

Preparing for the New Century: Innovative Work and Family Strategies

Innovative Policies and Workshop Report

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Cornell University has been voted best place to work for women, mothers and the elderly for the last several years due to its innovative policies. These include parental leave (semester off from teaching, extra time to tenure), adoption support (funds to help defray costs similar to that provided for births), flex time, and child care support (grant up to \$5000 per year to help defray child care expenses), on site child care center, child care support when on travel, lactation stations around campus. Cornell makes these investments in order to attract and retain top talent among its faculty and staff. It has now extended maternity leave and child care support to graduate students. Unlike many employers, Cornell has evaluated the impact of these programs showing that they increase employee productivity and reduce stress (see Shellenback 2009, Morrissey and Warner forthcoming). This helps ensure sustainability of funding and buy in from senior administration. Other universities could implement similar programs and it would strengthen their productivity. These work-life benefits are not a luxury, they are a core part of organizational mission and strategy for leading 21st century institutions.

In June 2009, Cornell University hosted a small national workshop of human resource professionals, academics and policy makers to talk about emerging work/life issues and explore innovative work and family strategies that can effect widespread change in public policy and corporate practices. The workshop, *Preparing for the New Century: Innovative Work and Family Strategies*, explored: 1) the challenges, 2) what the research shows on current practices, and 3) innovative new programs. For a full report of the workshop, and of trends affecting work-life policy in the new century see Shellenback and Warner 2009.

Conference attendees developed a framework linking work-life policies to core institutional mission and to management buy in and training. Recommendations from the workshop are given below.

Institutional Strategy – Link Human Resource Policy to Core Institutional Mission

- *Align with core mission: for universities, creating research/knowledge and serving students*
 - *Faculty recruitment and retention (also of graduate students and post docs)*
 - *Student recruitment and retention*
 - *Cultural competence, diversity, inclusiveness*
 - *HR policies and work environment create a role model for future professionals*
- *Make the business case: elder care and child care increase employee productivity, reduce absenteeism, lower replacement costs, save on training*
- *Recognize the social value of support infrastructure: staff, operations so benefits are extended to them as well*
- *Build a broad coalition of stakeholders: alumni, students, and community, as well as administration faculty, staff and union*
- *Use progressive policies as part of a branding and competition strategy*
 - *Create peer pressure among universities*
- *Managing institution efficiently will lower costs*
 - *Flexibility policies assist with emergency and disaster planning/response*
 - *Save on real estate costs*
 - *Increase coverage – over time and space*

Management Buy In and Training

- *Need clear institutional policy*
 - *Articulates the broader institutional view and reason for policy*
 - *Establishes standards, protects lower ranked staff*
 - *Gives managers guidelines, prevents self serving behavior and discrimination*

- *Value of research and making the business case*
 - *Show the link to core mission*
- *Need individual champions*
 - *Need leadership from the top – the Provost must give direction to the Deans*
 - *Provide training for Deans and Department Chairs*
- *Find a senior provost or very influential Dean who is interested in becoming a champion*
- *Need Managerial training*
 - *Supervisors are nervous about what is legal to ask with respect to family/personal issues*
 - *Help supervisors see the possibility of doing things in a different way*
 - *Change mindsets, let managers see their ability to manage flexibility as an asset in their personal managerial toolkit. This will lead to identity-based motivation*
 - *Pay attention to how adults learn*
 - *Crisis can open minds to new approaches*
- *Address supervisory challenges of remote or flexible work options*
 - *Recognize reality of cognitive bias in employee evaluation*
 - *Provide training in cultural competency*
 - *Consider 360 degree feedback for performance evaluations*
- *Link Department Chair, Dean and Provost job performance evaluations to team management prowess which includes consideration and utilization of work/life programs and flex work practices.*
- *Involve collective bargaining representatives, or worksite committees with broad representation of employees to improve education, outreach and buy-in from line workers. Reduce feeling of "us" vs. "them", town/gown, elite/workers.*
- *Connect senior leadership with stories that will speak to them.*

Other specific ideas:

- *Parental Leave – must be accompanied by resources at the Provost level so departmental units do not have to directly bear the cost of implementing the policy*
- *Pay attention to ease of administration - child care benefits are much harder to implement outside the Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) framework*
- *Make sure low income employees receive more through the FSA (>\$1500) than they would through the Dependent Care Tax Credit as they cannot use both.*
- *Create part-time tenured faculty lines. We do this for retirees (phased retirement), why not for younger faculty who would like to balance work, family and life?*
- *Recognize networks of care and support through policies which do not limit benefits just to next of kin.*
- *Provide occasional use flex (particular days, events, times of life).*
- *Use parental leave as a model for leaves for elder care and end of life care giving.*
- *Create a free-lancers' union for group benefits.*
- *Give awards – to honor risk takers, profile innovations, and promote more innovation.*

Resources:

- Morrissey, Taryn and Mildred E. Warner (2009), "Employer-Supported Child Care: Who Participates?" *Journal of Marriage and Family*, forthcoming.
- Shellenback, Karen and Mildred E. Warner 2009. "Integrating Care, Work and Community: New Policies for a New Economy, A Report from the Cornell University Conference: Preparing for the New Century: Innovative Work and Family Strategies."
- Shellenback, Karen 2009. "Child Care & Cornell Child Care Grant Subsidy Program Survey: Impact on the Cornell Community, Summary Report."

All reports available at http://economicdevelopmentandchildcare.org/technical_assistance/work_life
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