

Employee Satisfaction and Family-Supportive
Workplace Benefits

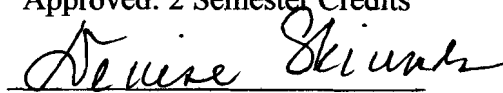
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Amy E. Steffen

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Dr. Denise Skinner

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout

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**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Author: Steffen, Amy E.

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ABSTRACT

The spillover between work and family is a common occurrence in today's workforce, especially with more women engaged in both paid employment while continuing unpaid family roles and responsibilities. Increasingly, companies are recognizing that offering enhanced work/life benefits which support employees in balancing their work and family roles can increase productivity, retention, and happiness. The purpose of this study is to assess employee perceptions and satisfaction with company-provided employee benefits.

The data analyzed in this study was collected from employees of a large Midwestern company who attended the company's annual benefits fair. The survey was sent to 1,798 employees and 1,097 surveys were completed and returned. The survey instrument consisted of 10 questions, including demographics and satisfaction and perceptions of company benefits. Two questions were open ended. Percentages were provided for all items.

The study found that over half of the employees who participated in the survey were satisfied with the company-sponsored benefits. The most common written in response for the most helpful benefits were medical benefits, back-up child care, and work and personal life offerings. The results of this study show that employees of this company are satisfied overall with company provided benefits, unlike previous research which revealed a lack of family-supportive benefits in companies who offer traditional fringe benefits.

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout

Menomonie, WI

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Chapter I: Introduction

The interrelationship between market work and family work has changed dramatically through the course of American history. One of the more profound societal events shaping the work-family interface was the Industrial Revolution, which effectively took paid market work out of the home, and men with it. The unpaid work of homemaking and dependent care stayed at home, primarily the domain of women. The Women's Movement in the 1960's served as the impetus for the next significant altering of the conventional work-family interface. Women entered the workplace in record numbers; first, women whose family responsibilities had lessened but increasingly by women who continued to have significant family responsibilities (Bailyn & Rapoport, 1996).

The presence of women in the workplace required companies to go beyond their traditional support and provide more. "In the early 1980's, Ellen Galinsky and Diane Hughes came to a conclusion – that what happens in the workplace matters for individuals and their families" (Bailyn & Rapoport, 1996, p. 12). Some companies began responding to this concern and started adding work-family policies and programs to their traditional Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), an "individual" benefit that companies have historically offered. The initial initiatives to respond to women's needs in the workplace were centered on child care. This was followed by policies allowing more flexible work schedules followed by companies eventually broadening policies to cover employees without children as well as those in "nontraditional" families.

Companies were recognizing that good workplace programs could make a huge impact on employee productivity and well-being, which in the long run can create a respectable return on investment (Bailyn & Rapoport, 1996). Work-family policies and

programs have several benefits for both the employer and employee. For employees, “work/life benefits are as important as health insurance, according to 90% of more than 1,000 employees surveyed by The Gallup Organization in a 1998 poll” (Tompkins, 2001, p. 1). Employees are expressing significant to severe stress due to workload and work pressure (Saltzstein, Ting, & Hall-Saltzstein, 2001). High amounts of stress due to workload and work pressure can lead to low-productivity at work. Work stress is not the only factor that can lead to low-productivity at work but family issues contribute as well. In fact, “family issues now account for more than 26% of absences-vs. 22% for illness” (Tompkins, 2001, p. 1). Personal matters have been known to consume up to 21 hours of time per employee, per personal issue annually. Because, personal issues are inevitable and unavoidable, employers will lose out on worker and organizational productivity if they do not offer work-family policies and programs.

Recent surveys purporting to show flexible work schedules and other family-friendly programs to be effective tools in promoting job satisfaction, productivity, and company loyalty among workers seem certain to generate continued support with in the business community, but assessments the true extent and nature of the family-friendly workplace are more elusive. (Saltzstein et al., 2001, p. 453).

Currently, the majority of American companies have some type of work-family policy or programs to help assistance employees balance their work and personal lives as well as increase job satisfaction.

Statement of the Problem

Previous research reports conflicting results when employees are asked about their satisfaction with work-family policies or programs. It is unclear if employees are satisfied

with work-family policies or programs and the relevance and sufficiency of these family supportive benefits. Previous research in work and family suggests that both employees and employers benefit when companies offer relevant and sufficient family supportive benefits. Although more companies have implemented work-family policies or programs, the extent to which employees are satisfied with the policies and programs is unclear. The purpose of this study is to investigate this issue by assessing employee perceptions and satisfaction with the benefits provided by their company. This will assist employers in understanding employee satisfaction with company-provided employment benefits. The primary purpose of this study is to analyze existing anonymous data from a larger survey of employees of a large Midwestern company to help assess employee perceptions and satisfaction with company-provided employee benefits.

The specific objectives of this research are as follows:

1. Identify employee attendance rationale and overall satisfaction with company-sponsored benefits fair.
2. Assess employee satisfaction with company-provided employee benefits.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Work-family policies or programs have been known to benefit both the employer and employees. However, research shows that a significant amount of companies do not offer work-family policies or programs. In fact, more companies surveyed and described in the current research offer an array of health-related benefits but few work-family benefits.

Importance of Work-Family Benefits

The importance of health-related benefits and family-supportive benefits has been clearly defined as increasing retention, productivity, and happiness (Manfredi, 2007). Understanding the needs of the employees will decrease the likelihood of companies losing them. Manfredi contends that companies can retain their best employees by suggesting that

First, companies should be consistently surveying new and existing employees to determine what matters most to them. This can range dramatically based on the employees and their gender, age, education, and place in their career. Unfortunately, most of today's employers are not doing this. Instead they rely on benefit packages that were defined decades ago. (47)

Knowing your employees is key in today's diverse workforce. "It is not uncommon to find a 40-year age difference between an employer's youngest and oldest employees" (Manfredi, 2007, p. 47). This is why we cannot assume that all employees want the same health-related benefits and family-supportive benefits. This is also why it is so important to survey all employees annually.

Understanding and offering what employees are looking for in health-related benefits and family-supportive benefits may seem like a burden for employers. However, it can actually provide huge cost savings (Manfredi, 2007). Companies that do not offer family-

supportive benefits usually cannot afford them and by not addressing these issues, companies lose their competitive advantage (Tompkins, 2001). Increasingly, employees are willing to work for a lower salary if good family-supportive benefits are offered. This is why it is important to understand what employees want.

According to Miller (2007), the top five most important aspects of job satisfaction, according to employees themselves, were compensation, benefits, job security, work/life balance, and communication between employees and senior management. “Still, employee benefits can serve as a powerful tool for increasing not only employee satisfaction but also loyalty, productivity, and recruitment and retention efforts” (Miller, 2007, p. 32). Companies who communicate and offer more health-related benefits and family-supportive benefits can have lower turnover rates and higher productivity.

Research has shown that employees who work in non-family-supportive companies tend to give false reasons for leaving work early or go to great extremes to keep their family life private, so it does not seem to show an effect on their work (Bailyn & Rapoport, 1996). It is now more common in large corporations for meetings to start at dawn and to continue into the dinner hours, otherwise known as “dinner meetings.” Employees who have high demands at work tend to be the most stressed and would benefit most from family-supportive benefits.

There is a significant body of literature documenting the relationship between job satisfaction and work-family conflict balance. According to the Families and Work Institute, a well respected organization focusing on family and work issues:

A perceived lack of work-family balance and its corresponding reduction in job satisfaction is further assumed to produce other negative job behaviors (such as

absenteeism, impaired performance, and turnover) and is thus the primary impetus for adopting family-friendly programs. (as cited in Saltzstein et al., 2001, p. 457)

Jobs that cause workers to burnout and give them a lack of energy for themselves and their families can put them in a bad mood and cause the mood to spillover into the workplace (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998). This type of cycle can keep re-occurring and affect the worker's job satisfaction.

Improving Work-Family Benefits

In the past 20 years, the quality of jobs have increased and become more supportive, but there is still plenty of room for improvement (Bond et al., 1998). Even with the improved jobs and supportive resources, they still do not seem to match the employee's family demands. The demands of the home front have changed drastically in the past 20 years and employers need to keep up with the changes.

Supportive and quality jobs are the largest predictors of productivity and job satisfaction (Bond et al., 1998). It is important for employers to provide high-quality jobs and supportive workplaces, whatever the industry. This will maximize satisfaction, commitment and retention. Employers must also "work" with employees to keep job demands at a tolerable level so they are not jeopardizing personal and family well being. The bottom line is that employers must offer a variety of support for their employees including quality jobs, supportive work environments, supportive resources, and secure relationships.

The majority of families are dual-earners, working full-time, which leaves less time for household work and time spent with children. The less time available for household work and children only creates more stress off the job. With less time for household work and children, employed men and women have even less time for themselves. This can create men

and women to have a lower personal well being and superior vulnerability to harmful spillover from job to home (Bond et al., 1998).

This brings us back to work. High-quality jobs—jobs that offer autonomy, learning opportunities, meaning, and a chance to get ahead—energize employees and win their commitment. Supportive workplaces help employees be more effective workers, people, and parents. Employers who can provide these better quality jobs and supportive workplaces have a clear competitive edge (Bond et al., 1998).

Job satisfaction is interrelated to so many aspects of an employee's life and it is the employer's responsibility to make sure that employees are satisfied, but are these benefits helping increase job satisfaction?

Job Satisfaction

The majority of workplaces are offering some type of health-related and family supportive benefits. Most employees are fairly satisfied with life and their family. However, according to The Families and Work Institute survey in 1997, “nearly one-quarter of employees have felt nervous or stressed often or very often, and 13% have had difficulty coping with the demands of everyday life often or very often” (as cited in Bond et al., 1998). Employees also reported feeling burned-out by their jobs and nearly 26% have felt emotionally drained, and 36% have felt used up at the end of the workday. Most employees are affected by harmful spillover from their jobs and personal lives. “Nearly 28 percent of employees do not have the energy to do things with their families or other important people in their lives often or very often” (p. 7). This type of spillover is dangerous for workplaces, especially for the productivity and commitment aspect.

What Companies are Offering

The 2005 National Study of Employers surveyed 1,092 employees from large and small companies in the United States and they describe the type of health-related and family-supportive benefits companies offer. Personal health insurance for full-time employees was offered to 95% of employees with 88% that covered family members (Bond, Galinsky, Kim & Brownfield, 2005). Only 47% of employees were offered wellness programs. Although previous research states that work/life benefits are just as important as health insurance, only 2% of companies offered work/life programs. Forty-three percent of companies offered Employee Assistance Programs and 21% offered counseling. Programs offered for parents of teenage children were 7%. Forty-five percent were offered Dependent Care Assistance Plans that help employees pay for child care with pretax dollars. According to the data from the 2005 National Study of Employers, more companies offer health-related benefits than family-supportive benefits.

Conclusion

As mentioned before, “74 to 84 percent of employees have access to traditional fringe benefits: personal health insurance coverage, pension or retirement plan, paid vacation days and holidays, and paid time off for personal illness” (Bond et al, 1998, p. 9). However, there is little workplace support and access for programs such as child care information and referral services, elder care information and referral services, and on-site or nearby child care services. With a small percentage of employers providing dependent-care benefits, how many employees are really satisfied with health-related and family supportive benefits? This study will look at this issue by assessing employee perceptions and satisfaction with the benefits provided by their company.

Chapter III: Methodology

Today's workforce is very competitive and health-related and work-family programs are crucial to balancing work and family life. More companies are offering health-related and work-family policies and programs to help assist with work and family balance. However, the extent to which employees are satisfied with the benefits provided is unclear. This section will describe the analysis of a survey from employees at a large Midwestern company to see if their health-related and work-family policies or programs are helpful and, most importantly, creating job satisfaction.

Subject Selection and Description

Subjects were randomly selected from the list of employees who chose to register by "badging in" at the benefits fair at a large Midwestern company in 2006. When an employee registers, it only uses his or her work identification number. The Midwestern company used a database that would randomly select employees who registered before entering the benefits fair.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument (a copy of which is included in Appendix A) was created by the Midwestern company's Health Care Benefits Team. This survey was developed to help understand the reasons the employees attended the fair, satisfaction with the company's benefits and if the benefits help balance the employee's work and personal life. Demographic information collected from employees included age, whether or not the employee had children and if so, the age of the employee's children.

Data Collection Procedures

This research on employee satisfaction with benefits was conducted using a 10-question survey (Appendix A) by a large Midwestern company in 2006. The company offers a yearly benefits fair that is open to all employees. Each employee has a personal identification badge with an electronic strip that identifies the employee when scanned over a badge reader. At the benefits fair the employees were voluntarily given a choice to badge in or not before entering. The employees were told it was to help create a list of employees who may or may not receive the benefits fair survey. If the employee chose to badge in, the names were automatically sent to a database. This database took all the employees names and randomly selected and sent an email with the benefits survey. The survey was randomly sent to 1,798 employees who attended and chose to badge in. There were 1,097 employees who responded to the survey.

Data Analysis

The Human Resource Communications Team analyzed the responses of the survey data. The database that was used to distribute the surveys also calculated and analyzed the questions that had a specific answer to choose from, such as yes or no. These answers were reported into percentages. The questions with open-ended answers were sorted and reviewed by a Human Resource Communications team member and then distributed to the Health Care Benefits Team for review.

Limitations

The information obtained from this study can only be generalized to employees who are offered work-family policies or programs or to employers who offer work-family policies

or programs. Another limitation to this study is that it only relates to the employees of the large Midwestern company.

Chapter IV: Results

This study analyzed existing data from a survey given to select employees at a large Midwestern company. The survey was sent to 1,798 employees and 1,097 employees responded, resulting in a 61% response rate. This chapter will report the findings from this survey, which assessed overall satisfaction with the company-sponsored benefits fair and company-provided employee benefits.

Demographics

The average age group of employees who responded was between ages 50 and 59 (36%). More than half of employees who responded were over the age of 40 (72%). Twenty eight percent of employees who responded were under the age of 40. Fifty two percent of employees responded that they have dependent children and 48% responded that they do not have dependent children.

Descriptive Statistics for Overall Satisfaction with Company-Sponsored Benefits Fair

Table 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the results for questions 3, 4 and 7, which related to reasons for attending the fair, whether their purpose for attending the fair was achieved, and the likeliness of attending next year's benefits fair. The results show the percentage of overall employee responses. The theme of these questions related to the overall satisfaction with the benefits fair. Forty six percent of employees who responded said they would "definitely attend" a company-sponsored benefits fair in 2007. Almost half (42%) of employees responded that they were attending the benefits fair to increase their awareness of company benefits. Ninety-four percent of employees agreed that their main purpose for attending the fair was achieved. In general, employees were satisfied with the benefits fair.

Table 1

Main Reason for Attending Fair

| Response | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| Increase awareness of available benefits | 42 |
| In preparation for benefits enrollment | 37 |
| To get a specific question answered | 19 |
| Other | 2 |
| Total | 100 |

Table 2

Main Purpose for Attending Fair Achieved

| Response | Percentage |
|----------|------------|
| Yes | 94 |
| No | 6 |
| Total | 100 |

Table 3

Likelihood to Attend a Benefits Fair in 2007

| Response | Percentage |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Definitely attend | 46 |
| Probably attend | 41 |
| May or may not attend | 10 |
| Probably not attend | 3 |
| Definitely not attend | .01 |
| Total | 100.01 |

Descriptive Statistics for Satisfaction of Company Provided Employee Benefits

Table 4 and 5 demonstrate the results for questions 5 and 6, with item 6 being a two-part question, including an open-ended question. Question 5 stated: “How satisfied are you with the amount of benefits this company offers?” Question 6 stated: “Do the company benefits and offerings help you balance your work and personal life?” Question 6a stated: “Please explain and/or list the most helpful benefit or offering.” The theme of these questions related to the overall satisfaction of company provided employee benefits. The results show the overall employees’ responses in percentages. Over half (53%) of employees who responded said they were extremely satisfied with the amount of benefits the company offers. Sixty-nine percent of employees responded “yes” that the company benefits help balance their work and personal life. The most popular written in answer for most helpful benefit/offering was medical benefits, a response rate of 37%. The second was retirement and investment benefits. The fifth most popular written in answer was back-up child care and the ninth most popular answer written in was work and personal life offerings.

Table 4

Satisfaction with Company Benefits Offered

| Response | Percentage |
|----------------------|------------|
| Extremely satisfied | 53 |
| Somewhat satisfied | 46 |
| Not at all satisfied | 1 |
| Total | 100 |

Table 5

Do Company Benefits Help Balance Your Work and Personal Life?

| Response | Percentage |
|----------|------------|
| Yes | 69 |
| No | 7 |
| Not sure | 24 |
| Total | 100 |

Conclusion

The majority of employees are satisfied with company benefits offered and mostly satisfied with the outcome of the benefits fair. The results reflect the overall satisfaction with employee benefits.

Chapter V: Discussion

Previous research in work and family suggests that both employees and employers benefit when companies offer relevant and sufficient family supportive benefits. The current research built on these findings by assessing employee perceptions and satisfaction with the benefits provided by their company. This study reviewed previous data collected from a large Midwestern company to assess employee satisfaction with benefits provided. The findings may help other companies understand employee's satisfaction with company-provided employee benefits, including work/life policies or programs. This chapter draws conclusions from the results and compares the data used in this study to other studies, making recommendations for future research. A summary of this study is also presented in this chapter.

Conclusions

This study found that the employees of the large Midwestern company are mostly satisfied with the company provided benefits and that the benefits provided help balance their work and personal life. The results of this study support past research reporting that job satisfaction correlates with benefits provided and work/life balance.

The 2005 National Study of Employers surveyed over 1,000 employees from large and small companies nationwide on the types of benefits they are offered (Bond et al., 2005). The overall results of the National Study of Employers survey show that most companies provide more health-related benefits than family-supportive benefits. Although research shows more health-related benefits are offered than family-supportive benefits, it does not mean they are less important to the employees. This study correlates with the results found in the 2005 National Study of Employers and the written in responses for the “most helpful

benefit/offering.” Over half of the written in answers for this study relate overall to health-related benefits or offerings. The list includes medical benefits, dental benefits, on-site health clinic, 24-hour nurse line, vision benefits, on-site physical therapy, and FMLA/disability. Although none of these responses are in the top 10 responses, it still shows the correlation between the 2005 National Study of Employers and how more companies offer more health-related benefits or offerings or are at least more aware of health-related benefits or offerings.

The importance of health-related benefits and family-supportive benefits has been clearly defined as increasing retention, productivity and happiness (Manfredi, 2007). Sixty-nine percent of employees in this study responded “yes” that the company benefits help balance their work and personal life. The most popular written in answer for “most helpful benefit/offering” was medical benefits, a response rate of 37%. The second was retirement and investment benefits. The fifth most popular written in answer was back-up child care and the ninth most popular answer written in was work and personal life offerings. These results relate to Manfredi’s (2007) previous statement and how the importance of health and family benefits relate to happiness of employees. Knowing your employees is important in today’s workforce because of the diversity of age, gender and culture. “It is not uncommon to find a 40-year age difference between an employer’s youngest and oldest employees” (p. 47). It is important for individual employers to survey yearly to help understand what is important to employees to help retain and attract them. The yearly survey by this large Midwestern company enables it to acquire the employee feedback necessary to assess employee satisfaction with the benefits it provides. . The data analyzed in this project was taken from employees who ranged from the age of 50-59 (36%) and under the age of 40 (28%). This reflects the report by Manfredi of the broad age range among employees which may result in

different employee-benefit needs. In order to keep employees satisfied, it is important to understand employees' perceptions can vary by age, and thus, the relevance of surveying all age groups in the workplace.

Most employees are affected by harmful spillover from their jobs and personal lives (Bond et al., 1998). "Nearly 28 percent of employees do not have the energy to do things with their families or other important people in their lives often or very often" (p. 7). This type of spillover is dangerous for workplaces especially for the productivity and commitment aspect. The data for the current study suggests over half (53%) of employees were extremely satisfied with the amount of benefits the Midwestern company offers. However, as stated above, the number one response for "most helpful benefit/offering" was medical benefits and the ninth was work and personal life offerings. This relates to previous findings suggesting that while work-life programs are valued, basic benefits like medical insurance are of first priority for both employees and employers alike. If work and personal life offerings were written in more often it would have shown that the Midwestern company is offering enough work/life policies or programs and are helpful to the employee. If employees were offered more family-supportive benefits, it could improve their energy and reduce the spillover of work to home and visa versa. The overall perception of benefits offered to this Midwestern company's employees is one of significant satisfaction. Employees also indicate that this Midwestern company's benefits help balance their work and personal life, even if it was not the most common written-in answer. Although the Midwestern company and their employees are satisfied, the majority of past research shows that the most companies do not offer enough family-supportive benefits.

Current research does not provide any information on company provided benefit events such as the Midwestern company's benefits fair. The Midwestern company provided benefits fair is a great way to show employees that they care about them and their families. Other companies looking to increase employee satisfaction may want to consider hosting a company provided benefits event. The results in this study show that the purpose of the benefits fair is to learn about the company-provided benefits and most employees' purposes for attending the fair were achieved.

This Midwestern company seems to be fairly progressive with regard to providing family-supportive benefits and in their awareness of the importance of surveys and events to educate employees on the company-provided benefits. Their efforts support the research that suggests that the provision of employee benefits and supportive work/life policies and programs positively affects employee satisfaction.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research include the following:

1. Develop two separate surveys: one for new employees and one for existing employees to assess the difference in employees' views on company-sponsored benefits.
2. Develop a survey for specific age groups in order to assess what types of family supportive benefits are important at different stages of the life cycle.
3. Determine perceptions and satisfaction of company-sponsored benefits at other large Midwestern companies to help companies offer similar and competitive offerings to help retain and attract employees.

4. Create support groups at companies to gather data for analysis, which will expand the research on perceptions of employees and the company-provided benefits and work/life offerings.

Summary

The purpose of this research project was to analyze existing anonymous data from a larger survey of employees to assess their perceptions and satisfaction with the company provided benefits.

A 10-question survey was distributed to subjects who were randomly selected from the list of employees who chose to register at the benefits fair at a large Midwestern company in 2006. The survey included two open-ended questions as well as demographic questions. A total of 1,798 surveys were distributed and 1,097 were obtained.

The company's Human Resource Communications Team analyzed the survey data. A database calculated and analyzed the results into percentages. The open-ended answers were sorted and reviewed by a Human Resource Communications team member.

Two major limitations of this study include that it is only generalizable to employees who are offered work-family policies or programs or to employers who offer work-family policies or programs and that it only relates to the employees of the large Midwestern company.

The results showed that the majority of employees were satisfied with company benefits offered and the outcome of the benefits fair. These results reveal the general satisfaction with employee benefits at the large Midwestern company.

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Appendix A: Survey

*The company name has been changed for privacy reasons.

Thank you for attending the Company A Benefits Fair! We hope this event increased your awareness of the Company A benefits and resources available to you and helped prepare you for benefits enrollment, which starts on October 30.

Your feedback is important! **Please complete and submit this short online evaluation by Friday, October 27, 2006.**

1. Did you bring a spouse or other covered dependent to the fair?
 - Yes
 - No
 - N/A

2. To what extent do you make the benefit-related decisions for your family?
 - I make the benefit-related decisions alone
 - I am primarily responsible for making the benefit-related decisions
 - I share the decision making with a spouse or other covered dependent
 - A covered dependent is primarily responsible for making the benefit-related decisions
 - A covered dependent makes the benefit-related decisions alone

3. What was your main reason for attending the Fair? (check all that apply)
 - To increase my awareness of the benefits available through Company A
 - In preparation for Benefits Enrollment
 - To get a specific question answered
 - Other _____

4. Was your main purpose for attending the fair achieved?
 - Yes
 - No

5. How satisfied are you with the amount of benefits Company A offers?
 - Extremely satisfied
 - Somewhat satisfied
 - Not at all satisfied

6. Do Company A benefits and offerings help you balance your work and personal life?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not Sure

Please explain and/or list the most helpful Company A benefit/offering:

7. If there is a Company A Benefits Fair next year, how likely are you to attend?

- Definitely attend
- Probably attend
- May or may not attend
- Probably not attend
- Definitely not attend

8. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the Benefits Fair?

Demographic Questions:

9. What is your age?

- 19-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- Over 60

10. Do you have dependent children?

- Yes
 - a. If yes, please list ages:
- No

Thank you for taking time to attend the Company A Benefits Fair and for filling out this evaluation!