

For release: October 26, 2005  
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## **WFD CONSULTING RECEIVES SLOAN FOUNDATION GRANT TO BUILD DATABASE ON WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY**

### **Employee Database to Promote Research, Communication, and Awareness**

How much do flexible working hours really help employees balance their work and family lives? Are employees who use flexible work options more or less productive than other employees? What's the impact of informal flexibility compared to more formal arrangements? A new multi-company database will help researchers and employers answer these questions and gain new insights about what difference it makes when there is flexibility in the way work is done.

WFD Consulting, the Boston-based consulting firm, has received a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to create a multi-company employee database that will assist researchers and employers in understanding the impacts of workplace flexibility. Data that WFD has gathered from dozens of organizational studies will be used to investigate how flexibility affects organizations, individuals, and families. Containing data sets representative of 500,000 employees, the new database is believed to be the largest and most comprehensive set of data available on work-life and flexibility topics.

Speaking about the potential of the new database, project manager Jan Civian said, "Because of its size, researchers will be able to do analysis along demographic, industry, and workforce dimensions to a degree not previously possible. For example, we'll be able to see how different generational cohorts view flexibility, whether the impact of flexibility is the same for younger versus mid-career versus mature workers, how flexibility affects men and women and workers with and without children, and whether the effects of flexibility are the same or different in various industries."

The database will draw upon employee surveys that WFD has administered in more than 30 organizations and will include quantitative employee data on a wide range of work-life and work environment topics including work-life support, access to and attitudes about flexibility, management effectiveness, and health and well-being. Because all results will be reported in aggregate non-identifiable form, the database will preserve the confidentiality of both companies and employees. The database will be continually updated, thus permitting participating organizations to compare themselves with others.

Amy Richman, Senior Consultant at WFD Consulting, commented on the analytic power of the data. "The data sets are based on WFD's validated indices of employee commitment, resilience, stress and burnout, and work-life support. We know from past experience with clients that these measures are very powerful in demonstrating the

business impacts of work-life issues and flexibility. What we previously could analyze for specific companies we will now be able to generalize across organizations.”

The multi-company database project is being directed by WFD’s research staff, in collaboration with a distinguished Advisory Committee of scholars who have experience in researching work-life and workplace issues. The Advisory Committee consists of E. Jeffrey Hill, Associate Professor in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University (Committee Chair); Nan Crouter, Professor of Human Development and Director, Center for Work and Family Research, Penn State University; Joe Grzywacz, Assistant Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine, Wake Forest University School of Medicine; and Marcie Pitt-Catsouphs, Associate Professor and Co-Director, Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility, Boston College. The WFD research staff includes Arlene A. Johnson, Vice President, Jan Civian, EdD (Project Director), Amy Richman, EdD, and Laurie Shannon, PhD.

In addition to answering research questions about the impact of flexibility, a major goal of the database project is to generate publications for business, family, and other academic journals. The multi-year grant from the Sloan Foundation supports the development of articles for the academic and business press. The database will be completed in late 2005. Research and analysis using the database will begin in early 2006.

According to E. Jeffrey Hill, Chair of the Advisory Committee, “Research in this area is often hindered by small sample sizes, lack of robust measures, or absence of rigorous statistical analysis. This project has none of those limitations, and so we expect that the database will contribute significantly to the academic research base as well as to business and public awareness about flexibility. We consider it a quantum leap forward in research about the intersection of work, flexibility, family, and personal life.”

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WFD Consulting is the leading provider of work-life consulting services and provides research and data collection expertise to its clients. Measurement and implementation of workplace flexibility is a major practice area of the Boston-based consulting firm.