

the program has reduced turnover and absenteeism, boosted morale, and helped achieve affirmative action objectives. However, job sharing can be difficult to implement; the program requires that a job be divided into two related but separate assignments, that the job sharers are compatible, and that the supervisor can provide task continuity between them.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the advantages and potential liabilities of hiring two-career couples, beyond those noted in the case?
2. Many of the services for dual-career couples and parent employees are provided by large corporations that have far greater financial resources than smaller companies. Identify and discuss potential ways in which a small company's HRM function can alleviate the challenges facing employees who are parents and employees with working spouses.
3. Suppose that a dual-career couple involves spouses who are at different career stages. Does this situation pose problems for the couple? For the organization or organizations employing them? Discuss.

Sources: Originally written by Kim Stewart and adapted from Kimberly Garts Crum (May 2005), "A Mother's Place," *Today's Woman*, p. 40; Rachel Connelly, Deborah DeGriff, and Rachel Willis (2004), *Kids at Work* (New York: W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research); Patricia Sellers (August 5, 1996), "Women, Sex, and Power," *Fortune*, pp. 42–56; Kim Clark (August 5, 1996), "Women, Men, and Money," *Fortune*, pp. 60–61; Veronica J. Schmidt and Norman A. Scott (August 1987), "Work and Family Life: A Delicate Balance," *Personnel Administrator*, pp. 40–46; Fern Schumer Chapman (February 16, 1987), "Executive Guilt: Who's Taking Care of the Children?" *Fortune*, pp. 30–37; Anostasic Toufexis (November 16, 1987), "Dual Careers, Doleful Dilemmas," *Time*, pp. 90; Irene Pave (December 16, 1985), "Move Me, Move My Spouse," *BusinessWeek*, pp. 57, 60; Ronald F. Ribark (August 1987), "Mission Possible: Meeting Family Demands," *Personnel Administrator*, pp. 70–79; Lawrence Rout (May 28, 1980), "Pleasures and Problems Face Married Couples Hired by Some Firms," *The Wall Street Journal*, pp. 1, 28.

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Application Case 14-1

The Dual-Career Couple

America's workforce has in the past been largely made up of the heads of traditional families—husbands who work as breadwinners while wives remain home to raise the children. However, today the “traditional family” represents less than 10 percent of all households. Increasingly, both spouses are launching careers and earning incomes. Dual-career couples now account for 40 percent of the workforce (more than 53 million employees), and their numbers will substantially increase. The situation of two spouses with careers that are both considered important has become something managers can't ignore. As more women enter the workforce, dual-career couples will become a consideration in decisions about hiring, promotion, relocation, and job commitment.

The advent of the dual-career couple poses challenges for the working spouses and for business. According to one survey of more than 800 dual-career couples by Catalyst, couples experience a myriad of problems, most notably difficulties with allocating time (the top-ranked complaint), finances, poor communication, and conflicts over housework. For couples with children, meeting the demands of career and family usually becomes the top concern. Studies indicate that dual-career families need (1) benefit plans that enable couples to have children without jeopardizing their careers; (2) more flexible work arrangements to help balance the demands of family and career; (3) freedom from anxieties about child care while at work; and (4) assistance from the employer in finding employment for the spouse when an employee relocates (this is a need for both parents and childless couples).

For businesses, the challenge lies in helping to ease the problems of dual-career couples, especially those with children. According to a study commissioned by *Fortune* magazine, organizations are losing productivity and employees because of the demands of family life. The study found that among the 400 working parents surveyed, problems with child care were the most significant predictors of absenteeism and low productivity.

For example, 41 percent of those surveyed had taken at least one day off in the three months preceding the survey to handle family matters; 10 percent had taken from three to five days. (On a national scale, these figures amount to hundreds of millions of dollars in lost productivity.) About 60 percent of the parents polled expressed concerns about time and attention given to their children, and these anxieties were linked to lower productivity. Overall, many experts advise that companies that ignore the problems of dual-career couples and working parents stand to lose output and even valued employees. Companies are beginning to respond to these needs in a number of ways.

Hiring Spouses of Employees or Helping Them Find Jobs

Studies indicate that more employees are refusing relocation assignments if their working spouses cannot find acceptable jobs. In response, many companies have recently begun to offer services for “trailing spouses.” These services include arranging interviews with prospective employers, providing instruction in résumé writing, interviewing, and contract negotiation, and even paying plane fares for job-hunting trips. Some companies (General Mills, 3M, American Express) use outside placement services to find jobs for trailing spouses. More than 150 companies in northern New Jersey created and use a job bank that provides leads for job-hunting spouses.

A small but growing number of companies (including Chase Manhattan Bank and O'Melveny & Myers, one of the nation's largest law firms) are breaking tradition and

hiring two-career couples. Martin Marietta maintains an affirmative hire-a-couple policy and hires about 100 couples a year at its Denver division. Proponents assert that couples who work for the same company share the same goals, are often more committed to the company, and are more willing to work longer hours. Hiring couples helps attract and keep top employees, and relocations are also easier for the couple and the company.

Providing Day-Care Assistance

More than 10,000 companies now provide day-care services and financial assistance or referral services for child care. For example, American Savings and Loan Association established the Little Mavericks School of Learning in 1983 for 150 children of employees on a site within walking distance of several of its satellite branch locations. This center was established as a nonprofit subsidiary with a staff of 35, and its services include regular day care, holiday care, sick-child care, Boy Scout and Girl Scout programs, a kindergarten program, and after-school classes. Fees range from \$135 to \$235 a month, depending on the type of service, and parents pay through payroll deductions. Company officials report that the center has substantially reduced absenteeism and personal phone calls and that it has been a substantial boon to recruitment and retention. However, as many couples have found, limited openings mean that not all parent employees can be served; and some employees get preferential treatment—sometimes even those who can afford external day-care services.

Many companies contract outside day-care services run by professional groups, thus relieving the company of the headaches of running a center. For example, IBM contracted the Work/Family Directions child-care consulting group to establish 16,000 home-based family centers and to open 3,000 day-care centers for IBM employees and other families throughout the United States. About 80 companies have created programs to help parents of sick children. If a child of an employee of First Bank System (Minneapolis) becomes ill, the company will pay 75 percent of the bill for the child's stay at Chicken Soup, a sick-child day-care center. The policy enables parents to keep working and saves the company money. A growing number of companies arrange to send trained nurses to the sick child's home.

Other companies provide partial reimbursement for child-care services. Zayre Corporation pays up to \$20 a week for day-care services for employees who work at corporate headquarters. A growing number of cafeteria fringe benefits programs enable employees to allocate a portion of fringe benefits to pay for day-care services. Chemical Bank pays these benefits quarterly in pretax dollars.

Providing Flexible Time Off

A number of companies combine vacation and sick leave to increase the amount of time off for family life. At Hewlett-Packard, for example, employees receive their regular vacation days plus five additional days of unused sick leave. Employees can take the time off in any increments at any time. Employees can carry a number of unused days over to the next year (the number is determined by tenure), and employees who leave the company receive cash value for their unused days (at their current salary level).

Providing Job Sharing

This program enables two people to share a job on a part-time basis and is a major boon to spouses who want to continue their careers while raising children. The program was first established by Steelcase, Inc., in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where company officials say that

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