*

“The labor market continues to tighten. Compelling research that correlates a supportive workplace to increased employee productivity and greater loyalty continues to be prevalent. Why then are there not a greater number of companies, both large and small, responding to the needs of contemporary family life? The service industry, dominated by hourly workers, is noticeably behind. The ironic thing is that the quality of our product, the delivery of service, is driven by employee mood. Why are there not more service industry employers investing in a supportive workplace?”

—**Donna Klein**
*Vice President,
Workplace Effectiveness,
Marriott International*

“We know from Catalyst research that employees today want and need supportive workplaces. This is especially true of dual-career couples, who are more likely to leave their company if they don’t get the support they want. Women leaders are helping to create workplaces that are more in keeping with the needs of employees. At the same time, when the workplace environment provides the support they need, women are more able to move into top executive positions.”

—**Marcia Brumit Kropf**
*Vice President,
Research and Advisory
Services,
Catalyst*

“The strong correlation between presence of women and people of color and companies providing more favorable benefits is truly astounding. I wonder which comes first—enlightened companies attracting/promoting women and people of color and also endorsing work-life assistance for the same reasons or if it is the women and people of color who advocate once there.”

—**Linda Hall Whitman**
*President,
Ceridian Performance
Partners*

1000 or more employees. Larger companies are more likely than their smaller counterparts to provide flexible work options and longer maternity leaves, paternity leaves, and leaves for adoptive parents, as well as wage replacement during maternity leave. However, smaller companies are more likely to provide wage replacement for paternity leave. Of the 11 child care options we examined, larger companies are more likely to provide seven. Likewise, larger companies are more likely to provide elder care programs, employee assistance programs, programs for the teenage children of employees, work-life seminars, health care and wellness programs, and work-life training for supervisors.

Proportion of Top Executive Positions Filled by Women

One of the most provocative findings of the 1998 BWLS is the broad extent to which having a larger proportion of top executive positions filled by women is associated with the provision of work-life assistance. It is the third most frequent predictor, and quite close to company size in importance. Interestingly, 30 percent of companies have no women in top executive positions (either the CEO or direct reports to the CEO), while 70 percent had one or more women in these leadership positions, and 20 percent of companies have women in half or more of their top positions. Some of the findings are quite dramatic:

- Eighty-two percent of companies with women in half or more of their top executive positions provide traditional flextime, compared with 56 percent of companies with no women in top positions.
- Six times as many companies (19 percent) with women in half or more of their top executive positions provide on- or near-site child care as those with no women in top management (3 percent).
- Sixty percent of companies with women in half or more of their top executive positions provide dependent-care assistance plans, compared with 37 percent with no women in these senior positions.
- Thirty-three percent of companies with women in half or more of their top executive positions offer elder care resource and referral programs, compared with 14 percent of companies with no women in key positions.

Proportion of Top Executive Positions Filled by Minorities

An equally provocative and similar pattern of findings emerges when we examine the relationship between the proportion of top executive positions filled by minorities and the prevalence of work-life supports. The proportions of top executive positions filled by minorities or women are equally important predictors. Since the majority of companies in the sample (63 percent) have no top positions filled by minorities, having even

one or more top positions filled by minority employees can have an impact. For example:

- More than 80 percent of companies with minorities in 25 percent or more of top executive positions offer traditional flextime versus 64 percent of companies with no minorities in key positions.
- About twice as many companies with at least one top executive position filled by a minority employee offer pay during leaves for adoption and foster care placement as companies with no top positions filled by minorities.
- Four times as many companies (26 percent) with minorities in 50 percent or more of top executive positions offer on- or near-site child care as companies with no minorities in key positions (6 percent).

Women as a Percentage of the Workforce

The percentage of women in a company's workforce is also predictive of work-life assistance in many areas we examined, albeit in a dual way. When women constitute a **larger** proportion of the workforce, companies are more likely to provide a number of options, some of which could be considered costly, some not—such as job sharing, part-time work, time off for parents to attend school and child care functions, longer maternity leaves, care for children during school vacations, direct subsidies for child care, and so forth. Conversely, we found that companies are more likely to invest in certain more costly options when women constitute a **smaller** percentage of the workforce—such as wage replacement during maternity leave, personal and family health insurance coverage, and paid family health insurance. Overall, in 31 percent of companies, women represent 60 percent or more of the workforce, while in 32 percent, they represent less than 40 percent.

Hourly Employees as a Percentage of Workforce

While it could be argued that hourly workers have greater needs for work-life assistance because they tend to be concentrated in lower-paid jobs, the 1998 BWLS reveals that companies with **larger** proportions of hourly workers are less likely than other companies to provide many forms of assistance. For example, they are less likely to provide replacement pay during maternity leave and during leave for adoption or foster care placement, leave for mildly ill children, employee assistance programs, work-life seminars, and personal and family health insurance coverage. On the other hand, companies with larger proportions of hourly employees are more likely to report that they take employees' personal needs into account when making business decisions.

"The issue of diversity has moved from the moral imperative to the strategic imperative."

—Ted Childs

VP, Global Workforce
Diversity,
IBM

"The presence of a more diverse workforce—women and minorities—is increasing the scope of benefits and number of companies that offer employees work-life programs, policies, and responsibilities.

However, there appears to be somewhat of a two-tiered system. Companies with large numbers of low-wage employees and hourly-wage earners—who are frequently women and minorities—are less likely to offer these benefits while companies that want to attract and keep women and minorities in key executive positions are more likely to provide these benefits."

—Kathryn Taaffe
McLearn

Assistant Vice
President for Youth
Programs,
The Commonwealth
Fund

"It is fascinating that there are different predictors of providing standardized benefits and of providing flexibility. Since both are important to employees, we need to think about how companies can respond to both needs."

—Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes

Director,
Center for Work and
Family at Boston
College

Part-Time Employees as a Percentage of Workforce

Companies with larger proportions of part-time workers are more likely than companies with smaller proportions of part-timers to offer the following flexible work arrangements: gradual return to work after childbirth, movement from full- to part-time work and back again, and job sharing. On the other hand, they are less likely to offer health care benefits and benefits to ensure economic security. As is the case for companies with larger proportions of hourly workers, companies with larger proportions of part-time workers report that they are more likely to take employees' personal needs into account when making business decisions.

Union Members as a Percentage of Workforce

Seventy-eight percent of companies with 100 or more employees have no unionized workers, while 12 percent have 30 percent or more unionized workers. Companies with larger proportions of unionized workers are less likely to provide part-time options, a gradual return to work after childbirth, and flexibility in moving from full-time to part-time and back again. However, they are more likely to provide longer leaves for paternity and adoption, paid maternity leave, and leave for mildly ill children. They are also more likely to provide health benefits and benefits to ensure economic security. Some of the findings are very impressive. For example:

- Sixty-five percent of companies with 30 percent or more unionized workers provide time off to care for mildly ill children without lost pay, compared with 46 percent of companies with no unionized workers.
- Forty percent of companies with 30 percent or more unionized workers pay the entire premium for family health care insurance, compared with 8 percent of companies with no unionized workers.
- Eighty-seven percent of companies with 30 percent or more unionized workers provide temporary disability insurance versus 66 percent of companies with no unionized workers.
- Seventy-nine percent of companies with 30 percent or more unionized workers provide defined/guaranteed benefit pensions versus 40 percent of companies with no unionized workers.

On the other hand, the proportion of unionized workers is not predictive of any of the child care options examined in the 1998 BWLS.

Number of Sites

Having a larger number of company sites is associated with widely scattered types of work-life assistance. Companies with more locations are more likely to provide tradi-

tional flextime, flexibility in moving from full-time to part-time work and back again, occasional work at home, dependent-care assistance plans, long-term care insurance, training to manage diversity, temporary disability insurance, scholarships for children of employees, and partnerships with state and local government.

Downsizing, Difficulty in Filling Skilled Positions, Difficulty in Filling Entry-Level or Hourly Positions, and Financial Performance

In the current business climate, we expected that downsizing, recruitment, and financial performance would be strongly related to the presence or absence of work-life assistance programs. However, business conditions did not emerge frequently as predictors in the 1998 BWLS.

Companies reporting difficulty in filling skilled positions (68 percent of the sample) are more likely than other companies to provide traditional flextime, career counseling or management/leadership training for women, personal health insurance for part-time workers, and individual retirement accounts. On the other hand, companies finding it easy to fill skilled positions are more likely to reimburse child care costs for employees who work late and to provide health insurance coverage for unmarried partners who live together.

Companies finding it difficult to fill entry level, hourly positions (40 percent of the sample) are more likely to allow flexibility in moving from full-time to part-time work and to allow time off to care for mildly ill children. On the other hand, companies that find it easier to fill entry-level, hourly positions are more likely to reimburse child care costs for working late and overnight business travel and to provide health insurance coverage for unmarried partners who live together.

Companies that have downsized in the past year (29 percent of the sample) are more likely to allow employees to work at home occasionally. They are also more likely to provide backup care and sick child care. Since companies that downsize often rely on fewer people to continue to do the same amount of work as before work-life options that minimize absenteeism make sense. Companies that have downsized are also more likely to offer EAPs, presumably for the survivors and the pink-slipped.

Finally, companies that report doing worse than their competitors are more likely to allow employees time off to attend school or child care functions. Companies that are outperforming their competitors are more likely to make direct contributions to elder care programs in the community, keep employees well-informed of the work-life assistance available to them, and offer career counseling and management/leadership programs for women. In addition, they are more likely to provide personal health insurance coverage, defined/guaranteed benefit pensions, individual retirement accounts, and scholarships or other educational assistance to the children of employees.

“Work-life programs should be most critical during adverse business conditions. They can play an important role in helping employees and companies during pressured times.”

—Dawn Walsh
*Manager of Public Affairs,
Joseph E. Seagram
& Sons, Inc.*

“This thorough review of workplace practice provides insight for significant actions that businesses can take to maximize the resiliency and effectiveness of the workforce.”

—Candice P. Lange
*Director, Workforce
Partnering Initiatives
Eli Lilly and Company*

“For those companies not involved or just beginning to develop work-life initiatives, this report clearly makes the business case for moving forward. For those companies further along in development of work-life initiatives, this study is a wake-up call to continue in new directions and not become complacent.”

—Chris Kjeldsen

*Vice President,
Community &
Workplace Programs,
Johnson & Johnson*

Conclusion

The 1998 BWLS is the first in an ongoing series of surveys that the Families and Work Institute will use to track the development of company-provided work-life assistance over time. The mere fact that so many companies provide programmatic assistance and supportive work environments indicates that many company executives are aware that meeting the needs of employees not only helps these employees and their families, but also benefits the bottom line.

However, the findings of this study also suggest that many executives still do not share this belief, as evidenced by the small proportions of companies providing many of the benefits, programs, and policies we examined. To the extent that company leadership itself reflects the growing diversity of the workforce—particularly by promoting more women and minorities into top executive positions—one might expect to see an increase in work-life support, as our findings suggest. In addition, however, we believe that rigorous research must continue to provide the necessary independent perspectives that can challenge companies to reexamine the status quo and point them in the direction of potential solutions.