

I N F O Bulletin

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Information Bulletin for Group Insurance Plan Administrators and Benefit Advisors

THE QUEST FOR BALANCE

Finding a balance between their personal and professional lives is a daily struggle for many Canadians.

This is one of the conclusions of the recently released Health Canada study entitled *Reducing Work-Life Conflict: What Works? What Doesn't?*¹ While the problem is not a new one, the study clearly shows that things are not improving:

- In 2001, one in four Canadians said they work more than 50 hours a week, compared to one in 10 in 1991.
- This increase in the number of hours worked was seen across all job sectors.
- Three times more employees reported feeling a high level of occupational stress in 2001 than in 1991.
- One in three respondents reported feeling a high level of burnout and a depressed mood.

Role overload

Most of the study's conclusions and recommendations are based on the different roles that people are required to play at work and at home. "Role overload" occurs when "the total demands on time and energy associated with the prescribed activities of multiple roles are too great to perform the roles adequately or comfortably."

This overload can occur in two ways. Employees may spend so much time on work responsibilities that they have trouble adequately fulfilling the various roles associated with their personal lives (family, activities, etc.). Conversely, they may experience overload when certain demands in their personal life interfere with their ability to meet their demands at work. This is the case for an increasing number of Canadians who are caring for an elderly or sick parent.

In both cases, this overload increases the level of stress and anxiety the employee experiences, and has a direct impact on the employee's mental and physical health.

Work-life conflict: recommendations for employers

A company culture that focuses on flexibility and managers who encourage work-life balance are key to ongoing improvement. According to the study, these factors also have a direct impact on employee commitment.

¹ Health Canada, *Reducing Work-Life Conflict: What Works? What Doesn't?*, 2007.

Flexibility can take different forms, including:

- flexible working arrangements (shared time, part time, telecommuting, etc.);
- flexible working hours (flex time, time bank, personal obligation days, etc.).

Managers play a key role in promoting a healthy balance between work and home life. They can reinforce this balance by focusing on the work that is done rather than how much time is spent doing it, and by being understanding and attentive to employees' individual needs.

Work-life conflict: attitudes to avoid for employers and employees

The Health Canada study also highlights certain attitudes that employers and employees should avoid:

- Working a lot of hours in order to "get everything done": This kind of behaviour amplifies stress and anxiety due to role overload, and quickly leads to counter-productive performance (decreased work quality and efficiency). It can also lead to more serious problems like depression and disability.
- Trying to ignore the problem of role overload: This attitude only delays the problems associated with role overload for a very short period of time.
- Taking prescription drugs: Although it helps to minimize the effects of stress, this is a temporary and costly solution for the employee and employer.

The Health Canada study clearly indicates that a person's personal and professional life must be seen in conjunction with one another. This is particularly true for employees, whose stress levels increase when there is a lack of balance, which can lead to a deterioration in mental health.

Consistent with the findings that are published in other studies on work-life balance, this study also offers a number of points to consider, some of which apply directly to employees (setting priorities, delegating tasks, etc.). In this regard, it helps make sense of the ongoing struggle.

For an online summary of the study, go to http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/occup-travail/work-travail/balancing-equilibre/index_e.html.

During this Holiday Season, we would like to thank you for placing your trust in us. From all of us at Industrial Alliance, Happy Holidays, and may the new year 2008 bring you success and prosperity! Your Group Insurance team



The Administrator's Corner



WHAT IS INTERNAL MARKETING?

Predicted labour shortages, rising costs due to absenteeism and employee retention: these are some of the reasons motivating many employers to maximize communications with their employees.

The search for effective communication solutions has raised a simple question: can we use the resources and expertise of "external" marketing (aimed at the target clientele) for the purposes of internal communication? The idea of *internal marketing* emerged in response to this question.

Internal marketing regards existing and potential employees as a customer market to be captured. It's literally a question of "selling" the company to its own employees. As with so-called "external" marketing, the cornerstone of this strategy is the development of a **customer-based** approach. Internal marketing represents a new perspective: a promotional and communications-based approach implemented within the business itself.

The internal market

The first step in establishing an internal marketing strategy is to conduct an analysis of the **internal market**, i.e., the employees. A study of the existing business situation allows the employer to develop "customer"-centered strategies, define internal customer-supplier networks, communicate the role of each one in the organization and stimulate team motivation.

Even if the business puts an exceptional communications campaign in place, it will never succeed in "selling" its vision unless this vision responds to one or more employee needs. The employee must understand how he or she really and meaningfully contributes. An effective and well-articulated approach should therefore raise employees' awareness of the fact that customer-service employees are not the only ones responsible for the quality of service.

Internal customer-supplier networks

The internal market analysis leads next to the creation of **customer-supplier** relationships. By specifying the suppliers for each internal client and vice versa, the various teams are mobilized around satisfying the external clientele. Managers, professionals and production groups are then seen as advisors and service suppliers anxious to facilitate the work of those who deal directly with the external client. The business attains an optimal service level when everyone seeks to meet the needs

of his or her clients, whether external or internal.

Fostering commitment

The ultimate objective of an internal marketing strategy is to obtain a high degree of employee commitment. To reach that point, it's essential to establish **ongoing communication** in order to create a spirit of mutual assistance, trust, commitment and interdependence.

The vision that management communicates to employees should take the form of a concrete and meaningful plan, designed around customer satisfaction that resonates with its employees.

- The effectiveness of internal customer-supplier networks depends on **candidly communicating** the clientele's needs and expectations to all employees, particularly those who are not in direct contact with external clientele.
- This communication must be **transparent**. Should a customer have a complaint, for example, management can handle the problem with openness and circulate all the information necessary to improve service. Management must be prepared to listen to employee concerns and take them into account in the process of dealing with the complaint.
- **Consistency** between words and actions on the part of management is essential for channelling efforts and maintaining employee motivation. If there is a contradiction between the values expressed and the actions performed, employees will be quick to notice the inconsistency.

Businesses develop annual marketing plans that include a stringent definition of the goals to be reached and the financial and human investments to be allocated to achieve them. This planning process can also be applied to an internal marketing strategy.

Considered both as supplier and customer, the employee can see and contextualize the value of his or her work as part of the business's overall daily operations. For their part, external customers receive the optimal service they deserve. It is here that external and internal marketing intersect: in the business's long-term growth.

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