

# Workplace Policy Development

## Background Information/Rationale

The Gage dictionary defines "policy" as "a plan of action; a course or method of action that has been deliberately chosen and that guides or influences future decisions." By stating principles and rules, a healthy workplace policy guides actions. A policy statement indicates the degree of an employer's commitment to a healthy workplace. It is recommended that all workplaces have a healthy workplace policy statement in addition to issue-specific policies.

Policy development is a key component of a comprehensive health promotion program. As a strategy for health promotion, a policy should serve one of the following purposes:

- Make healthy choices easier
- Make unhealthy choices more difficult; and/or
- Provide equitable access to the key determinants of health, such as income, education, housing, employment, clean air, nutritious food, and a safe water supply<sup>1</sup>

A healthy workplace policy statement should:

1. State the purpose of the policy.
2. Be tied to the vision/mission and values of a company.
3. Demonstrate a long-term commitment to providing a healthy workplace environment.
4. Be based on key factors that influence wellness including cultural/social environment, healthy lifestyles, health and safety issues.
5. Incorporate comprehensive strategies into initiatives including awareness raising, skill-building and environmental support and policy development.
6. Be based on key elements of a healthy workplace such as:
  - managerial support and participation
  - employee driven and voluntary programs
  - accessibility to all employees
  - addressing the needs of all employees
  - adaptation to the special features of each workplace environment
  - providing incentives and recognition systems to support employee involvement
  - providing continuous monitoring and evaluation
7. Outline the role and responsibility of each different level of the workplace: employees, union, senior management, managers, health and safety committee, wellness committee, etc.

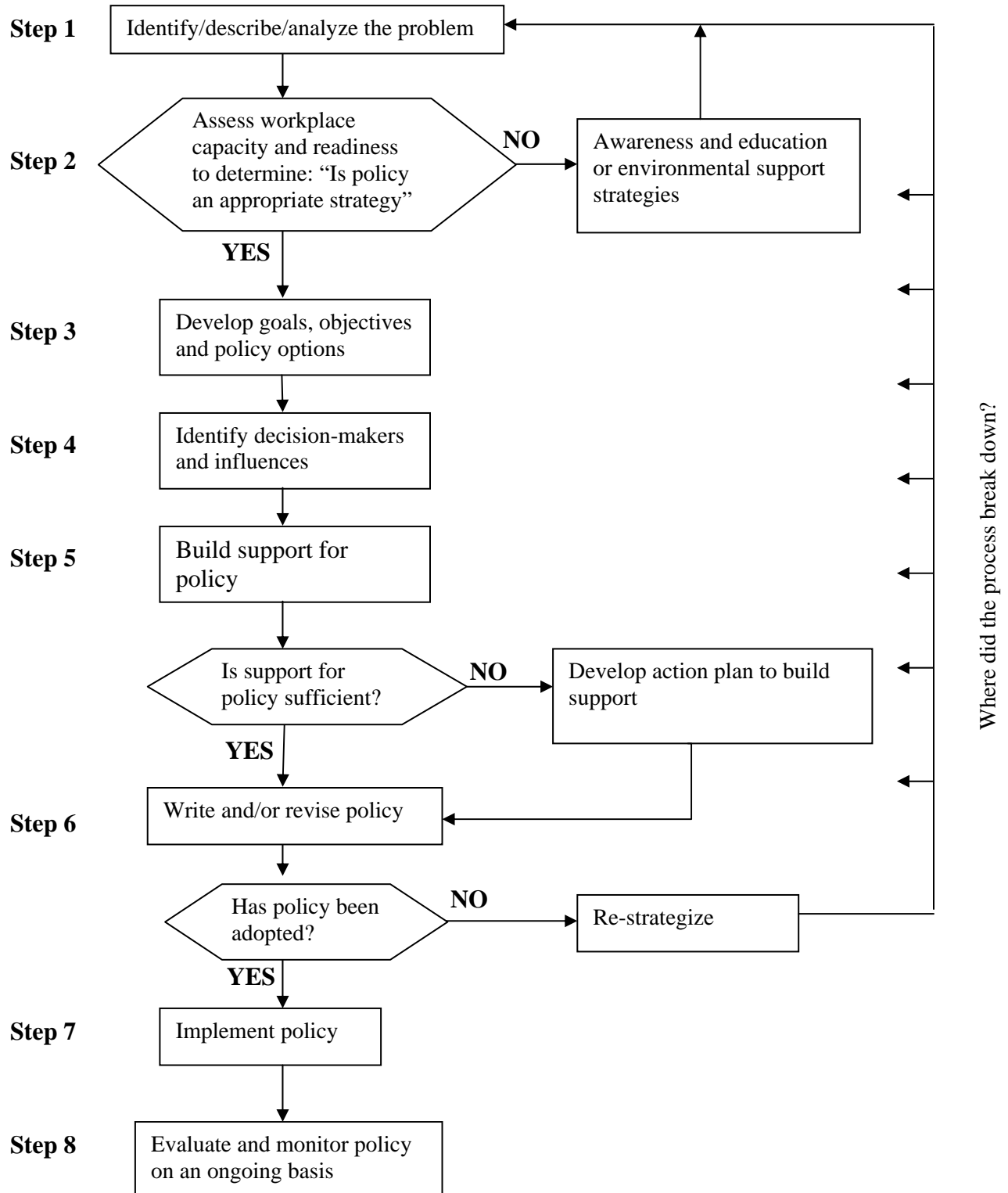
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Workplace policy development does not require a new set of skills. It does, however, require commitment and support from both the employer and the employees. It involves planning and cooperation that may necessitate a new approach to looking at health related issues in the workplace. Policy is an effective option that has the capacity to bring about far-reaching change. The policy development process has tremendous potential to involve people and give them ownership over some of the health and workplace issues that affect them.

Power to act on wellness-related issues does not simply lie in the hands of a few decision makers. It also lies within those who have a strong commitment to improving the quality of life in their workplaces and communities. The key to success lies in helping people realize that they have the power to bring about change and providing them with the resources and tools to do so.

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## Steps to Creating a Healthy Workplace Policy: Roadmap for Policy Development



## Steps to Creating a Healthy Workplace Policy

The following eight steps will help you and your organization in the development of your healthy workplace policy. While this process may not work for everyone, it is intended as a guideline and checklist for development, implementation and evaluation.

### **STEP 1: Identify, describe and analyze the problem**

#### *Describing the problem or issue*

Once you realize that something is wrong and/or needs to be changed, your next task is to understand the nature of the problem.

1. What is the extent of a problem? How big a problem is it?
2. What and who is involved?
3. What are the limits of the problem?
4. What are the origins of the problem? Is there a starting point to your problem? When did it first become apparent?
5. Are you looking at a real problem or a symptom of a larger problem or issue?

Ideally, at the end of this analysis you will be able to state your problem in one sentence. The ability to do this increases your ability to communicate the nature of the problem to others, thereby building support for policy development or policy change.

#### *Analyzing the problem or issue*

After you have identified and described the problem, the next task is to conduct an analysis of the problem. This involves finding out why the problem exists in the first place and who is affected by it.

1. What is it about the situation or condition that is unacceptable or wrong? What events or incidents illustrate this?
2. What factors in the workplace affect the problem (e.g., employee attitudes, traditional values, conflicting agendas, economic difficulties, cultural differences)?
3. What has been done to try to resolve the problem?
4. What is the cost of the problem (human and financial)? What is the cost of doing nothing about the problem?

#### *Identifying and understanding stakeholders*

A key step in analyzing a problem is determining the individuals and groups with an interest or stake in the problem or issue under consideration. These include those individuals and groups who would be positively or negatively affected if the problem was resolved. The extent of the likely support for, and opposition to, a policy solution to a problem has to be considered during the analysis stage. In other words, you need to

know who the key stakeholders with an interest in your issue are. Many health issues addressed by policies are linked to a broad range of stakeholder interests.

1. Who will be positively or negatively affected if the problem was resolved?
2. Who else sees this as a problem?
3. What exactly do some stakeholders stand to gain from resolving the problem?  
How important is it to them?
4. Are the stakeholders' reasons for wanting the problem solved the same as yours?  
If not, what are their reasons?
5. Are there others who you might bring on side if the matter was brought to their attention?
6. What exactly do other stakeholders stand to lose from resolving the problem?  
How strong is their opposition likely to be? What counter-arguments can be anticipated?

### *Gathering Data about a problem or issue*

Solid, reliable data is critical for raising awareness about a problem and building support for policies aimed at addressing the problem.

- **Community service directories** can help you identify the groups, agencies and organizations that have an interest in your issue and/or have taken action in response to your issue.
- **Population health status data** is available from your local public health unit, district health council or health research organizations.
- **Socio-demographic data** can include key social and economic variables in your community or workplace, such as household income, education level, food bank use, age distribution or occupational categories. Relevant sources for this information include Statistics Canada or your local social planning council. In addition to providing you with local data, this information may allow you to compare your community or workplace with others across the province or country.
- **Other studies about the problem or issue**, such as needs assessments, research reports, and journal articles are good sources. This documentation could be located through searches at reference libraries or keyword searches of on-line databases such as Medline.
- **Newspaper or magazine articles** may have relevant information about the problem or issue. Pay particular attention to articles that refer to controversy surrounding the issue or indicators of support.
- **Interviews with key individuals or groups** can provide valuable information about a problem or issues. Remember that they can only give you their perspective, so you will need to consult with a wide range of people. This will increase your ability to 'make the case' for recognizing and addressing the problem. The clear identification, description and analysis of a problem are the starting points in the journey towards policy development as a solution. Because all other actions stem from the way in which a problem is identified, it is

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important to devote considerable attention to the initial step of the policy development model. This lays the foundation for all other actions that follow.

## **STEP 2: Assess workplace support, capacity and readiness to determine if policy is an appropriate strategy**

Before reaching a decision to work towards establishing a policy, it is vital to assess

- The amount of support you have to address your problem and proceed with policy
- The level of capacity to develop and implement policy that exists within your organization and the broader community
- The level of workplace readiness to embrace policy as a solution to the identified problem

### *Workplace support and capacity*

As you can see from the policy model, this is a step that needs to occur early in the policy-development process. You will need to know whether or not members of your workplace agree with your viewpoint. Without their support, you may have to temporarily suspend your work until you can bring them onside. Two distinct forms of support are needed to proceed with the policy development process. First, you will need to know if the workplace views the issue as a serious problem. If this is the case, they are more likely to support policy as a way of addressing it. Second, you will need the support of individuals and groups who are both strongly committed to the issue and interested in developing policy as a solution.

1. Are there educational and awareness programs in your community that focus on your problem? How long have they been running? How successful have they been? How popular are they?
2. What kinds of environmental support for your issue exist in your workplace?
3. Has the problem been a recent focus in the media (radio, TV, newspaper editorials, etc.)?
4. If similar issues have arisen in the past, what kinds of actions were taken?
5. Is there valid and representative survey data measuring public opinion about the problem?
6. Are there signs in the workplace that indicate a need for change (e.g., dissatisfaction with the status quo or interest in a new idea)?
7. What general capacities to deal with the problem exist (assets, organizational infrastructure, community leaders, social, capital)?

### *Decision Makers*

In assessing workplace support, it is important to be mindful of the role of **decision makers**, those people with the power to implement policy. Some have actual decision-making power; others are extremely influential but may or may not have official power.

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In order to assess the support for your issue, you need to consider who in your workplace has both official and influential power. You need to assess their views about the problem and the likelihood they will support policy as a potential solution.

## *Force Field Analysis: Assessing the climate for change*

The **climate for change** refers to the combination of attitudes, values, atmosphere and employees that encourages or hinders change. It is extremely important to gauge the climate of change in your workplace regarding your issue because you want to predict the degree of support and opposition you are likely to encounter. Keep in mind that this climate can be difficult to assess as it can change very quickly. To predict how well a policy proposal will be received, it can be useful to determine the forces likely to support and oppose the policy. **Force field analysis**, a process developed by Kurt Lewin, maps these opposing forces and studies their relative strengths. Force field analysis is particularly useful for identifying and responding to potential counter-arguments against the adoption of a policy.

To conduct a force field analysis, you need to ask yourself the following questions:

1. What will help us to take action on the problem? What are the driving forces?
2. What will hinder us? What are the negative or restraining forces?

## *Determining if policy is an appropriate strategy*

Now that you have carefully examined your problem, you have a critical decision to make about whether or not to proceed with policy. Keep in mind that policy is not the only solution to a health problem or issue; in some cases, policy may not be the best solution.

1. Is there more than one solution to your problem?
2. What does each solution require in terms of time, people, money and/or additional resources?
3. Which solution offers the greatest benefit at the least cost?
4. Do any of the solutions involve policy development?
5. Are you willing to do the work required to develop policy?
6. Is your organization willing to support you in your policy development work?
7. Does your organization have a mandate that includes policy development?
8. Do you have the necessary level of management support for policy change?

The decision about whether or not to proceed with policy is based on finding the optimal fit between:

- The mission, purpose and goals of your group or organization
- The strengths and weaknesses of your organization as an agent for policy change (resources, capabilities, etc.)
- The forces in the external environment (opportunities and threats)

If you have carefully considered the full range of possible alternatives and determined that policy is the best solution to your problem, then you are ready to proceed through

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the subsequent steps of the model. If not, then you may choose to take a step back and focus on building the necessary prerequisites for policy, such as stakeholder support.

Alternatively, you may decide to proceed with another health promotion strategy, such as education, organizational change or environmental support, as a means of addressing your problem or issue.

## **STEP 3: Develop goals and policy objectives**

Setting clear, measurable and attainable goals and objectives is an important part of the policy development process. A **goal** is a broad statement summarizing the ultimate direction or desired achievement of your policy.

When setting policy goals, consider

- What aspect of a health issue/problem you want to address
- What your policy can realistically achieve over the short and long-term

An **objective** is a brief statement specifying the desired impact or effect of a policy (i.e., how much of what should happen to (whom) by when). Most policies have one, or, at most, two to three goals, and multiple objectives. Objectives can be viewed as directions or building blocks towards the achievement of policy goals.

Here is an easy way to remember how to write good objectives. They should be S.M.A.R.T.

*S = Specific*  
*M = Measurable*  
*A = Attainable*  
*R = Realistic*  
*T = Time limited*

Here are some tips for setting policy objectives:

- Consider the specific policy components and time frame needed to meet your goals
- Each objective should focus on one desired policy change or result
- Remember that a comprehensive policy will entail multiple objectives (both long and short term)
- Objectives must be measurable so the impact of a policy can be evaluated

*Once you have drafted a set of goals and objectives, take a step back and ask yourself the following:*

1. Are these goals and objectives consistent with how you/your group/organization define the problem?
2. Are they consistent with what members of your group/organization want to do?
3. Are they realistic, given the nature of the problem and the resources available to address it?

4. The value of setting goals and objectives should not be underestimated. With clear goals and objectives, you will have a good idea of the scope of the problem and what can be done about it.

## STEP 4: Identify decision makers and influencers

You will need to identify the main decision makers for your issue and the degree of influence you can exert. Then you will need to decide which decision makers to approach. Here are some factors to consider when making these decisions:

- Pick your decision makers carefully. Don't automatically start with the person at the top; you may be more successful with the support of someone lower down in the hierarchy. You probably want to start with sympathetic people who are linked with your decision maker. If more than one person is involved, think about the order in which they should be approached
- Who you approach depends on the issue being addressed

**Status-oriented** decision makers are highly concerned about generating positive image and avoiding unfavourable decisions. **Mission-oriented** decision makers hold strong beliefs and values that guide their decision-making. **Process-oriented** decision makers are most concerned with serving their clientele or constituency. When identifying decision makers, it's also important to remember that these individuals are influenced by the opinions of others, including their constituents, community opinion leaders and other decision makers. Also remember that decision makers are typically dealing with a variety of issues – not just yours. One critical factor for decision makers is knowing that they have the support of their constituents. Consider these factors carefully before identifying and seeking the support of decision makers for your policy.

## STEP 5: Building support for the policy

Gaining the support of both the stakeholder groups affected by a policy and the decision makers responsible for implementing a policy is critical; without this support, a policy will not succeed. To build support for a policy, workplace health promoters can choose from a range of persuasion strategies. The nature of the strategies used to build support for a policy can vary according to the degree of visibility or 'profile' they generate. All policies may produce opposition for at least one of the following reasons. When 'making the case' for your policy, be prepared to counter one or more of the following arguments.

1. The proposed change is too costly.
2. Increased legislation/regulations restrict individual freedoms to an inordinate degree.
3. There is an alternative (non-policy) means of addressing the issue.
4. There is a philosophical difference about the origin of, or the needed response to, the problem.

Here are some tips for convincing decision makers to proceed with a policy:

- Policies need to be clearly linked to a compelling issue or problem
- Build as many plausible links between the health issue and the desired policy as you can
- Proposed solutions/policies need to be clearly explained, straightforward and not overly complex
- Look for signs that indicate a need for change (e.g., dissatisfaction with the status quo)

## *Presentations*

Presentations are a good way of getting known by decision makers while enhancing your own credibility as a spokesperson for a particular policy or issue. A well-received presentation can also be a critical step in building support for your policy. Here are some tips for making presentations to decision makers as a tactic to build support for policies:

- Carefully consider your objective for the presentation
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations, acronyms and sophisticated language
- If possible, use audio-visual aids to retain interest and communicate complex ideas
- Provide a written brief or handout of your presentation for members of the audience
- Have your supporters present and readily identifiable

When stating your case for a policy:

- Keep it short
- Clearly identify the benefits of, and the need for, the policy
- Substantiate your position with local data, scientific facts and the experiences of other workplaces
- Counter the opposing arguments

When building support for your policy, it's important to remember that the persuasion strategies noted above are ways of moving towards your policy. They should not be regarded as ends in themselves. When you are considering which action strategy to use, always keep the big picture in mind – your ultimate goal is the resolution of your problem or issue.

## STEP 6: Write and revise the policy

Whatever their purpose, written policies usually include the following:

- A preface or preamble describing the purpose of the policy
- Policy goals and objectives (often incorporated into the preface)
- A description of the policy components (e.g., the associated activities, regulations, sanctions, that constitute the 'meat' of the policy)
- Procedures for dealing with failure to comply with the regulations specified in the policy
- A plan for promoting and disseminating the policy
- A plan for monitoring and evaluating the policy

When developing a policy, the drafting or writing process is usually done by a small subcommittee (two to three persons), with a designated lead writer. The committee assumes responsibility for writing drafts of the policy, obtaining feedback from other stakeholders (as appropriate) and undertaking revisions to the policy.

## STEP 7: Implement the policy

A policy is ready for implementation if the following conditions are met:

- Have you identified and analyzed the issues your policy needs to address?
- Do you have sufficient information about these issues to support and justify the implementation of your policy?
- Are your policy goals reasonable and your policy objectives measurable?
- Do you have the required support and approval of key decision makers? If not, how will this be obtained?
- Have you selected your policy components and prepared a written policy that describes these components and a strategy for implementation?
- Do you have an accurate estimate of the resources (time, money, person power and expertise) needed to implement and monitor your policy?
- Is the timeline for implementation realistic?
- Does your policy specify who is responsible for what?
- Have you identified the barriers to implementation you are likely to encounter?
- Do you have a plan for dealing with these barriers?
- Have you shared your draft policy with other key stakeholders who will be responsible for implementation?
- Is this the appropriate time to start implementing your policy?

### *Costs of implementation*

There may be costs involved with policy development and are likely to occur when the policy is implemented. Therefore, try to anticipate what expenses you may have to absorb.

## STEP 8: Evaluating and monitoring

**Evaluation** is the systematic gathering, analysis and reporting of data about a policy to assist in decision making. A thorough evaluation will help to:

- Collect evidence on the effectiveness of a policy (i.e., was it successful in achieving its stated goals and objectives)
- Be accountable to the stakeholders who supported the development and implementation of the policy
- Identify ways of improving a policy by determining what works, what doesn't work and why, improving the usefulness of the resources and materials needed to implement a policy and assessing the extent of compliance with a policy (Hyndman, 2000)

There are two basic types of evaluation. **Process evaluation** monitors the implementation of your policy. It examines the procedures and tasks involved in carrying out a policy in an effort to determine "what is happening to whom." Process evaluation includes:

- Tracking the number of people affected by a policy (e.g., number of beneficiaries, number of infractions)
- Tracking the quantity and type of activities carried out to implement a policy (e.g., number of server training sessions delivered as part of an ergonomics policy)
- Assessing the quality of the activities carried out to implement your policy (e.g., participant satisfaction with a policy training workshop)
- Tracking modifications to your policy over time

**Outcome evaluation** assesses the results or impacts of a policy, both intended and unintended, to determine whether or not the policy made a difference. Outcome evaluations can assess both short-term results, such as increased knowledge about the health and safety benefits ergonomics, as well as longer-term results, such as the decreased incidence of repetitive strain injuries as a result of mandatory ergonomic assessments.

Here are some important points to consider when designing an evaluation for a Policy:

- Link your evaluation measures to the goals and objectives of the policy
- Select easy, realistic methods to collect evaluation data, such as questionnaires, surveys and focus groups. Make sure that data is collected systematically from the moment the policy is implemented. Don't wait until a policy has been in place for a long period of time before starting to evaluate its impact

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- Review the evaluation results on an ongoing basis to guide appropriate changes and modifications to the policy
- Evaluations should include a mix of both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative data. Both types of information are needed to fully understand the impact of a policy. Effective healthy workplace policies are not static; they are flexible enough to incorporate insights gained from past experience while responding to future developments and trends

## *Evaluation questions: Looking back and looking ahead*

Once a policy has been implemented, it's important to take some time for reflection – looking back and looking ahead.

### *Looking Back*

- Is the situation better than it was before the policy was implemented?
- If the policy was not as effective as anticipated, why not? What could have been done differently?
- Are people who were involved in the policy development and implementation process happy with the results of their efforts?
- Do the people affected by the policy have a favourable view of the policy? If not, what can be done to address their concerns?

### *Looking Ahead*

- Does more need to be done to implement the policy?
- Are there any foreseeable developments that may affect the policy?

### *Characteristics of effective policies*

In addition to meeting their intended objectives (e.g., reducing absenteeism, increasing physical activity, improving communications), effective policies:

- Are developed using a bottom-up approach (i.e., consulting with stakeholders to determine needs and appropriate solutions)
- Have realistic goals and objectives
- Do not rely exclusively on enforcement and punitive measures
- Are responsive to changing circumstances and unintended consequences

## **Conclusion**

Having worked through the steps presented here, you probably realize that workplace policy development does not require a new set of skills. It does, however, require looking at a health-related problem or issue in a different way, being persistent and flexible and working with others. It involves planning and systematically approaching a

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process that can, at times, be unclear and unpredictable. While policy is not a solution for all workplace problems, it is an effective option that has the capacity to bring about far-reaching change. In spite of the inherent challenges, the policy development process has tremendous potential to involve people and give them ownership over some of the issues that affect them.

Power to act on wellness-related issues does not simply lie in the hands of a few decision makers. It also lies within those who have a strong commitment to improving the quality of life in their workplaces and communities. The key to success lies in helping people realize that they have the power to bring about change and providing them with the resources to do so.

## References

\* Adapted with permission from: University of Toronto. (2004). The Health Communication Unit, at the Centre for Health Promotion: *Developing Health Promotion Policies*. Retrieved February 2007 from, <http://www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/publications/policyworkbook.march04.v1.0.pdf>

