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ABSTRACT

After a brief historical overview of child care provision and a characterization of current interest in employer support for day care services, this paper describes pressures on employers to support child care, delineates a rationale for employer support, and identifies employer options for supporting parents' needs for services, information, financial assistance, and discretionary time. Subsequent examination is directed toward strategies for expanding child care through employer involvement as well as toward obstacles to employer-supported care. The consequences of early childhood educators' reluctance to acknowledge that they serve parents' needs as well as children's are discussed, and erroneous assumptions and dangers of corporate child care consultants who focus exclusively on on-site care centers are pointed out. Reasons are offered for anticipating continuing growth of employer-supported child care in the future and, in conclusion, the issue of the potentially negative consequences of employer involvement is addressed. Throughout the paper the thesis is advanced that, to solve problems of child care provision, the contributions of both early childhood educators and corporate managers must be fashioned by parent needs and preferences. (RH)

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THE CHALLENGE OF EMPLOYER-SUPPORTED CHILD CARE: MEETING PARENT NEEDS

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INTRODUCTION

The challenge of making the business sector a part of the child care landscape is in recognizing mutual self-interest. During these hard economic times, both business and child care struggle for survival. And for both employers and child care providers, a critical element of that survival is the capacity to respond to the changing and diverse needs of parents. The solutions to child care problems will not be determined only by the dreams of early childhood educators, nor by the agendas of corporate managers--the contributions of both must be fashioned by parent needs and preferences.[1]

An Historical Overview

When one considers early childhood education as a matter of policy, its purpose and purview go beyond the care and education of our nation's preschoolers. Historically, government involvement in child care includes a patchwork of programs focused primarily on broader social and economic concerns. During the Depression, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration provided funds for day care to soften economic hardships and create jobs for the unemployed. During World War II, thousands of centers were established through funds provided by the Lanham Act to encourage female employment within war-related industries. During the 1960s, Head Start was created to break the "cycle of poverty." And throughout the 1970s there were five unsuccessful attempts to pass comprehensive child care legislation. Each effort failed, in part because of political confrontation or moral ambiguities which in and of themselves had little to do with child care. The tenor of the times was such that child care was swept away in the conservative winds of a burgeoning "moral majority."

Now, with prospects of private sector support, it is imperative that advocates learn from the mistakes made in the public sector. As with public policy it is likely that private policies will embrace early childhood education for reasons that go beyond the best interests of the child. And as it has been shown in the past, corporate America will likely be motivated to support child care when it can be shown to have positive effects on that which management is concerned about--recruitment, retention, and productivity. For example, during the United States Civil War, some employers opened temporary child care centers to enable women to help manufacture gunpowder and tend to the injured, and at the turn of the twentieth century, when factories needed cheap labor, the industrial day care nursery was provided in order to exploit working mothers. As with the United States Civil War, World War I again saw some employers opening temporary child care centers to meet worker shortages (see Feinstein, 1979). World War II gave rise to another round of employer-sponsored centers, only this time there was support from the federal government. In 1940, Congress passed the Lanham Act, and a year later it passed amendments that encouraged the creation of community-based child care programs in defense plants to help the war effort. Among the most famous of these centers were the two family-centered child care programs at the Kaiser Shipyards in Portland, Oregon.

After the war, many women returned home, the work force swelled with returning servicemen, and industry's interest in day care remained inactive until the 1960s. In 1967, federal legislation created the opportunity for rapid tax amortization of constructed buildings used to serve employees' children. The increased demand for child care, caused by the increasing labor-force participation of women, prompted widespread interest in day care as a potentially profitable investment. However, since profit in day care is difficult to attain, especially when the centers are under-utilized, a number of companies (Curlee Clothing, KLH, Avco Printing, C & P Telephone, and Westinghouse, to name a few) did not make the profits they had hoped for. In fact, there were significant losses, and 15 of the 18 on-site centers opened between 1964 and 1972 closed.[2] (For additional information on center operation, see Besner [1971] and Welfare Research, Inc., [1980].)

Current Interest in Employer Support

An estimate provided by the National Employer Supported Child Care Project in Pasadena, California, suggests that today approximately 415 employers are responding to their employees' child care needs. Best estimates are that 45 corporate work-site day care centers exist at the time of this writing. Another six centers are sponsored by unions, five of these by the Health and Welfare Fund of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Worker's Union. Most of these union-sponsored centers also serve as laboratory schools for early childhood training. The largest industrial group today providing on-site day care services to employees is hospitals. Facing a nationwide nursing shortage, nearly 300 hospitals are providing some sort of child care services to encourage recruitment and retention.

What characterizes recent interest in exploring corporate sponsorship is the variety of alternatives to work-site child care. (Table 1 indicates the number and variety of these programs.) Not only are companies learning from the lessons of earlier center closings, but they are also recognizing the inappropriateness of center-based care given the adequacy of existing community-based programs, the preferences of parents, and the special needs of children. Parents may not need additional child care services at the work place as much as they may need assistance finding, selecting, or paying for child care already available in the community. Another concern for parents may be their need for time in balancing the responsibilities of home and work.

Insert Table 1 about here

Whether business will support child care and how it will choose to do so will be based on a unique blend of management agendas, community resources, and parent needs. Those management agendas may override consideration of community resources. In order to approach corporations with any degree of success while retaining a commitment to quality of services for children, early childhood educators need to understand the pressures on business to respond to working parents.

PRESSURES ON EMPLOYERS TO SUPPORT CHILD CARE

There are a variety of internal and external pressures on employers to attend to family needs. For one, families are less able to rely on themselves for the daily care of their children than was once the case. This situation would seem largely due to the increase of mothers in the work force, stimulated by the women's movement and/or economic necessity. There is also a trend for families to have fewer children, which means there are fewer older siblings to take care of younger children. In addition, relatives are less able to take on this responsibility due to family mobility or their own economic need to work. The cumulative effect of these changes is that families are increasingly turning to the community for child care support.

The same economic forces creating the two-wage earner family have also resulted in government cutbacks to various child care programs, thus eroding the capacity of community-based services to meet parent needs. In other words, the supply of services is declining at a time when the demand is increasing. These changes in family and service capacity are creating two sources of external pressure on employers to play a role in meeting the needs of working parents: (1) parents who, with no recourse, may bring their unmet problems to the workplace, and (2) those involved in community-based services who, faced with a struggle for their own survival, look to the business community in the hope of tapping a new source of revenues.

There is a third source of external pressure on the business community--more nebulous in its origins, but no less forceful in its impact. What seems to be evolving is a business enterprise no longer able to define itself solely as an economic unit. In the past, criticism of business focused on the practices of underpaying workers, overcharging customers, and fixing prices. Today, the corporation is held responsible for everything from air pollution to executive stress. Whether these charges are justified is not the issue; the concept they imply is important, however. A corporation is no longer responsible for simply making a profit or producing goods, but for simultaneously contributing to the solution of extremely complex ecological, moral, political, racial, sexual, and social problems (Toffler, 1981). Further changes in industry and worker values create internal pressures on employers to respond to the needs of working parents. Business today is dealing with a new breed of workers who are becoming increasingly concerned about the quality of their lives and more willing to express those concerns (Yankelovich, 1981).

Another pressure, this one internal, is the changing nature of industry itself. High technology firms and the growth of services characterize our post-industrial society. Businesses involved in these concerns have and are replacing the classical industries of Toffler's (1981) "second wave": coal, rail, textiles, steel, auto, and rubber. When the shift within industry began in the 1950s, we started to see a decline in old industrial regions like New England's Merrimac Valley, while places like Route 128 outside Boston and Silicon Valley in California zoomed into prominence. And it is interesting to note that the areas now providing the home for today's growth industries are precisely where we find the most activity in employer supports to working parents. These newer industries, which are generally experiencing a demand for labor, are responding by offering employees the attraction of family benefits. An increasing concern about productivity has also led to the belief among many employers that attention to family concerns may help worker performance.

THE RATIONALE FOR EMPLOYER SUPPORT

Many child care providers recognize the need to justify the provision of child care on the basis of corporate self-interest--that is, the extent to which child care will solve management's problems by aiding recruitment, increasing productivity, or by reducing turnover, absenteeism, or tardiness. While common sense would appear to support the notion that management will gain from the provision of services, there is very little empirical evidence to suggest that this is true. The assumption that provision of child care improves productivity was made most poignantly in the movie <u>9 to 5</u>, in which a corporation providing flexible schedules, part-time work, and a day care center to its employees apparently increased productivity by 40%. Unfortunately, the research findings supporting a causal relationship between provision of child care assistance and the amelioration of management woes is hardly more substantial than the Hollywood version.

The anecdotal evidence from existing programs is overwhelmingly supportive of the use of child care as a management tool. According to Perry's 1978 survey of 305 on-site centers (including those in companies, hospitals, and unions), a great number of managers responding believed their programs accomplished a variety of benefits (reported in Fishel, Balodis, & Klaus, 1982--see Table 2). The fact that managers believe provision of child care services improves overall operations was confirmed by a study conducted by Welfare Research, Inc. (1980). However, investigators in the Welfare Research, Inc. study spoke to managers and based their findings on impressions and not empirical evidence.

Insert Table 2 about here

Intermedics, the sponsor of the largest near-site day care center in Freeport, Texas, found a 1% yearly reduction in turnover, which yielded a gain of 3,700 work hours annually. Photo Corporation of America estimates that their on-site center saves them $40,000 a year as a result of reduced turnover (<u>Child Care Resource Service Newsletter</u>, 1981). These estimates were not the result of a scientific study, however. To date, only one company has attempted an experimental study of productivity gains resulting from the provision of a child care program. The Northside Child

Development Center in Minneapolis, sponsored by a consortium of businesses and spearheaded by Control Data, studied 90 employees over a 20-month period. Thirty mothers with children in the day care program were matched to a sample of 30 mothers who did not have children in the program, and to another 30 employees who had no children or who had grown children. The average monthly rate of absenteeism for the group of mothers provided day care was 4.40, as compared to 6.02 for non-participants (the two control groups combined). The average monthly turnover rate was 1.77 for day care mothers and 6.3 for those not in the day care program. Both these findings were statistically significant. (For a report of the study, see Milkovich & Gomez, 1976).

Empirical evidence supporting the bottom-line value of company-sponsored family supports is scanty due to a lack of research, to a lack of models on which to base research, and to the difficulty in establishing a cause and effect relationship between provision of child care and subsequent reductions in management problems. Many of the companies providing child care also have flextime (or flexible work schedules), as well as an interesting array of other innovative benefits and work policies. How can one control for these other factors when trying to measure the true effects of day care? We need more longitudinal research including control groups, pretests, and posttests. In the meantime, it is wise not to overpromise what provision of child care is capable of achieving, lest we disappoint employers.

The assumption that a demand for labor and a concern for increased productivity are the primary forces motivating employers to support working parents suggests that the provision of day care is an issue of corporate self-interest, where a return on an investment is expected. Corporate social responsibility, which is charitable giving, is not implied. An interesting point to note is that even if actual funding for a child care initiative comes from corporate contributions designed to fulfill social responsibilities, it is still likely that some element of self-interest is being served. The interface between corporate self-interest and social responsibility is most clearly seen in the success of the Corporate Child Development Fund for Texas. The fund, which began in 1979, raises money from city-based corporations to sponsor day care programs in rural parts of the state. In most cases, the funds are given to programs in the communities where the donating company has a plant site. The center is used by all residents, but company employees also have access to it. Consequently, there is some return to the company on their investment and self-interest has been served through corporate giving.

Acknowledging the rationale for corporate involvement may be the most important change required by early childhood educators in their efforts to obtain employer support. The fact that children are our nation's greatest resource is perhaps not the most convincing argument for bottom-line oriented business managers.

EMPLOYER OPTIONS FOR SUPPORTING CHILD CARE NEEDS

Since management has ultimate control of decision making in the quest for corporate support of child care, it is their needs and expectations which must be satisfied. However, corporate self-interest can be satisfied only if the parents' needs are also met. Consider an employer who, having attempted to boost staff morale by providing a free lunch of chicken and ribs, is faced with the realization that the staff is vegetarian. If it is useless to the employee, ultimately it is useless to the employer.

Employer responses to the needs of working parents from around the United States indicate four basic categories of parent needs: (1) the need for services where the community supply is lacking, (2) the need for information about services in the community that provide child care or general parenting help, (3) the need for financial assistance in purchasing community services, and (4) the need for time to help balance the dual responsibilities of family and work. Both the parent needs and employer responses are based on the strengths and weaknesses of existing community resources--programs are fashioned as much by parent needs and management agendas as they are by community needs.

Response to Parents' Need for Services

For many, initial thoughts about employer-sponsored child care turn to a work-site day care center. However, the success of these programs is mixed, in part due to the fact that parents may need or prefer services of another type, such as family day care, before- and after-school care, or care for sick children.

Preschool care alternatives. If parents commute to the work site, they may not want to travel on public transportation during rush hour with their preschoolers. The Unco Survey, conducted by Rodes and Moore (1975), found that parents prefer their children to be cared for in their home neighborhoods and that they also prefer more informal arrangements, such as family day care, especially for children under 3 years of age.

If a center is to be built, it may be established on-site and run by the company, by a nonprofit organization, or by a profit-making center or chain of centers. Also, when a firm does not have enough employees who prefer an on-site center, the company might organize a group of firms in the area to jointly support child care services for the employed parents of all the firms. In Washington, DC, for example, five television and radio stations have each made $7,000 loans to establish a center for their employees. The center is housed in a nearby church convenient to all employees.

School-age child care. Another set of parent needs and employer responses exists regarding the school-age child. Child care problems related to school-age children occur because school may begin after parents start work and end before they finish. The after-school programs provided by public schools often do not provide the kind of structured activities needed by 5- to 12-year-old children. Appropriate before- and after-school programs may be needed, either in cooperation with the schools or elsewhere in the community. The School-Age Child Care Project of the Wellesley Center for Research on Women, located at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, has identified approximately 150 school districts providing after-school services, but very few of these programs have received any corporate support. Working parents also have particular difficulties when school is not in session. An unusual response developed by Fel Pro Inc. in Skokie, Illinois, is a day camp which employees' children can attend during summer.

Caring for sick children. It is difficult enough to arrange child care on a regular basis, but when emergencies arise, such as the child becoming ill, working parents often have few options but to stay home and miss work. Although most states require day care centers to have quiet, semi-isolated rest areas for children, if a child's illness is contagious, it is deemed best that he or she not remain near other children. However, an alternative approach being tried in Minneapolis and Berkeley is for a company to contract with a local agency to send health care workers into the child's home. This arrangement may be more convenient for the parents, more comfortable for the child, and more beneficial for other children than group care solutions.[3] But, as day care directors will attest, if the child is too sick to come to the center, the parent usually wants to remain with the child.

An effective solution to sick-child care problems may involve changing personnel policies so that employees would be permitted to use sick leave for the illness of a member of the immediate family or would be allocated a specified number of "personal days" for attending to family matters. A study by the Catalyst Career and Family Center (1981) indicates that 29% of companies in the United States provide employees with days off when their children are ill.

Response to Parents' Need for Information

According to Zigler, cited in a study conducted by Project Connections (1980), "A major problem with day care is the lack of centralized information to help parents locate existing day care services" (p. 2). Dwindling resources usually lead to pressures for a more efficient use of existing resources. An obvious mechanism for reducing overlap and maximizing limited resources is a central clearinghouse in the community which collects and disseminates information about the supply of and demand for child care services.

Problems in locating child care have been recognized by other researchers as well (e.g., Keniston, 1977; National Academy of Sciences, 1976), by policy analysts (e.g., Kamerman & Kahn, 1979, 1978), and by parents who responded to the Unco Survey (Rodes & Moore, 1975). The parents surveyed, for example, indicated that the support service they would most like to see provided by the government was "a referral system where parents could get information about screened and qualified people and agencies to provide child care" (part II, p. 32).

Information and referral (I & R) services, supported by employers, have the potential for providing employees with access to well-planned and coordinated child care systems that include a variety of choices for care at high levels of quality. While I & R services may be provided through Title XX wihout regard to income, only a few states have opted to make such services available for child care. A 3-year study of child care I & R by Project Connections (1980) estimates that there are 6,390 organizations in the United States providing some child care I & R services. However, only 4.1% of these agencies receive financial assistance from industry.

Employers can supply I & R services through a variety of means. As a 1-year pilot project, the Gillette Company of Boston has implemented for their employees a telephone hotline to the local Child Care Resource Center, a Boston-area I & R agency. A firm might also internalize I & R services by hiring an individual to provide child care information. Such services could be housed in the personnel department, as occurs at Steelcase, Inc. in Grand Rapids, Michigan, or be provided through an employee assistance program (EAP). Designed primarily for counseling chemically dependent employees, EAPs cover an estimated 6.2 million workers in the private sector (see Brasch, 1980). Honeywell, Inc. in Minneapolis initially used their EAP for child care I & R services, but EAP counselors are also able to address other family-related problems affecting employees. In addition, some companies provide for parents' child care information needs by holding parent education seminars at the workplace. The Texas Institute for Families in Houston, for example, has conducted "Noontime Seminars" in more than 20 companies throughout the state. These hour-long brown-bag seminars are offered at the workplace and cover a range of parent/child topics. The Center for Parenting Studies at Wheelock College in Boston also conducts noontime seminars at some downtown Boston banks, as do a growing number of mental health and family therapy organizations.

The appeal of I & R and parent education to companies relates to the fact that such programs allow data to be collected about parent needs without the administration of a survey. Employers fear that surveys will create the expectation that the company will provide a "solution" to parents' child care problems before the decision to do so has been made. Information and counseling services enable the company to respond to needs with a relatively low-cost program, at the same time collecting data far richer than can be obtained from a questionnaire.

Response to Parents' Need for Financial Assistance

Parents are sometimes unable to afford the child care arrangement of their choosing once they have located it. As a result, children may be placed in care that is inappropriate for their needs or inconvenient for their parents. A high level of guilt is typically reported by women who leave their children under someone else's care during the day (Rodes & Moore, 1975; Whitbread, 1979), and dissatisfaction with child care arrangements may cause even greater strain for the parent. The subsidization of child care, enabling the purchase of quality care, may reduce such parental stress.

Child care cost. The cost of child care depends upon a number of factors: type of child care used, fees charged by the provider, number of hours care is used, number and ages of children, and economic status of the parent and the neighborhood. The Unco Survey (Rodes & Moore,

1975) explains that child care costs and standards are more influenced by micro-community standards than is the market for goods; in other words, child care in a low income neighborhood will cost less than that provided in a more affluent community. The survey concludes that people pay what they can afford, and as Morgan (1980) notes, generally, the higher the income, the higher the price paid for child care. Based on Department of Labor projections, Ruopp (cited in Morgan, 1980) contends that day care costs range between 9 to 11% of the total family budget and remain the fourth largest budget item for the family, less only than food, housing, and taxes.

<u>Voucher system</u>. Problems associated with the cost of child care can be eased for parents by the employer's offering to pay for a portion of the cost through a voucher system. Polaroid is one of a handful of companies currently offering such assistance. In operation since 1972, Polaroid's program pays a percentage of the cost of care on a sliding scale for employees with incomes of less than $25,000 a year. The percentage of reimbursement remains the same regardless of the cost of care selected. Approximately 150 employees per year take advantage of this opportunity. The Ford Foundation in New York has a similar program, while Measurex Corporation of Cupertino, California, offers a $100 per month stipend to employees as an incentive to return more quickly from maternity leave.

A voucher system may help parents defray a portion of the cost of care and may also encourage the expansion and improvement of child care services in the community as providers compete for the new market of paying clients. The cost of child care may also be eased by the corporate purchase of child care slots in local community programs.

Employer Responses to Parents' Need for Time

If all needs for information, money, and services are being met, parents' overriding concern may then become the need for more time with their families, or for more conveniently arranged time. Analysis of the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey by Pleck (1979) indicates that "about 35% of workers with spouses and/or children report that their job and family life 'interfere' with each other, either somewhat or a lot. Interference occurs significantly more frequently among parents than among non-parents" (p. 482).

An employer decision to offer employees more discretion over their working hours may relieve some of these "interferences." Flextime, for example, allows employees to choose the time they arrive at work and the time they leave, as long as they accumulate the prescribed number of hours per day or week. There is usually a core time during which all employees must be present and flexible periods of time when employees exercise choice. Other alternatives to standard work hours may occur through part-time work, job sharing, or work at home (also called "flexi-place").

A study by Harris (1981) for General Mills, indicated that 51% of professional women surveyed from a United States sample preferred working part-time. Smith (1979) notes that part-time work most clearly offers additional hours for family involvement. Between 1965 and 1977, the number of part-time workers increased nearly three times as rapidly as the number of full-time workers. Most of the increase was among women. By 1977, women held nearly 70% of the part-time jobs. Smith sees this as a consequence of the number of working mothers with young children.

An option yet to be tested on a widespread basis, but promising in terms of its flexibility for working parents, is work at home. It appears that high technology may be moving us back to a form of cottage industry. Continential Bank of Chicago, for example, is presently conducting an experiment which involves the installation of word processors in employees' homes and the transmission of information over sophisticated communications equipment.

These options, relating to the need for more time, call for radical changes in the traditional structure of work and in traditional management practices. While child care providers may not possess the expertise to advise corporations about alternative work scheduling, it is essential that employers remain open to the possibility that more flexibility in their employees' work hours may be the most helpful solution.

STRATEGIES FOR EXPANDING CHILD CARE THROUGH EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT

While it is critical that parent needs be the focus of efforts to stimulate a corporate response, attention to parent needs is imperative also for the survival of child care. It appears that parents will play an increasingly influential role in determining the kinds of child care services that stay alive during the present difficult economic period in the United States.

The only federal legislation from which providers might benefit in the next few years is expansion of the child care tax credit. While "supply-side" economics is fashionably applied elsewhere, for child care the term "demand-side" economics is more appropriate. The tax credit does not directly increase the supply of child care, but rather gives available funding to parents to purchase the child care of their choice. Where federal monies are available for direct funding as in the case of Title XX programs, states may administer the flow of dollars through consumer voucher systems. Like the tax credit, this mechanism favors parent choice. In the Boston area of Massachusetts, the Child Care Resource Center is responsible for $1 million of the state's tax levy funds. Parents come to the center to learn about their child care choices. They then pay a portion of the cost of care for choosing participating programs, and the resource center reimburses the provider for the remaining cost of care. All of Florida's public child care is funded through a vouchering program. Families, Inc., located in Austin, Texas, has also set up such a system for the expenditure of employer dollars.

Some employers seem more willing to consider voucher plans than on-site centers. For large companies with a diverse parent population, perhaps located in several sites around the country, the creation of one day care program will obviously not serve the needs of all concerned. Subsidies to employees through a voucher system may help a greater number of employees as well as favor parent choice. Parents receiving a subsidy are not limited to the particular form of care chosen by their employer; they may purchase care close to home if they prefer or choose between family day care or center-based care. If parents are able to pay for child care but cannot find their preferred form of care, the underlying theory of our free enterprise system suggests that there will be a new growth of services to meet the new demand--that is what supply-side and demand-side economics are all about.

Child Care Community Response

If these patterns emerge as predicted here, the child care community, in its present mindset, may be unprepared to respond appropriately to the demand. First, there is the practical problem of start-up funds. More debilitating, however, is the fact that early childhood educators know little about parent choice. Studies of child care consumers have been few. To a certain extent, child care providers do not recognize the fact that they serve the whole family. While companies may be remiss in not having family profiles of their employees, one may well ask how many child care programs have a work profile on the parents of the children they serve.

While early childhood educators seem ready to acknowledge their role as it relates to children, they seem less ready to acknowledge that they serve parent needs as well--possibly because to accept the latter they must simultaneously accept the custodial role they play in society. The connotation of custodial is "janitorial" or "babysitting," functions not requiring the commitment of professional skills. But in fact the derivation of custodial is "custody." For most parents the initial reason for seeking child care services is that they need to place their children in someone else's custody because they must work out of economic necessity. This is not to say that they do not seek or appreciate the developmental services that can indeed enrich the social, emotional, and intellectual lives of their children. But for most parents, the impetus for seeking child care services would seem to be their need for custodial care. In fact, it is only the custodial function of child care that public policy has addressed, for it is this function that justifies the investment in child care on the part of both government and the business community.

As explained earlier, government invests in child care because they want parents to go to work, thus reducing welfare dependency. Business considers child care support so they can recruit parents to work or help those already working to work better. Both these sectors view child care as an important investment because they want parents to work to reduce deficits and increase profits. Quality in child care has almost always been an afterthought. Safety and health are to be protected without question, but developmental care is a luxury. This lack of attention to quality on the part of benefactors is the most poignant indication that child care is viewed more as a support to parents than a contribution to the lives of children.

The unwillingness of child care providers to consider their role in meeting parents' needs for child care as being equally as important as their role in meeting children's needs is one cause of their ineffectiveness in convincing government and business decision makers of the importance of child care. The three parties have not found the common ground on which to base their arguments.

Consultant Fever

The current emergence of corporate child care consultants who focus exclusively on on-site centers highlights the general inappropriateness of child care advocacy. The burgeoning of the child care consultant role characterizes the reaction to the prospect of corporate involvement in child care. Most would-be "consultants," so named because very few have any company contracts, have as their primary area of expertise the planning and running of a day care center. Their pursuit of on-site centers is based on three erroneous assumptions: (1) that businesses want to build day care centers, (2) that parents want their children in them, and (3) that the community is incapable of providing needed services. Where on-site care works, it works well, but as discussed earlier, day care centers may not satisfy either management agendas or parent needs. One danger of trying to sell on-site care is that while those promoting the concept may be effective sales people, they may start programs which ~~fail.~~ At the beginning stages of a movement, these failures not only impede progress but may move us back a few steps. Because early efforts are so few in number, they are more visible and hence more influential. Corporations look to other corporations' experiences, and failures will be seriously considered. Thus, early failures do not only cause the demise of the consultant, they hurt everyone in the field.

The second danger of consultants' marketing on-site care is that it may ultimately undermine the existing child care system, crafted over a period of two decades. Why should a company start an on-site center when the terrific Title XX center up the block is about to close for lack of funds? Even if the community program is not of high quality, why not make it so with the infusion of corporate dollars? And the most significant danger of an inappropriate peddling of on-site care is that it may neglect parent preference. Those whose only expertise is the establishment of day care centers are acting more out of self-interest than are the corporations hoping to solve their management problems with day care. It is only with attention to the variety of ways in which parent needs can be addressed that we may find the common ground on which to negotiate with employers and ultimately serve children. In short, a look at the alternatives to on-site day care centers is not only more responsive to parent and child needs, it is also more politically salient to the employer.

The increase in number of consultants is to a large degree understandable. There is the hope that corporate contracts will provide them with the respect, money, and professionalism that elude them as directors and teachers in child care programs. One of the largest problems in retaining very dedicated and talented day care directors is the short career ladder they climb: Is there life after directing? And what kind? Surely, consulting to business about the child care needs of employees appears as the pot of gold at the end of a child care rainbow.

Of course, many consultants who move beyond their experience as early childhood educators do deserve the respect and incomes they seek. They are the ones who take scarce savings and invest them in travels to various companies and communities to learn about the successes and failures to date of employer-supported child care. They attend expensive conferences (generally beyond their means), make contacts, establish networks, and open themselves to new ways of thinking about the issues. Some have hired a team of management consultants, benefits specialists, and personnel and tax experts who complement their own child care skills. They have recognized the complexity of the marketing choices and ultimately of the choices that must be made in properly advising employers. They recognize that by working with other child care groups they may derive benefits for themselves in the long run. They understand that competitive consulting and information sharing are not mutually exclusive activities. And they remain respectful of parent choice and the existing child care community. If any consultants are to succeed they will be those with the sophistication described above. For the next few years, however, everyone must contend with obstacles in the economy and the market.

THE FUTURE

With whatever crystal ball policy analysts are equipped, I am prepared to say that within the next 3 to 5 years employer supports to working parents will increase dramatically in number and variety. Those practices currently in place suggest only the realm of possibility. Unfortunately, the ability of the business community to respond to the immediate survival needs of child care programs is diminished by a variety of forces.

Obstacles to Employer-supported Care

The economy. Growth in employer-supported child care is seriously hampered by the recession. The current economic climate does not lend itself to experimentation with programs that are potentially costly. Until there are many more companies with experience providing child care supports or there are data substantiating the economic wisdom of such support, many companies will place child care on a back burner. The lack of research on the extent to which provision of child care support can ameliorate management problems by reducing turnover and absenteeism or by improving productivity and recruitment efforts is another serious obstacle to the immediate growth in the number of companies supporting child care.

Equity. In addition to the economic climate and the general lack of research, a third obstacle is posed by the issue of equity. Employers are concerned that if parent employees receive a child care benefit, their nonparent employees will demand a benefit of equal value. However, companies with child care programs suggest that to date this has not been a problem. In fact, employers already providing family supports contend that they receive from all their employees considerably more positive than negative feedback on the provision of family benefits. (For those with on-site centers, all employees derive pleasure from watching little Pac Men and E.T.'s march through the office on Halloween. It humanizes the workplace.) There is also a reality to the fact that inequities already exist in benefit plans. For example, single employees do not receive equal value in pension plans because of spouse-only benefits, and the use of gender-based mortality tables (which provide estimates of longevity based on a person's sex) to determine pension plans results in women receiving smaller annuities than men.

One way of avoiding discrimination is to adopt a system of flexible benefits in which employees choose the benefits most appropriate to their needs. More and more companies are coming to realize that most benefit packages were designed for the male breadwinner with a spouse and children at home--according to Bureau of Labor Statistics, a design inappropriate for all but 4.8% of American families.[5] Only a few companies have implemented flexible benefits (only one or two including child care); and these have met with mixed success. Such a system is somewhat complex administratively because the companies usually have to manage thousands of individual benefit packages.

In the 30-odd companies with flexible benefits, a core set of benefits is offered, covering basic benefit areas: retirement, medical, disability, life insurance, and vacations. "Flexible credits" are given to employees based on salary and tenure to augment their benefits package as desired. A young single parent whose time with her children is more valuable to her than increased retirement may thus apply her credits to vacation days. An older employee will probably choose more retirement.

Benefits specialists predict more wide-scale adoption of flexible benefits as more experimentation occurs. Child care is likely to become one of those benefit choices because of passage of the Dependent Care Assistance Plan (DCAP) as part of the 1981 Economic Recovery Act. Now part of the Internal Revenue Service code, Section 129 of the DCAP makes corporate expenditures for child care (and care for elderly parents and handicapped dependents) not taxable to employee or employer. This plan makes child care very easy to insert into a flexible benefits program. A variation of the flexible benefits approach, the Salary Reduction Plan, may also result in more care, although it has not yet been approved by the Internal Revenue Service. Under this plan the employee may reduce his or her salary by a certain amount and receive the difference as pre-tax dollars which can be used for child care. Notably, this plan may be of little help to low-income parents, who cannot afford a reduced salary.

Equity becomes an obstacle at another level: namely, equity within the corporate system between company headquarters and local home offices. Headquarter offices do not wish to antagonize local offices and hesitate offering child care unless it is made available to all. At the same time, local offices claim they want to move ahead with supports to families, but feel constrained by headquarters. This same control issue arises between parent companies and their subsidiaries. A data processing firm in Massachusetts, for example, was ready to build an on-site center, but was stopped by the parent company. Office Airlines Guides, on the other hand, flew in the face of its parent company, Dun and Bradstreet, by starting a day care center without official sanction.

The solution to this equity problem may entail a willingness on the part of the headquarter/parent company to establish broad policy while allowing the local branches to design their own programs according to headquarter/parent company guidelines. (For instance, the broad policy might be that only licensed child care facilities could be used and that a child care subsidy may not exceed a set monetary limit.) The local site is then able to reflect upon the specific needs of its employee population and the resources in the community to determine the most appropriate form of the subsidy.

An interesting irony surrounding the equity issue is that the problem does not occur when subsidiaries of a United States based company are located overseas. In these instances, the overseas subsidiaries offer the same services to their employees that national companies do in those countries. For instance, Levi Strauss in Argentina and IBM in Italy both sponsor day care centers. In some cases when foreign employees of such companies relocate in the United States, their firms give them the cash value of the child care benefit they received in their home country. While headquarter offices are able to acknowledge and accept the differences in cultures overseas, apparently they cannot see the varying cultures in different parts of America as having any consequence (i.e., that the needs in the headquarter community may differ from those in a subsidiary site elsewhere in the country).

Values. Yet another obstacle to the growth of corporate involvement is more elusive and difficult to change: our value system. In a time of rapid change, where new rules and new games are played, a level of uncertainty accompanies decision making. And because someone must make decisions, there must be personal discretion. As Kanter (1977) observes in her examination of corporate practice, discretion raises not technical but human and social questions or values. The issue of child care does not personally touch most decision makers in our society, and at a deeper level there may even exist an ambivalence about women working, about child care, and about corporate involvement in family life. These issues should be acknowledged, for they help shape the education and consciousness-raising that must be sustained if any of these obstacles are to be removed.

Child care market. Finally, we must consider the obstacle presented by the quality of the existing child care market, for which we are soliciting corporate support. If service providers hope to persuade companies to purchase their services or help employees pay for them, those services must be of such quality that employers have confidence in their stability and in their ability to satisfy workers. For some, the notion of corporate involvement is posed as the panacea for child care program woes. In truth, however, the poor quality of many child care services may impede corporate commitment rather than beckon for its involvement. To elaborate, if child care is to fulfill the purpose for which it was intended (let us assume for the moment, a reduction in absenteeism), then it must be of high quality. A poor-quality program is very unstable and likely to close at any time with little warning. If parents are left to find other care, then the company has not eased the burden on the parent nor on itself. Therefore, efforts made to involve corporations should be accompanied by efforts to expand and improve the existing market of services.

The strategic use of evaluation research can be critical here. In a study conducted at High/Scope (Schweinhart, 1981), results indicated that economic savings can accrue for a community when child care is provided. However, implicit in the findings of the study was the suggestion that such effects of child care are positive only when the program is of a high quality. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is attempting to address the quality issue more directly. Recently, NAEYC announced plans to serve as a credentialing agency for day care centers, both nonprofit and proprietary (see Bowman, 1982). The association's "seal of approval" could be an important contribution.

The Prognosis

Despite current problems, my faith in the continuous emergence of employer-supported child care is based on a variety of factors. First, there is likely to be some improvement in the economy. This will enable companies to move from the research stage into implementation. Second, benefits specialists predict that the institution of flexible benefits may be 3 to 5 years down the road. The equity issue is a very real concern and flexible benefits eliminate it nicely. The non-taxability of child care for employee and employer through the Dependent Care Assistance Plan also makes child care a uncomplicated addition to a flexible benefits program. It is likely that employer support of child care will burgeon simultaneously with flexible benefits program.

Third, in 3 years time, a number of companies will have had their programs in place long enough to generate decent evaluation research. The experiences of other companies and the data to substantiate program effectiveness will provide convincing evidence to those who were willing to take fewer risks in earlier years. There is, of course, the possibility that these efforts toward family support will not prove efficacious. In that case, there would have to be a reassessment of the merits upon which to rest family benefits.

In the near future, the federal and state governments will perhaps have defined more clearly their roles in shaping the emergence of employer support for child care, removing barriers and constructing incentives in the process. Furthermore, those service providers still in existence in 3 to 5 years will have experienced the phenomenon of "survival of the fittest." Program closings, mergers, and more professional management styles will characterize the social services during this period. Technology may augment the capacity to monitor supply and demand with such innovations as computerized information and referral. In 5 years time, then, the child care market could well be in a better position to sell its services to the business community.

Unions will have made headway among women, technical, and white-collar workers. These employees are in industries experiencing a demand for labor and looking for innovative ways to recruit labor in short supply. This means that unions, currently benign in their child care efforts, may begin to exert more pressure on management to respond to child care. This pressure may be instigated by workers in the baby boom generation, who, because of their sheer numbers, will be stuck in jobs without opportunities for advancement. Caught in what is called the "pyramid squeeze," employers may have to respond by providing new, attractive fringe benefits to compensate for the loss in expected job mobility. Child care may well be included in this effort.

The values that permeate our culture and affect our views of the world will take many years to change. However, we can begin a process of education that may help bring about a level of awareness regarding the family-work interface. The next step is understanding, then commitment. For the present, I believe we are in an education phase. Employers need to understand the impact of work on family life and to be shown the reciprocal effects of family concerns on work. Service providers need to be educated about the workings of corporate decision making and the most effective ways of influencing it. And while more widespread adoption of child care benefits is a few years away, the business community, unable to respond to the immediate survival needs of nonprofit community child care facilities, may be faced with an increased demand by employees for such services. One thing seems certain: If an employer role in service delivery and family benefits is to emerge successfully, it must proceed incrementally.

IMPLICATIONS OF EMPLOYER-SUPPORTED CHILD CARE

Potentially negative consequences of employer involvement also need to be addressed if we are to effectively shape the emergence of the employer role in child care and family support services. When we talk about employer supports to working parents, we are talking about a self-interested, profit-oriented institution having a greater say in the lives of families. Are we therefore promoting a "cradle to grave" benefits situation, raising a society dependent on the private dole? And if we use the tax deductions as incentives to business to provide child care, have we really increased the amount of revenues available for child care, or have we merely shifted the onus of responsibility from the public to the private sector?

Lessons from the public sector suggest that many of our current problems are the result of our earlier problem solving. (For example, the attempt to solve the housing problem for the poor with subsidized dwellings often resulted in the creation of ghettos.) Problem solving is often a hydraulic process in which solutions to one problem merely displace the problem to another level. For the private sector, even with the best of intentions, it is possible that provision of child care as an employee benefit may thwart efforts to raise wages to more equitable levels, particularly for women. Similarly, while part-time work may be preferred and advocated by many, there is the reality that less attachment to the labor force means less income. It may also mean less financial security if pro-rated benefits do not accompany wages.

The reality also exists that not all employers can or will respond to the needs of their parent employees. Many parents work in small companies, they may work in dying industries, or they may be unemployed.

Further, what responsibility does the business community have for parents not in their employ? Is it possible that the parents who benefit from corporate involvement will be those in the middle- and upper-income brackets? Given that demand for labor is a driving force, and that labor in short supply is generally skilled and highly paid, it seems possible that less skilled parents will be left to rely on decreasing, publicly supported programs.

It would help if it could be shown that corporate self-interest can be served as a result of helping all parents in the community with child care. To the extent that there are more members of society contributing meaningfully to the economy rather than receiving welfare, the private sector will benefit. If an economically healthy community helps business, then there is a long range pay-off to companies investing in the child care component of economic and community development efforts. However, American management has traditionally focused on the short-term payoffs. Suggestions for preventive efforts, such as child care, often fall on deaf ears.

Certain employer-supported child care initiatives raise some fundamental questions concerning the value of childrearing in our society. The $100 per month subsidy offered by Measurex (mentioned earlier in this chapter) to persuade employees to return sooner from maternity leave is a case in point. Whereas in Sweden and most other industrialized nations a family allowance is designed to help mothers stay home with their children (see Kamerman & Kahn, 1979), in the United States we appear to be encouraging their earlier separation.

Perhaps the most serious of all potential consequences of employer-supported child care initiatives concerns an inference that may be made about the quality of work performed by working parents. If the feasibility of child care is best justified in terms of its ability to improve productivity and solve management problems, then that justification has within it the assumption that without the employer's child care assistance, parents are not as effective workers and perhaps should not be hired. Even in a tight labor market, such attitudes may not always prevent the hiring of parents, but they might affect the way parents are treated once on the job. Also, the mandating of child care as a fringe benefit, as the Florida legislature has considered doing, would, in effect, make it more expensive to hire parents. An overambitious policy such as this one might thus open the door to widespread discrimination against working parents (particularly women, who are the most likely to seek child care).

Although presenting child care as a panacea for all of management's problems provides a convincing case for its provision, such an argument can be dangerous. Child care has long been advocated as a means of reducing poverty, helping children succeed in school, and preventing a later life of crime and delinquency. But Grey (cited in Ryan, 1976) points out with regard to Head Start programs that

> An effective early intervention program for a preschool child, be it ever so good, cannot possibly be viewed as a form of innoculation whereby the child is immunized forever afterward to the effects of an inadequate home and a school inappropriate to his needs. (p. 136)

Similarly, child care cannot be expected to innoculate an employee against boredom or lackluster performance in a job that is inherently boring and lackluster. Nor can it immunize an employee against the effects of poor working conditions and a management system inappropriate to his or her own needs.

Government policies have not been particularly family- or child-focused. Similar patterns are emerging around corporate personnel policies relating to famlies. Without a concern for the child, there is a chance of skimping on quality--an action with possible negative, long term consequences. Further, the quality of child care programs is largely determined by the quality of the staff, and the staff of child care programs are notoriously underpaid and overworked (Whitebook, Howes, Darrah, & Friedman, 1982). A discussion of the benefits and work conditions of employees in corporate America cannot ignore employees engaged themselves in the child care programs. Given that approximately 60 to 80% of the cost of operating a center is attributable to staff (Abt, 1977), it is difficult to make a profit in child care without cutting back on salaries. If a company, well-intentioned about meeting its employees' child care needs, recommends an inexpensive or totally profit-oriented program, a company may, in the process of serving its own employees, exploit the employees of the child care program and contribute to a reduced quality of child care service. Without a concern for the quality of the child care programs into which employees' children are placed, there may be no overall easing of parental concern.

These consequences cannot be overlooked during the initial phases of an employer presence in family support services. Because this presence is relatively new, there is a great need for careful planning and analysis. The rationales and foundations established today for employer involvement will have long lasting effects on later developments. As Amory Houghton (cited in Baden & Friedman, 1981), Chair of the Board of Corning Glass, has said, "One percent of all companies want to be first and 99 percent want to be second" (p. 23). What motivates that 1% is very important to the 99% who follow.

Those of us in the field of child care have the opportunity to shape the emergence of an employer role in child care. It is an awesome task with considerable rethinking required to assure that a high quality of care is preserved and that parent preference is respected. It is also one of the most creative and exciting tasks ever placed before the child care community. We need only heed the lessons learned in the public sector. When we asked for universal comprehensive child care, we got nothing. Perhaps the incremental approach will work in the private sector. As Lindblom (1968), a scholar of the policy process, observes:

> Policymaking is typically a never-ending process of successive steps in which continual nibbling may be a substitute for a good bite. (p. 25)

Bon appetit.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Much of the information presented in this chapter derives from original research gathered through visits and telephone conversations conducted over a period of 4 years, during which time the author attended nearly 70 conferences on the subject of employer-supported child care. Among Professor Friedman's most recent publications on the subject are the following: Strategies for expanding employer supports to working parents (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1983), State and local government strategies to encourage employer-supported child care (New York: Center for Public Advocacy Research, 1982), Management by parent objectives: A case study establishing the feasibility of employer-sponsored child care and other family supports (Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1982), and Designing a feasibility study: A starting point for considering new management initiatives for working parents (paper presented at the Conference on New Management Initiatives for Working Parents, Boston, April 1-2, 1981).

[2] In Day care services: Industry's involvement, Besner has identified 11 on-site day care centers. These centers include Avco Economic Systems (Dorchester, MA), Bro-Dart Industries (Williamsport, PA), Control Data Corporation (Minneapolis, MN), Curlee Clothing (Mayfield, KY), KLH Research and Development Corporation (Cambridge, MA), Mr. Apparel, Inc. (High Point, NC), Skyland Textile Company (Morgantown, NC), Tioga Sportswear (Fall River, MA), Tyson Foods, Inc. (Springdale, AR), Vanderbilt Shirt Factory (Asherville, NC), and Winter Garden Freezing Company (Bells, TN).

A 1980 study by Welfare Research, Inc., On-site day care: The state of the art and models development, identified an additional seven centers in operation between 1960 and 1974. These included Forney Engineering (Dallas, TX), Jefferson Mills (Williamstown, NC), Joshua Tree Manufacturing (Gardena, CA), Levi Strauss (Star City, KS), PhotoCorporation of America (Matthews, NC), Security National Bank (Walnut Creek, CA), and Stride Rite Shoes (Boston, MA). As of 1982, only three of these 18 centers have remained open and operating as originally sponsored--Forney Engineering, PhotoCorporation of America, and Stride Rite.

[3]Wheezles and Sneezles in Berkeley, California, and Child Care Services, Inc. of Minneapolis, Minnesota, are two groups providing health care workers in children's homes so that the parent can go to work. These groups charge on an hourly basis, a practice prohibitive to the parent unless partially funded by a difficult-to-obtain corporate subsidy.

[4]In "supply-side" economics, the focus is placed on stimulating the supply of services available to those who need (or demand) such services; funding of programs is a "supply-side" activity. Putting dollars into the hands of those (e.g., parents) who demand the services is a "demand-side" activity.

[5]The Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 1981, has indicated that there are 2.9 million married couple families with only the husband working and with two children. This number equals 4.8% of all families and 9% of families with children.

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TABLE 1

Forms of Child Care Assistance
Provided by Various Employer Groups

Assistance	Number of Companies Sponsoring Programs				
	Industry	Health Care	Government	Union	TOTAL
Child Care Centers	43	151	14	4	212
Information and Referral	20	17	0	0	37
Vouchers	10	7	0	0	17
Family Day Care	0	7	0	0	7
Parent Education	23	0	0	0	23
Support for Community-based Child Care	78	11	2	0	91
Other	23	2	1	2	28
TOTAL	197	195	17	6	415

Data provided by the National Employer Supported Child Care Project, 363 E. Villa, Pasadena, CA 91103.

TABLE 2

On-Site Day Care Center Reports of Employer Benefits

Benefits Reported	Percent of Employer Response
Increased ability to attract new employees	88
Lowered absenteeism	72
Improved attitude toward employer	65
Improved attitude toward work	55
Favorable publicity	60
Lowered job turnover	57
Improved community relations	36

From Appalachian Regional Commission Employer-Supported Day Care Study: Final Report (1982), prepared by Leo Fishel, Inese Balodis, and David Klaus. (Reprinted by permission of Appalachian Regional Commission, 1666 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20035.)