WORK–LIFE
BALANCE
AN EMPLOYER'S GUIDE

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This guide is intended for business and organization management teams seeking to implement a work-life balance policy. The purpose of this guide is to overview the concept of work-life balance and offer useful tools for the development, adoption, and implementation of such a policy.

N.B. The acronym WLB used throughout this document refers to work-life balance.

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"Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing."

\- Albert Schweitzer

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WHAT IS WLB?
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Definition:

According to Québec's ministère de la Famille et des Aînés, work-life balance is about striking a balance between the obligations and responsibilities of professional life and family life.

> Striking a balance between the obligations and responsibilities of professional and family life.

Family life is defined by any bond of dependency existing between a worker and his or her loved ones (including immediate family and extended family, and at times, close friends).

Achieving balance between one's family life and professional life is a matter of concern for both workers and employers. Accordingly, businesses and organizations can greatly benefit from addressing this issue and ensuring that their human resources are functioning as optimally as possible.

Background:

The level of social change that has taken place in Québec over the past decades — and in particular women's integration into the job market — has brought new issues, challenges, and realities to the forefront. This new context ushers in a new way to look at work-life balance that has become front and centre in the minds of today's workforce.

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THREE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE EVOLUTION OF THE WLB CONCEPT:

1. Demographic Change

- Changes in the workforce due to the high volume of the population reaching retirement age;
- Decline in the volume of the next generation labour force;
- The rise of the "sandwich generation" (that is workers responsible for the care of their children and their aging parents).

These changes particularly impact women workers in that despite their entry into the labour market they remain the primary caregivers for their families and loved ones.

2. Sociological Change

- Increased presence of women in the labour market;
- Increase in the number of families where both parents work on the labour market;
- Increase in the number of single-parent families.

These changes necessarily imply that we rethink how work hours are structured because earlier conceptions —based on women being home to tend to household and family responsibilities— are no longer tenable.

3. Changes in the Workplace

- The nature of the market economy inevitably compels businesses to be ever more competitive and high performing. This in turn put an enormous amount of pressure on human resources;
- The growth of the service-based economy, the rise of the "consumer as king", and the advent of new technologies not only allow but require businesses to scale up their services, extend their hours, increase business travel, and adopt measures to enable continuous monitoring.

> **"In today's world, defining regular or standard employment as full-time permanent work for a single employer from 9 to 5 performed Monday to Friday outside the home would only capture just over one-third (37%) of Canadian workers."[1]**

These workplace, sociological, and demographic changes have consequently forced business and society at large to rethink how time is managed, how human resources are managed, and how work conditions are adapted to optimize employer-employee relations.

1. Paquet, Renaud and Elmustapha, Najem (2005). "L'évolution récente des pratiques de conciliation travail-famille dans les entreprises canadiennes", Proceedings from the Congrès relations de travail et organisations, Université de Montpellier.

IMPACTS OF WORK-LIFE IMBALANCES

Work-life imbalances can be the cause of any number of negative outcomes impacting not only individual workers, but also businesses as well as society at large.

• Impacts on Employees

The impacts of work-life imbalances typically manifest themselves at the physical and psychological level (fatigue, tension, migraines, stress, burnout, lack of concentration, loss of self-esteem, depression, etc.).

Over the long term, these impacts become more extensive and spill over into different spheres of the worker's professional life (reduced revenue due to lost employment, poor or no career progression, shrinking of one's social network due to lack of time, etc.).

• Impacts on Organizations

Human resource management lies at the heart of an organization's performance and productivity. Many studies have shown that good WLB policies have a positive impact on an organization's economic health (reduced turnover, reduced incidences of burnout, reduced absenteeism, reduced employee health care costs).

A Canadian study revealed that employers believe that a major component of the problems faced by their organization is related to work-life imbalances: stress-related issues (73%), absenteeism (61%), motivational levels (55%), productivity levels (53%), and punctuality (52%).[2]

• Impacts on Society at Large

The negative impacts of work-life imbalances borne by employees and organizations also have a wider impact, namely on families, spouses, and social networks.

> **It is estimated that the added costs borne by the Canadian health-care system to address the physical and psychological impacts of work-life imbalances exceeded $14 billion for the year 2001.[3]**

2. Bachmann, K. (2000). Work-life balance: Are employers listening? Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada.
3. Duxbury, L. and Higgins, C. (2003). Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report. Ottawa: Health Canada, p. 44.

IMPACTS OF WORK-LIFE IMBALANCES (cont'd)

Work-life imbalances also impact gender equality within society at large.

This is because women are in large majority the ones bearing the brunt of any work-life imbalances since they continue to be the ones primarily responsible for household and family-related obligations while simultaneously working on the job market.

Women consequently contend with increasingly precarious economic realities by virtue of having to choose temporary, part-time, or atypical work in order to better balance their home and work lives, and consequently contend with the less generous salaries that this type of work involves. They are also less likely to accept promotions or management positions if they are unable to get the necessary support required to meet the needs of the household.

Therefore a more equitable sharing of responsibilities between men and women is a necessary component of work-life balance.

At the organizational level, this involves a gender-neutral distribution of positions amongst employees and an organizational culture that fosters men's involvement at the household level.

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BENEFITS AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

✘   It's untenable to think that employees can completely detach themselves from what's happening at home when they are at work.

✘   It's equally untenable to think that employees can completely detach themselves from what's happening at work when they are at home.

To better achieve balance, it's important to acquire the necessary tools and be adequately organized to manage both one's home and professional lives.

Organizations can gain significantly from taking action. Working towards the implementation of a work-life balance policy can help reduce the negative impacts and costs related to work-life imbalances. Think of it as an investment towards increasing organizational efficiency and revenues, as well as improving the organization's image.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING AN ORGANIZATIONAL WLB POLICY

✦   Promotes employee recruitment and retention;

✦   Increases employee engagement and performance;

✦   Reduces the various costs associated with work-life imbalances (absenteeism, lateness, employee turnover, etc.);

✦   Increases workforce competitiveness;

✦   Improves organizational performance;

✦   Avoids production delays by means of a workforce absence contingency plan;

✦   Reduces incidences of perceived injustice or inaccuracies stemming from case-by-case decision-making by applying measures consistently with all employees;

✦   Reduces human resource personnel workload (increasingly autonomous teams, less daily case-by-case decision-making, fewer exceptional situations, reduced monitoring and follow-up);

✦   Improves knowledge transfer by offering favourable conditions to employees nearing retirement (who are often caregivers to aging parents) and to new employees (who are often new parents);

✦   Builds a favourable work environment and improves team synergy;

✦   Improves the organization's image.

WLB POLICY IMPLEMENTATION
BASIC STEPS

The implementation of a work-life balance policy must be done both collaboratively and responsively. The policy must reflect the needs, values, and realities of your organization. A successful policy must address the needs of the three stakeholder groups: employees, management, and the organization.

Here are the five basic steps to follow in implementing a work-life balance policy. Remember that every organization will necessarily develop its own custom-made policy.

STEP 1. Strike a committee

This committee will be tasked with developing, implementing, and monitoring the deployment of the work-life balance program. The committee membership must include at least one member from management. The size of the committee can vary based on the size of the organization but a minimum of three people is recommended.

For larger organizations, particularly those with unionized employees, it is advisable to include an external member on the committee (such as a member of the board of directors or a consultant).

STEP 2. Undertake an audit

Once the committee has been formed, the next step involves taking stock of the organizational context. What should be changed? What should remain unchanged? What are the primary challenges? What is being sought? What are the difficulties faced by employees?

During this stage, the more feedback you can get the better. Using an anonymous survey is a great way to get everyone's feedback. This stage is about understanding the realities and needs of the organization and its employees in relation to work-life balance issues.

Step 2 - Examples:

- Many incidences of employee lateness are related to daycare hours.
- We have high absenteeism on school ped days.
- Employees are not aware of existing WLB measures.
- Management does not consistently apply policies, which creates inequity.

STEP 3. Recommend solutions and concrete measures

Once the audit complete, the next step involves recommending measures that address the issues raised and can help you achieve your WLB objectives.

You can base recommendations on existing models (see table on page 11) or design new solutions customized for your specific organizational context.

It is extremely important to propose WLB measures that correspond to the budget and resources the organization has set aside for their daily management. The WLB policy can always be amended or upgraded over time.

Step 3 - Examples:

- To address the issue of lateness, employees could be offered flex time to work their 8 hours. They can arrive anytime between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. and end their day any time between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m.
- Organize a team meeting to overview the available WLB measures to both employees and managers.
- Arrange for a "replacement" employee to be on-call for school holidays, and do not schedule meetings on those days.

STEP 4. Implementation

Once the audit is complete and the potential measures outlined, it's now time to implement them.

When adopting the policy, a sustainable action plan must also be adopted which should outline the measures, the objectives, and those responsible for them.

Effective communication and role-modeling by management is essential at this step. The policy's success will depend on how well it is adopted by the organization.

Step 4 - Examples:

- A new schedule will be implemented over the next three weeks. The WLB Committee will follow-up and communicate with employees by way of a newsletter and team meetings.
- The school schedule has been disseminated and an on-call employee (the same employee used for absences) is now available for school ped days.
- Team meetings have been held and management will be upholding the WLB policy in a consistent manner. The WLB Committee is following up with managers to ensure the policy's values are properly communicated.

STEP 5. Review and follow-up after implementation

It is essential to ensure follow-up is done, and to improve and upgrade the WLB policy as required.

Step 5 - Examples:

- The new schedule is working well and has allowed us to reduce incidences of lateness. However, we now need more employees on hand at 8 a.m. to greet customers. We will maintain this measure "as is" but will ask each employee to commit to being on-site at 8 a.m. at least twice a week.
- The concept of work-life balance is now part of the organizational culture and a yearly review will take place with managers.

CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS

Work-life balance policies adjust to a business' organizational realities and can be developed differently based on the nature of the business, its values, and its priorities. It's therefore important to challenge any of our misconceptions and keep in mind that different businesses will adopt different WLB measures and that different contexts will give rise to different WLB policies. Here are a few misconceptions to watch out for:

My organization can't adopt a WLB policy because...

The type of work we do doesn't allow for it FALSE

WLB measures are chosen based on your audit of the organization's needs, realities, and goals. A travel business won't be using the same kind of WLB model that a manufacturing company would, but that doesn't mean it shouldn't adopt a WLB policy.

It's too expensive FALSE

Most WLB measures involve little to no monetary investment. The process of adopting WLB measures is mostly about planning, a short-term adaptation period after its implementation, and modifications to human resources management processes. Some organizations take it one step further and adopt measures that involve financial investments (daycare, financial support, WLB management specialists, etc.). In such cases, these are not seen as expenses but rather as worthwhile investments.

We'll lose control of things FALSE

A clear and well-disseminated WLB policy specifically avoids misuse or improper applications. What it does is simplify the job of managers and administrators by having clear, well-understood, and well-disseminated measures to work with.

No one has young children in our organization FALSE

Work-life balance has to do with bonds of dependency, which includes children but also aging parents and caregivers. Most everyone will be impacted by this kind of situation at one moment or another over the life of their career. When such situations arise, it's better to be ready rather than having to respond on the spot.

Our organization is too big/too small FALSE

Though the challenges faced by small teams are different than those faced by larger teams, audits can account for that and different measures can be adopted based on specific contexts.

Our work force is too highly diversified FALSE

A good WLB policy must be able to address all types of professions working within an organization, including seasonal workers, workers with different levels of education, and workers of different ages. This type of diversity should not constrain the organization's ability to offer WLB measures. It's simply a matter of catering them to the specific context of the organization.

We already have a union FALSE

Whether an organization is unionized or not has to bearing on whether it offers proper WLB conditions. Unions may in fact help support to the WLB policy implementation process.

MEASURES

Adopting a WLB policy is about going above and beyond the minimum requirements imposed by the law.

Though it's true that WLB is a significant and complex issue, it's ultimately about addressing management, scheduling, and communication problems. Consequently, the changes that need to happen are typically inexpensive and don't involve negatively impacting organizational performance. On the contrary! It's about improving the organization's management processes.

What's more, it's important to remember that WLB policy measures are primarily used by employees to address short-term or exceptional circumstances. It's in this way that they allow the organization to retain its organizational knowledge. Indeed, the organization's needs will change over time; families grow, children get older, the role of caregivers evolves, and so on. A WLB policy gives employees the necessary means to stay with the organization during times when it becomes more difficult to balance work life and home life. This therefore contributes to lower employee turnover and reduces the need to continually train new employees and repeatedly manage the loss of organizational expertise held by long-term employees.

Lastly, implementing a work-life balance policy is a perfect way to combine all of the organization's official WLB measures into one single document. This helps reduce confusion and case-by-case decision-making, as well as monitoring problems.

The following table lists a variety of different WLB measures. It's up to you to determine which are most appropriate to your organization.

Type	Measures	Impacts
Flex time	✦ Flexible hours: a minimum of required hours, with or without obligatory on-site time during specific hours; ✦ Allowances for short absences (that the employee can reschedule at a later time); ✦ Intensive or extended work week (35-hour work week over 4 days, half-days, every second Friday off, etc.); ✦ Part-time work (temporary or permanent positions); ✦ Annualization of work hours (reducing overtime and last-minute scheduling changes); ✦ Flexibility of work schedules; ✦ Use of banked hours; ✦ Summer schedule; ✦ Special schedule during school breaks.	Work hour flexibility is the model most sought after by employees. Increased flexibility allows parents to better manage their schedules, the 4-day schedule being the most sought after. Highly beneficial for employee retention and improves performance.

Type	Measures	Impacts
Work Organization	✦ Autonomous work teams (requires clear and specific guidelines from managers); ✦ Work from home (occasionally or on specific days); ✦ Satellite office work (in another branch or from a shared office space); ✦ Optimization of workers' commutes; ✦ Job sharing (position shared by more than one employee; tasks and schedules earmarked in advance); ✦ Assessing results rather than attendance (this model reinforces employee worth and increases their desire to perform).	These measures take more time to implement but offer substantial benefits over the long term. By offering some flexibility to employees, they too develop a tendency to be flexible. Job sharing reduces employee turnover and recourse to temp staff.
Leaves	✦ Maternity and paternity leaves with options to extend; ✦ Parental days (typically 3 to 7 additional vacation days per child under the age of 18); ✦ Adoption leaves; ✦ Bereavement leaves; ✦ Compassionate leaves; ✦ Family-related leaves; ✦ Leaves with or without pay; ✦ Adding vacation days.	Fosters employee loyalty This is an excellent way to reduce employee rotation and retain knowledge within the organization.
Organizational Culture	✦ Systematically account for family responsibilities; ✦ Broach the topic of WLB when dialoguing with partners; ✦ Trust part-time employees and value their role within the organization; ✦ Foster effective communication between the different levels of the organization; ✦ Encourage personal and professional development (offer resources to help with self-esteem, stress management, time management, communication, etc.).	Valuing the family at the organizational level discourages employees from being judgemental and improves team performance. Contributes favourably to the organization's image. Family obligations do not preclude professional advancement. Invest in employees that will stay loyal to the organization.

Type	Measures	Impacts
WLB Management	✦ Support workplace reintegration: gradual return to work, parental support, support to the bereaved, etc.; ✦ Customized career paths; ✦ Getting involved in WLB-related initiatives (workplace or neighbourhood daycares, group or cooperative purchasing, rebates on childcare-related costs, etc.); ✦ Offering workshops on WLB and WLB-related topics (time management, stress management, household budget management, etc.).	The organization's engagement demonstrates how employees are valued which fosters commitment and increased motivation. Improves the organization's image. Employee needs must be well-known in order to customize solutions to their evolving realities.
Management's Level of Commitment	✦ Appoint someone within the organization as WLB coordinator; ✦ Provide an organizational WLB guide or policy document outlining all WLB measures; ✦ WLB communication plan.	Allows for better task distribution. Better harness team strengths and weaknesses and optimize a results-oriented approach.
Other Measures	✦ Financial support or aid for child care for preschool and school-aged children; ✦ Reimbursement of child care costs for overtime and weekend hours; ✦ Design custom measures as you see fit.	Keep abreast of needs and explore new potential measures. The smallest gestures can sometimes count for a lot.

The changes needed are typically inexpensive and don't involve negatively impacting organizational performance. On the contrary! It's about improving the organization's management processes.

BEST PRACTICES
ENSURING THE WLB POLICY DOESN'T BECOME A BOOKEND

To ensure the full impact of a WLB policy within an organization or business, the policy must go hand-in-hand with an authentic organizational willingness to improve work-life balance and its management.

A few tips on how to optimize the application of the WLB policy:

Gender-Inclusive Communications
WLB measures must cater equally to both men and women, and must encourage fathers to contribute to child-rearing. In doing so, you avoid any sense of injustice or inequality between employees, regardless of their gender, and you also contribute to a more gender-neutral distribution of roles.

Favourable Organizational Structure
WLB must be folded into the organization's values. Employees, be they men or women, mustn't feel judged or perceived different when they opt to use the available WLB measures.

Leading by Example
Management employees must lead by example and encourage male and female employees to take advantage of WLB measures. The entire staff must see that WLB is valued within the organization, and teams must be encouraged to support and respect one another and cultivate solidarity.

Information Dissemination
It's very important to ensure that all teams are made aware of all new WLB measures. The organization must also be willing to receive feedback about these measures in an effort to improve them and ensure that employees are comfortable using them.

Results-Based Assessments
Make it a habit to assess the performance of employees based on desired results, not based on when they are on site or not. Generally speaking, workers who can schedule their own hours tend to work at times when they are most productive compared to dealing with fixed schedules that require employees to do their work even if their mind is elsewhere, which negatively impacts their productivity levels.

Imagination and Attentiveness
Different opportunities and challenges can arise based on the type of organization in question. Therefore, it's important to be attentive to needs to ensure that the measures adopted can be customized to cater to different realities. Small details that may seem insignificant can often become very effective WLB measures.

DID YOU KNOW...?

- It can take **up to a year** for a WLB policy to be fully implemented within an organization. It is essential to take the time needed to implement measures and make all necessary adjustments.

- It is better to **adopt a few measures (instead of many)** and to take the time to properly implement them. Adding or modifying policy measures can always be done at a later time.

- **25% of human resource challenges** are linked to work-life balance issues (Conference Board of Canada).

- Employee replacement costs can equal **50% to 150% of their annual salary** (Local Development Centre of the regional county municipality of Arthabaska).

- A recent survey conducted in Brome-Missisquoi revealed that one-third of WLB requests made by employees were motivated by a need to **support a loved one or an elder.**[4]

- In 2010, the full-time work rate in Brome-Missisquoi was **70.5% for women and 84.9% for men**.[5]

- Within the Brome-Missisquoi regional county municipality and in the Eastern Montégérie region, **men's average employment revenue** is nearly 1½ higher than that of women.[6]

4. Enquête sur les défis et les besoins de la gestion de la conciliation travail-famille dans la région de Brome-Missisquoi. June 2015. Avante and Consilia, consulting firm.
5. Portrait statistique et analyse comparative entre les sexes dans Bromme-Missisquoi, 2013. Femmes et Pauvreté dans la MRC de Brome-Missisquoi Project
6. Ibid

LINKS AND REFERENCES

Websites offering various tools

WLB resources from the Ministère de la Famille

Tools (sample surveys, template policies, action plans, etc.)
www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Famille/travail-famille/Pages/index.aspx

Resources from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety
http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/worklife_balance.html

Bureau de normalisation du Québec (Québec Standards Bureau)
www.bnq.qc.ca/fr/certification/ressources-humaines/conciliation-travail-famille.html

Canadian Bar Association resources
http://www.cba.org/cba/practicelink/balance_main/default.aspx

Reports

Revisiting Work-Life Issues in Canada:The 2012 National Study on Balancing Work and Caregiving
in Canada (Carleton University and University of Western Ontario)
http://newsroom.carleton.ca/wp-content/files/2012-National-Work-Long-Summary.pdf

Reducing Work–Life Conflict: What Works? What Doesn't? (Health Canada)
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/alt_formats/hecs-
sesc/pdf/pubs/occup-travail/balancing-equilibre/full_report-rapport_complet-eng.pdf

Achieving Family Work-Life Balance - Working Together to be Family Friendly (KFL&A Public Health)
http://www.kflapublichealth.ca/Files/Resources/Achieving_family_work_life_balance.pdf

What other regions are doing

WLB in La Mauricie, guides and tools
www.lasolutionctf.com

WLB in the RCM of Arthabaska
www.travailfamille.com

WLB in Lanaudière
www.cfte-lanaudiere.ca/

WLB in the RCM of Maskoutains
www.mrcmaskoutains.qc.ca/politiques-reglements/
politique-famille

Your task is not to foresee the future, but to enable it.

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

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