



# Executive Summary

## *Synthesis of Findings*

The study of work and family life is relatively new. Most studies have investigated either how life on the job affects life at home or, conversely, how life at home affects life on the job.

There have been few attempts to connect it all. *The 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce* provides a model for understanding how work, family, and personal life fit together, a model that incorporates outcomes important to all—productivity and well-being.

We are able to test this model with a nationally representative sample of the U.S. labor force. Our study design also allows us to detect trends through comparisons with the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey, providing a 20-year perspective, and with our 1992 National Study of the Changing Workforce, providing a five-year point of reference.

What have we found?

- The *quality* of workers' jobs and the *supportiveness* of their workplaces are the most powerful predictors of productivity—job satisfaction, commitment to their employers, and retention. Job and workplace characteristics are far more important predictors than pay and benefits, which are generally competitive with the marketplace. To maximize satisfaction, commitment, and retention, employers need to provide high-quality jobs—whatever the employee's occupation—and supportive workplaces—whatever the industry.

We also found that the characteristics of jobs and workplaces have important effects on the personal lives of workers.

- Employees with more difficult, more demanding jobs and less supportive workplaces experience substantially higher levels of negative spillover from work into their lives off the job—jeopardizing their personal and family well-being.

These effects set in motion a chain reaction.

- When workers feel burned-out by their jobs, when they have insufficient time and energy for themselves and their families, when work puts them in a bad mood—these feelings spill back into the workplace, limiting job performance.
- Although more supportive workplaces offer some protection against the effects of hectic and demanding jobs, not even the most supportive workplace can eliminate this problem entirely. To improve and sustain productivity over the long run, employers must not only create supportive workplace environments, but also work with employees to keep job demands in check so they do not endanger personal and family well-being. Promoting

work-life balance appears to be good both for employees and the bottom line.

So what does the scorecard tell us? Are characteristics of jobs and workplaces improving for the U.S. wage and salaried labor force? There is good news and bad news.

*The good news:* The quality of jobs has improved somewhat over the past 20 years, and workplaces appear to have become a bit more supportive even over the past five years. There is, however, still plenty of room for improvement.

*The bad news:* Jobs have become less secure. They have also become more demanding—more time-consuming and more hectic—making it increasingly difficult to achieve a balance between work and personal life.

Meanwhile, what is happening on the home front?

- The proportion of employees living in dual-earner families has increased markedly over the past 20 years, and in three-quarters of these couples, both partners work full-time. Thus, among married employees, the pooled time available for child care (if they have children) and household work is decreasing, creating additional stresses off the job.

In response to this situation, the roles of employed married men and women appear to be converging somewhat.

- Although employed married women still spend more time than men doing household chores, men's time doing household chores has increased over the past 20 years, while women's time has decreased somewhat.
- And although employed married mothers still spend more time than fathers with their children, the time that fathers spend with their children has increased over the past 20 years. The time mothers spend with their children has remained about the same despite an increase in the average hours they spend at their jobs. As a result, children appear to spend somewhat more time with their employed parents today than children 20 years ago did.

Although these role changes with respect to child care and household work appear to be positive, effective responses to the challenges facing today's families, they impose costs as well.

- Employed married men and women have less time for themselves today than their counterparts did 20 years ago, and less time for oneself is associated with lower personal well-being and greater susceptibility to negative spillover from job to home.

This brings us back to work. High-quality jobs—jobs that offer autonomy, learning opportunities, meaning, and a chance to get ahead—energize employees and win their commitment. Supportive workplaces help employees be more effective workers, people, and parents. Employers who can provide these better quality jobs and supportive workplaces have a clear competitive edge.

## *Summary of the Report*

The National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) is a research program of the Families and Work Institute that surveys representative samples of the nation's labor force every five years. This report focuses on findings from the 1997 survey but also provides a historical perspective by comparing data from 1997 with data from the 1992 NSCW and from the U.S. Department of Labor's 1977 Quality of Employment Survey. Only data for wage and salaried workers who are 18 years or older are considered here. The sample sizes are 2,877 employees for 1997, 2,958 for 1992, and 1,298 for 1977.

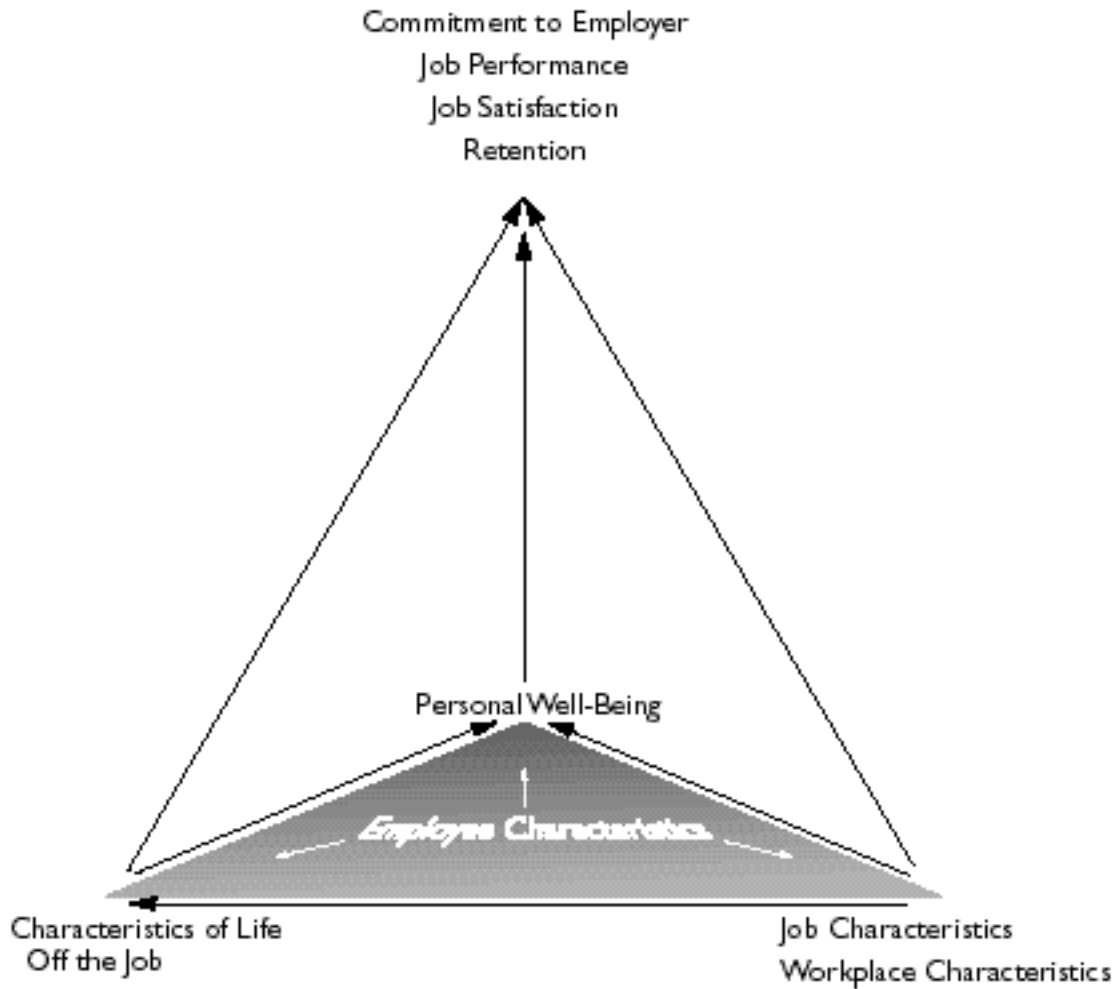
In recent years, there has been much discussion about the relationship between workers' lives on and off the job, about changes in the nature of work and in the lives of workers, and about the fit between what is good for employers and for employees, including their families. Our study addresses many of the issues raised in this ongoing discussion, while informing it with new insights.

To guide our analyses and frame our presentation of findings, we developed a conceptual model that ties together many of the elements embodied in discussions of work and personal life. This model, outlined below, portrays hypothesized causal pathways connecting characteristics of employees' jobs and workplaces, characteristics of their lives off the job, and aspects of their personal well-being to one another, as well as to the outcomes of primary interest to employers—job satisfaction, commitment to employer, job performance, and retention—at the pinnacle of the pyramid.

The findings reported here will be of interest not only to employers, but to labor organizations, researchers in various disciplines, public policymakers, and workers everywhere whose experiences and opinions are the substance of the study.

Key findings are summarized below. First, we present descriptive information about the demographic characteristics of individual employees, the characteristics of their lives off the job, their personal well-being, the quality of their jobs, and the quality of their workplaces, as well as their job satisfaction, commitment to their employers, job performance, and plans to remain with their current employers. Then we present and discuss findings that test the conceptual model by exploring the ways in which these factors affect one another.

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*Findings  
from  
Chapter 2*

## The Changing Composition of the Workforce

Over the past 20 years, the U.S. wage and salaried labor force has become more balanced with respect to gender, older on average, much better educated, more racially and ethnically diverse, and more concentrated in managerial and professional occupations.

## Life Off the Job

Eighty-five percent of U.S. wage and salaried workers live with family members and have immediate, day-to-day family responsibilities off the job. Family members include anyone related by blood, marriage, or adoption, as well as partners to whom employees are not legally married.

Forty-six percent of wage and salaried workers are parents—that is, they have children under 18 who live with them at least half-time.

Nearly one in five employed parents is single, and more workers are raising children alone today than workers did 20 years ago.

Among employed single parents, 27 percent are men.

More than three out of four married employees have spouses or partners who are also employed—an increase from 66 to 78 percent over the past 20 years. Among full-time employees living in dual-earner households, 75 percent have partners who also work full-time.

While only 49 percent of married male employees with children under 18 had employed partners in 1977, 67 percent do today.

Thirteen percent of wage and salaried workers—83 percent of whom have full-time primary jobs—moonlight at secondary jobs, adding an average of 13 hours per week to the hours they work at their primary jobs. The most important reason employees take second jobs is to earn extra money.

### *Are the Roles of Mothers and Fathers Changing?*

Although employed married fathers spend less *time with children* than employed married mothers do on both workdays and days off work, the time fathers spend with their children has increased substantially over the past 20 years, while the time mothers spend has remained the same. For example, fathers spend an average of 2.3 hours per workday caring for and doing things with their children, an increase of 30 minutes per workday since 1977. In contrast, mothers spend nearly one hour more than fathers (3.2 versus 2.3 hours) with their children on workdays, but the total time they spend has not changed significantly from 1977 to 1997.

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Primarily as the result of changes in fathers' behavior, children are receiving somewhat more attention from their employed parents today than was the case 20 years ago. However, 70 percent of both fathers and mothers feel they do not have enough time with their children.

Employed married mothers spend more *time on chores* than employed married fathers do on both workdays and days off work, whether or not they have children. However, this gap has narrowed quite substantially over the past 20 years, with fathers spending more time, and mothers less, on household work. The decrease for mothers is more than offset by the increase for fathers. Over the past 20 years, mothers' workday time on chores has decreased by 36 minutes per day, while men's time has increased by one hour.

Married employees with children—both fathers and mothers—spend less time on their own *personal activities* today than employees 20 years ago did. The decline has been somewhat more pronounced for fathers than for mothers, suggesting, again, a gradual convergence in the way employed fathers and mothers in couples allocate their time off the job. Fathers spend an average of 1.2 hours engaged in their own free-time activities on workdays, 54 minutes less per workday than 20 years ago. Mothers spend even less time engaged in personal activities on workdays (0.9 hours), 42 minutes less per workday than 20 years ago.

The decrease in time that married fathers spend on themselves suggests where they may have found more time for their children and household work, while the decrease in mothers' time on chores and personal time may help to explain how they have managed to preserve time for their children despite longer hours on the job. The implications of reduced personal time for workers' mental health is another matter.

### *Child Care Arrangements*

Among all employed parents with pre-kindergarten children, two-thirds rely on family members—partners and relatives—as the primary source of care for their youngest children, while a third use non-family arrangements. Among employed parents with employed spouses, 55 percent rely on care by parents or other relatives.

Those experiencing the fewest child care breakdowns—having to make other arrangements because their usual care is not available—use center-based or parental child care.

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When one member of a dual-earner couple has to care for a sick child or attend to other needs of children when both are supposed to be at their jobs, 83 percent of employed mothers say they are more likely than their partners to take time off, compared with only 22 percent of fathers who make this claim.

*Findings  
from  
Chapter 4*

## The Personal Well-Being of Workers

Most employees are fairly satisfied with their lives in general, their family lives, and their relationships with their partners, but many have reservations. Only 33 percent rate general life satisfaction at the highest level, while 31 percent and 51 percent, respectively, rate family satisfaction and marital satisfaction at the highest levels.

In the past three months, nearly one-quarter of employees have felt nervous or stressed often or very often, and 13 percent have had difficulty coping with the demands of everyday life often or very often.

Substantial numbers of employees feel burned-out by their jobs. For instance, in the past three months 26 percent have felt emotionally drained by their work often or very often, and 36 percent have felt used up at the end of the workday often or very often.

Similarly, many employees are affected by negative spillover from their jobs into their personal lives. For example, in the past three months 26 percent have not been in as good a mood as they would have liked at home because of their jobs often or very often, and 28 percent have not had the energy to do things with their families or other important people in their lives often or very often.

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## Job Characteristics

### *Job Demands*

Considering *all paid and unpaid hours worked at any location*, employees spend an average of 44 hours per week on work related to their *primary or only jobs*—six hours more than they are scheduled to work. When the time that the 13 percent of employees who worked at secondary jobs is included, the average total hours worked per week at *all jobs* for all employees increases to 46. On average, men work more hours at all jobs (49 hours per week) than women (42 hours per week).

Eighty-five percent of workers in the wage and salaried labor force are scheduled to work full-time at their main jobs. Women are more likely (21 percent) than men (8 percent) to have part-time jobs, which accounts for part of the difference in hours worked by men and women in the labor force.

It appears<sup>1</sup> that employees are working longer hours today than employees 20 years ago worked. Among employees working 20 or more hours per week,<sup>2</sup> all paid and unpaid hours worked at all jobs have increased from 43.6 hours in 1977 to 47.1 hours in 1997—an increase of 3.5 hours per week. While men’s total hours at all jobs have increased from 47.1 hours to 49.9 hours—an increase of 2.8 hours per week—women’s hours have increased from 39 hours to 44 hours—an increase of 5 hours per week.

Employed fathers with children under 18 work longer paid and unpaid hours at all jobs (50.9 hours) than other men (48 hours), while employed mothers with children under 18 work fewer hours (41.4 hours) than other women (43.4 hours). Fathers’ total work time has increased by 3.1 hours in the past 20 years, while mothers’ time has increased by 5 hours.

Given the hours people work, it should come as no surprise that many employees (63 percent) would like to work less. There is no difference in the proportions of men and women who would like to work fewer hours, and both would reduce their current total work week by about 11 hours on average if they could. The proportion of employees who would like to work fewer hours has increased by 17 percentage points since 1992.

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1. Small variations in the way work hours were measured in 1977 and 1997 may affect these estimates somewhat. However, the differences found are sufficiently large and reliable to suggest that they are not accounted for by measurement bias.

2. The restriction of the sample to employees working 20 or more hours per week was necessitated by the design of the 1977 survey.

Nearly one in five employees is *required* to work paid or unpaid overtime hours once a week or more with little or no notice, and one in five employees regularly takes overnight business trips.

One in three employees brings work home once a week or more often—an increase of 10 percentage points since 1977.

Moreover, many workers indicate that they have to work very fast (68 percent), have to work very hard (88 percent), and do not have enough time to finish everything that needs to get done on the job (60 percent)—much higher proportions than 20 years ago.

To the extent that comparisons with data from 1977 are possible, it appears that work has become substantially more demanding over the past 20 years.

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### *Job Quality*

Employees in 1997 have more job autonomy than employees did 20 years ago.

Opportunities and challenges to learn on the job and the meaning that employees find in their work have also increased substantially over this period.

However, only 16 percent of workers rate their chances for advancement in their jobs as excellent, while 23 percent say their chances are good and 61 percent say their chances are fair or poor.

And about three out of 10 employees think it is somewhat or very likely they will lose their jobs in the next couple of years—a higher proportion than 20 years ago.

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### *Compensation and Fringe Benefits*

The majority of employees—from 74 through 84 percent—have access to traditional fringe benefits: personal health insurance coverage, pension or retirement plan, paid vacation days and holidays, and paid time off for personal illness. However, only a minority have access to dependent-care benefits: child care information and referral services (20 percent), elder care information and referral services (25 percent), on- or near-site child care services

(11 percent), financial assistance for purchasing child care services (13 percent), and dependent-care assistance plans (29 percent).

Historical comparisons could only be made with data from the 1992 survey, and then, only for 5 benefits: personal health insurance coverage, family health insurance coverage, child care information and referral services, employer operated or sponsored on- or near-site child care centers, and elder care information and referral services. Of these fringe benefits, only access to elder care information and referral services has changed, increasing from 11 percent five years ago to 25 percent today.

Access to fringe benefits varies according to a number of factors. Employees who work for companies with larger numbers of employees nationwide have greater access than other workers both to traditional and dependent-care benefits. Part-time workers, low-wage workers, and, to a lesser extent, hourly workers have less access than other workers to traditional fringe benefits.

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*Findings  
from  
Chapter 6*

## Workplace Characteristics

### *Flexible Work Arrangements*

Forty-five percent of employees are able to choose—within some range of hours—when they begin and end their workdays, but only one in four can change daily schedules as needed.

Two-thirds (66 percent) of employees find it relatively easy to take time off during the workday to address family or personal matters. However, only 50 percent of employed parents are able to take a few days off from work to care for sick children without losing pay, forfeiting vacation time, or having to fabricate some excuse for missing work.

Nearly all employees in companies of all sizes say that women are able to take time off—without jeopardizing their jobs—to recuperate from childbirth, and most say that men can similarly take some time off when they become fathers.

Part-time employees are more likely to believe they could switch to full-time in their current jobs, if they wanted to, than full-time workers are to believe they could switch to part-time in their current positions.

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Nineteen percent of employees spend at least part of their *regular workweek* working at home, while another seven percent say they would be allowed to do so if they wanted to.

### *Work Environment*

Most employees feel that their immediate supervisors are quite supportive, with 76 through 92 percent agreeing with nine statements describing various dimensions of supervisor support related to performance of the job and personal or family needs.

Although most employees also feel that the cultures of their workplaces are person- and family-friendly, supervisors are rated more favorably than workplaces. Employees in smaller workplaces rate their workplace cultures as more supportive than employees in larger workplaces do.

And most employees have positive, supportive relationships with coworkers.

Men are slightly more confident than women that employees of their same gender and racial or national backgrounds can advance in the organizations where they work, while non-minority employees are much more confident than minority employees that workers of their own gender and racial or national backgrounds can advance.

Almost one in five employees feels that he or she has been discriminated against at his or her *current* job because of age, gender, or race.

Despite signs of perceived inequality of opportunity and discrimination on the job, 91 percent of workers agree strongly or somewhat that they are treated with respect at work.

Employees in smaller workplaces rate their workplace cultures as more supportive than employees in larger workplaces do.

*Findings  
from  
Chapter 7*

## Employee Outcomes on the Job

Employees are generally satisfied with their jobs—somewhat more so today than employees 20 years ago were, and most are also committed to the success of their companies and loyal to their employers, despite the flagging loyalty of employers to their employees.

More than three out of five employees (62 percent) plan to stay with their current employers for at least the next year, while 22 percent say it is somewhat likely they will make a genuine effort to find another job with

The proportions of employees planning to stay with their employers for at least a year as well as those planning to move on have not changed since 1977.

another employer in the next year. Only 15 percent indicate that it is very likely they will move on in the next year. Perhaps surprisingly, these proportions have not changed in the past two decades.

Most employees are able to manage their personal lives so that there is relatively little negative spillover from home to work. As an example, only 4 percent of employees reported that their family or personal lives often or very often kept them from getting work done on time at their jobs in the past three months, while 13 percent said this had happened sometimes. The pattern is similar for the other home spillover items. Indeed, reported spillover from home to work is much less frequent than spillover from work to home. Nonetheless, for some employees, spillover from their personal lives into work is substantial.

*Findings  
from  
Chapter 8*

## What Can Employers Do to Improve Job Satisfaction, Commitment, Performance, and Retention?

*Chapters 8 and 9 explore relationships among various parts of the conceptual model that have been described above and discuss the implications of these findings for employers.*

Wages and fringe benefits—including traditional benefits like health insurance, pensions, and paid time off, as well as dependent-care benefits like child care information and referral services and on- or near-site centers—are often considered primary determinants of job satisfaction, commitment, loyalty to employer, job performance, and retention.

Findings from the survey, however, tell quite a different story. The quality of employees' jobs and the supportiveness of their workplaces are far more important predictors of these outcomes than earnings or fringe benefits. Job quality is defined as autonomy on the job, learning opportunities, meaningfulness of work, opportunities for advancement, and job security. Workplace support is defined as flexibility in work arrangements, supervisor support, supportive workplace culture, positive coworker relations, absence of discrimination, respect in the workplace, and equal opportunity for workers of all backgrounds.

The implications for employers are potentially far-reaching. While offering competitive pay and benefits is undoubtedly necessary to achieving business goals, it is insufficient on its own. If employers want to maximize satisfaction, commitment, performance, and retention, they

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must provide high-quality jobs—whatever the employee’s occupation—and supportive workplaces—whatever the industry. And improving job quality and work environments is generally much more challenging than providing more pay or offering new benefits, because it requires organizational change.

Findings related to job performance provide additional insights into how job and workplace characteristics are related to important business outcomes. Job performance is affected by many things, including spillover from problems that employees have in their personal lives. To improve job performance, employers frequently offer special work-life programs—wellness programs, employee assistance programs, child and elder care information and referral services, direct child care services, and so forth—to help employees solve personal problems so they will not spill over into the workplace and reduce productivity. Such strategies generally treat employees’ personal problems as products of their lives off the job that are unrelated to their work experiences.

Our findings, however, indicate that work life is actually an important *source* of employees’ personal problems. That is, demanding jobs and unsupportive workplaces lead to spillover from jobs into workers’ personal lives that can create or exacerbate problems off the job that, in turn, spill over into work and diminish productivity. Thus, helping employees to solve problems in their personal lives by providing special programs of assistance—without also reducing the extent to which jobs contribute to these problems—may severely limit the impact of work-life programs on job performance.

Of particular concern are the negative spillover effects that demanding and hectic jobs can have on the quality of workers’ personal lives and well-being. When job demands exceed some individually defined level, it seems that not even the most supportive workplaces can fully protect workers from negative job spillover into their personal lives. This spillover is reflected in high stress, poor coping, bad moods, and insufficient time and energy for people who are personally important, creating “problems” that, in turn, spill over into work and impair job performance. Therefore, actions by employers to not only increase the supportiveness of workplaces, but urge and help employees “get a life” off the job may be crucial to improving employee productivity over the long run—not to mention the obvious benefits to workers and their families.

## Current and Emerging Issues

### *Generation X*

Members of Generation X (workers 18 through 32 years old in 1997) are much better educated, as well as more racially and ethnically diverse, than young workers 20 years ago were.

Married Gen Xers—with and without children—are more likely to have an employed spouse than young workers in 1977 were, and both members of employed couples are more likely to work full-time. This creates stresses and strains that were less prevalent among earlier generations of workers.

Contrary to the portrayal of Generation X in popular media, young workers today are not a group of “slackers.” They work substantially longer hours on average and find their jobs more demanding than young workers 20 years ago did.

Although members of Generation X feel somewhat more satisfied with their jobs than young workers did two decades ago, they feel that they have less job security.

Generation-X employees are less likely than Baby Boomers were to have embarked upon their work lives imagining they would remain with the same company for most of their careers. However, half of all Gen Xers *and* Boomers now view expectations of a lifetime job as passé.

Though most Gen Xers do not expect to stay in the same jobs forever, they are not a generation of job-hoppers. Indeed, only 22 percent of young workers in both 1977 and 1997 said it was very likely they would leave their employers within the next year. Moreover, Gen Xers are just as loyal to their employers, and say that they are just as willing to work harder than required for the success of their companies, as older workers.

As for employers’ concerns about retaining Gen-X employees, who are in short supply, the findings indicate that higher job quality and workplace support that is responsive to basic individual needs both on and off the job are the factors most likely to increase retention—assuming that wages and fringe benefits are competitive. This is exactly what we found for workers in general.

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## *Elder Care*

Historically, and still today, families provide the major part of non-medical care for elderly relatives. As the population ages and labor-force participation expands, however, the supply of non-employed family members available to provide care is not keeping pace with needs. Looking into the future, one sees that elder care will demand time and attention from growing numbers of employees, affecting the way they work.

While only 13 percent of workers were providing special assistance to someone 65 years or older when interviewed, 25 percent—a quarter of the U.S. wage and salaried labor force—had provided elder care during the preceding year.

One in five working parents has been part of the so-called “sandwich generation” during the past year—both raising children and caring for elderly relatives.

The proportions of employed men and women with elder care responsibilities are virtually the same.

Employees with elder care responsibilities spend an average of nearly 11 hours per week providing assistance, with men and women spending equal amounts of time.

Among workers who had elder care responsibilities in the past year, more than one-third reduced their work hours or took time off to provide that care. Surprisingly, in the past year employed men with elder care responsibilities were just as likely as employed women to have taken time off or reduced their work hours to provide care.

Many employers appear to be at least informally supportive of workers who need to take time off or reduce work hours to provide elder care. However, employees in managerial and professional positions and employees with higher earnings are more able to take as much time as they need without losing pay.

Only one in four employees has access to elder care resource and referral services through his or her employer.

With today’s smaller families, single-parent families, and two-career couples, the pool of able-bodied, non-employed adults available to provide elder care is shrinking just as demand for care is rising. It is not clear that anyone—employees, employers, community agencies, or government—is prepared for the substantial impact that growing elder care responsibilities will have on the labor force in coming years.

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Although no one expects employers to address the full range of issues raised by this demographic tidal wave, employers who do not anticipate the potential disruptions to their workforces will likely be taken aback by the consequences.

### *Work-Family Backlash?*

Despite claims in the press and worries in the boardroom, the findings do not indicate that young, unmarried, or childless employees are more likely than other workers to resent work-family benefits that do not benefit them personally. Nor are they more likely to resent doing extra work occasionally to accommodate coworkers' family or personal needs.

In general, the demographic characteristics of individual workers bear little relationship to either their acceptance of work-family benefits that are not personally beneficial to them or their willingness to do extra work to accommodate the personal and family needs of coworkers. Rather, workplace characteristics—flexibility, supportive supervisors, good coworker relations, and supportive workplace cultures—are most predictive of employees' acceptance of work-family benefits and willingness to accommodate coworkers' needs. Thus, it would appear that employers who have made greater progress in creating person- and family-friendly work environments actually experience less work-family backlash.

To a large extent, supportive workplace factors are within the control of employers to alter, unlike the personal demographic characteristics that workers bring to the job. Although creating a highly supportive workplace environment is more challenging than simply implementing another discrete benefit or program from the top down, the challenge appears to be well worth the effort when measured by employees' attitudes and behavior on the job, ranging from less resentment of work-family benefits and greater support of coworkers to increased job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and retention.

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