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THE WORKPLACE AS A SETTING FOR GOOD NUTRITION



Photo: ILO/C. Loisel

“The rich would have to eat money if the poor did not provide food.”

Russian proverb

Key issues

The workplace – a setting for good nutrition

- The workplace is the ultimate community-based setting for health intervention. Many workers are present at least eight hours a day, five days a week. They are often of the same educational background and face similar health concerns.
- An opportunity exists to provide employees with what may be their only wholesome meal of the day. The comparison with school lunch programmes is apt.
- An opportunity exists to intervene, to provide the employee with access to nutritious foods – through canteens, meal vouchers, kitchenettes or pleasant places to eat, on-site farmers’ markets, vending machines offering healthy options, or simply provision of bowls of fruit.
- Healthy foods at work, such as fruits, vegetables and fortified food items, might not be available in the marketplace as a result of a poor food distribution system.

Opportunities

- Ideally the meal break should be a time to rest, refuel, bond with co-workers, and release stress and to physically remove oneself from the cubical or workstation.

Food at work: Workplace solutions for malnutrition, obesity and chronic diseases

- The meal setting should be clean and free from the noise, vibrations, chemicals and other hazards of the work area – a place to unwind.
- The workplace meal can be fortified with iron, iodine or other key nutrients that might be lacking in the local diet.
- The workplace or its environs can be a haven for good nutrition where workers can find all those foods that their doctors recommend for losing weight or lowering cholesterol: foods such as wholegrain breads, lean meats, fruits and vegetables.
- Meals must be affordable. Eating areas must be accessible. Time is needed for the walk to and from the eating area, for purchasing food and for finding a seat.

Opportunities lost

- How many workers have no access to a canteen or proper restaurant, or no place to safely store food? How many workplaces have greasy canteens? How many are surrounded by only fast-food options or street foods of questionable safety?
- How many workers in the vast informal economies in developing nations have no allotted meal break? How many skip lunch or get by on bread and water?
- How many workers must eat at their desks or in a messy backroom, have no place to wash before eating or are subjected to food-borne contaminants?

The reality

- There are few laws that stipulate when, where and how workers gain access to food.
- In many cases, workers have low expectations about feeding programmes and unions have what they consider to be more pressing concerns.
- In developing countries, only half the populations consume enough calories for normal activity, and these countries depend more on heavy manual labour.
- Nearly a billion people are undernourished while over one billion are obese or overweight.
- A cycle emerges: poor health leads to lower learning potential, leading to a poorly qualified job pool, leading to lower productivity, leading to a loss of competitiveness, high business costs and lower economic growth, leading to lower wages and greater wealth disparity, leading to poor nutrition and poor health ...

Access to healthy food (and conversely protection from unsafe and unhealthy food and eating arrangements) is as essential as protection from workplace chemicals or noise.

Many workers around the world spend at least half of their waking hours at work; eight hours or more a day, five days or more a week. Some workers live at work for prolonged periods. At any given worksite, workers are largely of the same educational background and, in many countries and job situations, of the same sex and ethnic background. Often they face the same health concerns. They need to eat and rest in order to perform their work properly. And they are a captive audience – even temporary and migrant workers and day labourers. For health educators and nutritionists, the opportunity is profound. The workplace represents a manageable community-based setting – a logical place to ensure proper nutrition.

In school lunch programmes, health experts attempt to instil lifelong healthy eating habits and to intervene when nutritional needs are not being met. Similarly, in the workplace, an opportunity exists to teach employees about proper nutrition and to monitor outcomes. An opportunity exists to intervene, to provide employees with access to nutritious foods – through canteens, meal vouchers, kitchenettes or pleasant places to eat, on-site farmers' markets, vending machines offering healthy options, or simply provision of bowls of fruit. An opportunity exists to provide employees with what may be their only wholesome meal of the day. There are food solutions that can fit most budgets and locales. Yet too often, the opportunity is missed. Even working in the largest, most economically developed of cities in the world will not guarantee access to a nutritious meal during the working day. Far from a lingering and isolated problem in developing nations, the lack of access to the very foods needed to stay healthy, alert and to be productive has become widespread. The situation only exacerbates the rising trend (and cost) of obesity and chronic diseases.

London, Paris, Los Angeles, New York – pick any city. A taxi journey through the urban expanses between the airport and the city core reveals the extent of the missed opportunity. In the city outskirts, before the skyline begins to dominate the horizon, take notice of the junkyards, mechanics' shops, printers, small factories, retail stores, telecommunications depots, police stations, roofing companies, plumbers, health clinics, beauty salons, furniture warehouses, timber yards and car dealerships. There are workers here. What type of access to food do they have? It is unlikely they will have company canteens or meal vouchers; and if they did, where would the workers use the vouchers? At a fast-food outlet? There are few proper restaurants, if any. Perhaps these workers pack a lunch. If so, where do they eat? In a back room? How relaxing is such a setting? How clean is it? Is there

a refrigerator to store the food? Are the workers at risk of food-borne illnesses? Throughout any given city, many workers eat in far from ideal conditions.

Now venture into the city centre. Has the situation really improved? Yes, the larger companies may offer a canteen. But what kind of food is served? Is the dish of the day fried meat and overcooked vegetables? Is the only economical choice a burger with chips or a fried Chinese egg roll? Are the foods heavy on salt, sugar and saturated fat and light on healthy fat, vitamins and minerals? Is the one healthy option even appealing? Are the workers bombarded by an unlimited choice of sugary drinks and snack foods? Some companies offer meal vouchers. But do workers have a proper meal during their 30- to 45-minute break, or do they grab something on the run and bring it back to their desk? The reality is often less than ideal.

Calcutta, Dhaka, Mogadishu, Managua – workers' nutrition in developing countries can be dire. Only the largest of enterprises have catering services. In many locales the greatest concerns are food and water safety, and adequate calorific intake. Street vending of food is an important means of livelihood in developing countries, particularly for women; and it often represents the only access to food for workers in the extensive informal work economy of these countries. But unregulated or under-regulated food vending is a major source of food-borne illnesses. Vendors usually have no access to washrooms or lavatories, and no means to refrigerate perishable foods, and often keep food for days until it sells. Of the 1.5 billion cases of diarrhoea annually in developing countries, around 70 per cent are associated with food contamination (Henson, 2003, p. 8). Worldwide, one in three people annually suffer from a disease caused by micro-organisms in food and 1.8 million children die from severe food and waterborne diarrhoea (WHO, 2002c, p. 7). Most food-borne illnesses are not reported; and in developing nations the economic impact in terms of health and productivity can be only grossly estimated. In the United States, where food-borne illnesses are a concern but are not epidemic, the United States Department of Agriculture estimates an annual economic loss of US\$6.9 billion from five food-borne pathogens: *Campylobacter*, non-typhi *Salmonella*, *E. coli* O157, *E. coli* non-O157 STEC and *Listeria monocytogenes* (Henson, 2003, p. 16). Removing vendors, the typical government reaction in developing countries, often leaves workers with no access to food. Bringing food from home (and having no place to store it) might leave less food for the family and might not be a good food solution either. Food safety issues are well described in the FAO December 2003 working paper *The economics of food safety in developing countries* by Spencer Henson (Henson, 2003).

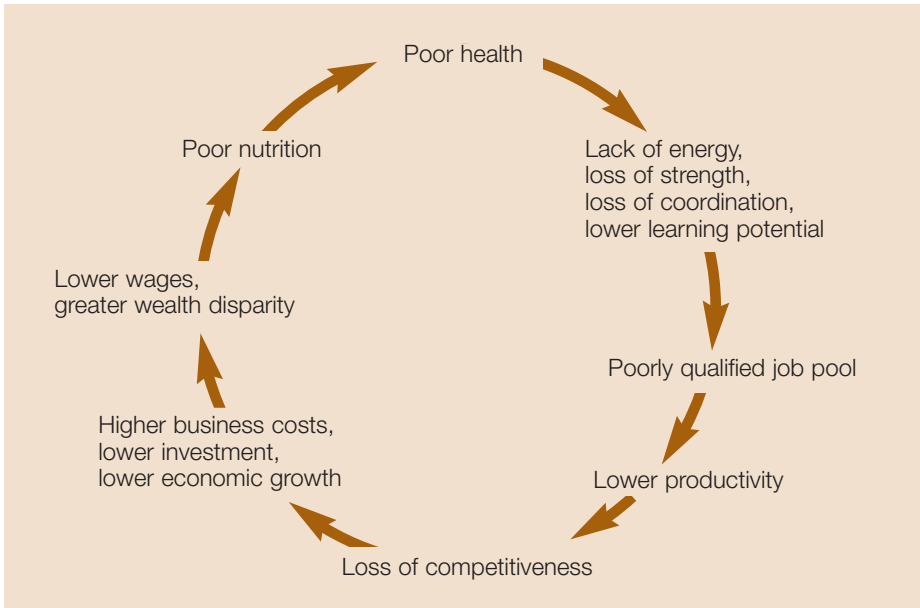
The FAO reported that 50 per cent of populations in developing nations do not consume enough calories for normal activity, and that these countries depend more on human power than machines for heavy work (FAO, 1966). That was in 1966. Little has changed since then for workers. A recent WHO analysis found that nearly half the world's population face starvation (WHO, 2004a). If food is not scarce, often it is unsafe or too expensive. Yet food fuels productivity. Early ILO research found that a 1 per cent kcal increase resulted in a 2.27 per cent increase in general labour productivity (Galenson and Pyatt, 1964). Similarly, another study found that increasing the average daily energy supply to 2,770 kcal per person per day with adequate nutrients in a sample of countries would have increased the average annual GDP growth rate by nearly 1 per cent each year between 1960 and 1990 (Arcand, 2001). And more recently, the WHO reported that adequate nourishment (through food fortification) could raise national productivity levels by 20 per cent (WHO, 2003a). Not providing safe and nourishing foods and adequate calories in the workplace is a missed opportunity in developing nations.

3.1 Opportunities

Ideally the meal break should be a time to rest, refuel, bond with co-workers, and to release stress and to physically remove oneself from the office, cubical or workstation. The meal setting should be clean and free from the noise, vibrations, chemicals and other hazards of the work area – a place to relax. In regions plagued by war, famine or poverty, the workplace meal can be fortified with iron, iodine or other key nutrients that might be lacking in the local diet. In industrialized countries, with an abundance of unhealthy foods, the workplace or its environs can be a haven – a place where workers can find all those foods that their doctors recommend for losing weight or lowering cholesterol. These are foods such as wholegrain breads, fresh fish, lean meats, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables.

In the developing world, we find that WHO and FAO recommendations for proper nutrition often go unheeded, for a variety of reasons. War and government instability can make it difficult to get to work and to secure food, water and fuel at work or at home. Refugee status takes a terrible toll on nutrition. Yet even with a stable government, workers are sometimes denied meals or discouraged from taking meal breaks; or sometimes food simply is not available, particularly in the amount and variety needed for good health. Case studies presented in subsequent chapters of this publication will demonstrate that providing proper nutrition to workers at work need not be complicated or expensive and ultimately can be profitable. Simple meal plans

Figure 3.1 The cycle of poor nutrition and low national productivity



can include fortified grains and local vegetables. Improving the street food sector to minimize food-borne illnesses is another means to provide access to inexpensive and nutritious food. With proper nutrition workers will have the energy to be productive at work and, thus, earn more money, buy more food for the family and stay healthy. This is a virtuous circle allowing workers to remain productive and lift themselves out of the cycle of poor health and poverty. Yet without proper nutrition, governments, employers and workers will find themselves in the cycle captured in figure 3.1.

In the developed world, the workplace is often wrought with temptations that are sometimes worse than the ones at home. Danish pastries, muffins and cakes are standard fare at morning meetings and conference breaks. Office birthday parties bring more cake. Vending machines are usually filled with biscuits, chocolate and salty snacks. The local food van is stocked with meals for people on the go: rich sandwiches and cakes. Fast-food restaurants seem to surround the premises. Just a meal or two a week here can lead to serious weight gain (Pereira et al., 2005). Co-workers order pizza or greasy sandwiches for delivery, and the odour fills the room. The company canteen offers unlimited sugary drinks and fried potatoes every day of the week.

On top of this, many workers feel pressure to skip lunch, grab a ten-minute lunch, or stay at their desks to eat – the so-called desktop dining or SAD (stuck at desk) café phenomenon. According to a 2004 survey by the

British bank Abbey National, 70 per cent of British office workers regularly eat at their desks (Lyons and Moller, 2002). A 2004 survey commissioned by the United Kingdom Public and Commercial Service Union found that more than half of the British workforce take less than 30 minutes for lunch (Flynn, 2003). Similarly, the 2004 *Eurest lunchtime report* (Eurest, 2004) found that the British lunch hour was down to 27 minutes on average, the shortest ever recorded by Eurest. A missed or incomplete lunch will lower worker productivity, increase stress, and ultimately lead to afternoon snacking. In the United States, the American Dietetic Association found in 2003 that 67 per cent of workers eat lunch at their desks and 61 per cent snack there (American Dietetic Association, 2003).

The WHO, FAO and a multitude of national health institutes continue to urge the public to eat more fruits and vegetables, more fibre, fewer saturated and trans fats, fewer sweets and fewer high-cholesterol foods. The question is, if not at work, where and when? In this modern era, few people live within walking distance of work. Commuting times have increased and have shortened the breakfast period. Commuting and the two-worker-family phenomenon have shortened the dinner period as well. As a result, workers often grab something fast and sweet for breakfast, if anything. And there is a greater tendency to purchase prepared foods for dinner. This situation jeopardizes the success of the ubiquitous national “five-a-day” fruit and vegetable programmes. If workers have no access to fruits and vegetables at work, they will have to consume all five servings in the few hours between arriving home from work and going to sleep – an unlikely scenario. As we see, the workplace is often an obstacle to healthy eating instead of a vehicle of good nutrition.

3.2 The law

Surprisingly, there are few laws that stipulate when, where and how workers gain access to food, and none specifying what foods should be made available. The meal break is often left to cultural norms from country to country. In the United States, for example, there is no federal law mandating a meal break. The United States Code actually stipulates somewhat the opposite, that “breaks in working hours of more than one hour may not be scheduled in a basic work-day” (United States Code, 2000); and the United States Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) reiterates that meal breaks are a matter of agreement between the employer and the employee. Only 19 of the 50 American states have laws concerning meal breaks. Each of these laws have many conditions and allow for only 20- to 30-minute breaks, except for New York, which requires hour-long lunch breaks for factory workers.

In the European Union, the meal break length is under debate now that France has lowered the working week to 35 hours. At issue is the definition of “working time”, the time during which workers are at their employer’s disposal, which some see as including the lunch break. The European Union Working Time Directive (93/104/EC) guarantees a rest break of at least 11 hours between shifts and a break during the working day when this is longer than 6 hours. Around the world rest periods and meal breaks vary: in Brazil, 1–2 hours per 6 hours; in Nigeria and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, 1 hour per 6 hours; in Japan, 45 minutes per 6 hours; in the United Kingdom, 20 minutes per 6 hours. South Africa and the Philippines mandate a 60-minute meal break. Other countries stipulate that the break must be at least 30 minutes during shifts longer than 5 hours. Some enterprises, such as the United States Government, section off an hour for lunch, but pay for only 30 minutes. An American civil servant’s “eight-hour” working day is from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. In Japan, the lunch hour can be strictly applied, with strong societal pressure not to eat early but precisely at noon with others. In many developing countries, workers feel obligated to work continuously, usually from early morning until late afternoon. In some situations, they are not allowed to take breaks. Sometimes there is no food in the vicinity, some workers feel they cannot afford to break. In these situations, workers often eat one meal a day, in the evening. The Labour Standards Act of Saskatchewan, Canada of 1978 (as amended in 1994), reflects the language of many laws regarding meal breaks:

Meal breaks – 13.3 (1994, c.39, s.8.)

- (1) An employer shall grant to each employee who works six hours or more an unpaid meal break of at least 30 minutes within every five consecutive hours of work except:
 - (a) where an accident occurs, urgent work is necessary or other unforeseeable or unpreventable circumstances occur;
 - (b) where the director is satisfied that the employer and a majority of employees agree that the employees may:
 - (i) take their meal break at another time; or
 - (ii) forego their meal break;
 - (c) where the employer seeks and obtains the written consent of the trade union representing the employees;
 - (d) where it is not reasonable for an employee to take a meal break; or
 - (e) in any other case prescribed in regulations made pursuant to section 84.

- (2) Where it is necessary for medical reasons, an individual employee is entitled to take a meal break at a time or times other than the time specified in subsection (1).
- (3) Where an employee has worked five hours and the employer is not required to grant a meal break to an employee, the employer shall permit the employee to eat while working.

In India the Factories Act of 1948 makes it mandatory that companies ensure that their workforce has access to quality wholesome meals, a progressive act for any country. According to the Act, the Government “may make rules requiring that in any specified factory wherein 250 workers are ordinarily employed, a canteen or canteens shall be provided and maintained by the occupant for the use of the workers” (Viswanath, 2002). Still, the Act stops short of defining wholesome meals and the requirements of the canteen. Similarly, other countries (or, more often, regions within countries) have “labour standard” acts that define minimum length of meal breaks and exceptions to these.

The specifics about meal breaks and dining areas are often left to collective bargaining. Where there is no union, businesses are largely free to offer whatever the employee will accept. In many cases, workers have low expectations and unions have more pressing concerns. National and international trade unions and trade union federations contacted for this publication conceded that workers’ nutrition and meal breaks were important issues but that these topics were not on their agenda. Notable exceptions include the Canadian Auto Workers and the Singapore National Trades Union Congress, both highlighted in Chapter 4.

The ILO has made progress in standardizing workers’ access to breaks. The ILO Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention, 1921 (No. 14), and later the Weekly Rest (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1957 (No. 106), established a minimum period of weekly rest for workers: at least 24 hours per seven-day period and preferably 36 hours. In view of the lack of broad legislation concerning meal breaks historically, and no consistency from country to country or even within countries, the ILO’s Welfare Facilities Recommendation, 1956 (No. 102), includes a list of recommendations for meal provision. Adopted in 1956, it “define[s] certain principles and establish[es] certain standards concerning the following welfare facilities for workers: (a) feeding facilities in or near the undertaking; (b) rest facilities in or near the undertaking and recreation facilities excluding holiday facilities; and (c) transportation facilities to and from work where ordinary public transport is inadequate or impracticable”. The text of this Recommendation is included in its entirety in Chapter 11.

3.3 Food solutions

Fifty years on, the ILO's Recommendation No. 102 remains relevant and applicable. The 1960s saw a shift in emphasis from the concept of workers' nutrition as a welfare benefit to a socio-economic benefit – that is, a necessity for increased productivity. In 1971, the ILO, along with the WHO and FAO, re-examined the state of workers' nutrition and asked a number of questions. Are workers getting enough calories and nutrients? To what extent is nutrition related to productivity, absenteeism, turnover and accidents? Who is responsible for planning and implementing meal programmes? And how can such programmes be financed? Their recommendations were published in May 1971 in the *Report of FAO/ILO/WHO Expert Consultation on workers' feeding*. In building upon the ILO's 1956 Recommendation, the authors reaffirmed that the scope of statutory obligations “should not be governed by the size of the unit, should embrace all types of industry in both urban and rural areas, and should be related to the needs of the workers and the industry” (FAO, 1971, p. 6).

The main recommendation of the report read: “that governments promulgate laws and regulations requiring the establishment of workers' feeding programmes with a view to improving the health, welfare and productivity of workers ... Such laws and regulations should have as their objective the adequate feeding of the worker and his family; should be designed to stimulate the establishment of appropriate food services ... and should recognize the economic limitation of the worker, the undertaking, the industry and the country” (FAO, 1971, p. 11).

There are a number of key points to consider in creating a meal programme.

3.3.1 Cost and place

What constitutes a successful feeding programme? First, employers must consider their space and budget. Canteens can be an ideal food solution. The company can ensure that workers have healthy foods at a reasonable price. Canteens are clearly an expensive option, though, and they require space. There is the cost of building the structure, acquiring equipment and hiring staff. (Hiring a caterer might reduce costs.) Vouchers allow the employer to avoid some of these costs. Workers use vouchers to choose from local restaurants. Yet for vouchers to be useful, there must be local restaurants. This is not always an option. Mess rooms can be less expensive than vouchers, although these too require space. In their simplest form, mess rooms are merely rooms in which food is served. An outside company could provide the daily food; the employer

is merely providing accommodation. This solution can work well for small companies that aren't near restaurants. Companies can also consider offering kitchen areas with a refrigerator or box to store food and a way to heat food. This allows workers to save money by bringing their own meals, and it costs the company very little to maintain. At a minimum, workers need some place away from their workstations that is sheltered from the extremes of weather.

Cost to the employee is also important. Workers in Western Europe, Australia and North America pay about US\$5–7 a meal (US\$100–140 a month) yet earn around US\$4,000 a month. Workers fortunate enough to have a subsidized meal programme pay about US\$6 in Belgium, US\$4–5.25 in France, US\$4 in Germany and Spain, US\$2.50–5.25 in Sweden, US\$1.25–2.50 in Italy, and US\$1.25 in the Czech Republic, according to internal Sodexo Alliance statistics. These workers on average spend no more than 3.5 per cent of their pay on workplace meals. In the 1971 FAO report referenced above, the authors recommend that the meal price should not exceed 5 per cent of the daily wage of the lowest-paid worker (FAO, 1971, p. 7). Russian workers featured in Chapter 8 pay only US\$2 a meal, but this is about 16 per cent of their take-home pay, far too much. Most workers cannot afford this, and they skimp on lunch as a result.

Enterprises in remote locations, for example, mines and farms, must be prepared to properly house and feed workers and possibly their families. Abuses are common, as relayed in the Ugandan case study in Chapter 6. Workers are sometimes given grains as a sole source of nourishment. Two case studies in Chapter 4 about mines show how a meal programme can attract workers to remote areas.

3.3.2 Time, timeliness and rest

Time is always a pressing concern. Many workers are increasingly spending more hours at work or getting to work. The extra hours create stress and place constraints on morning and evening meals. The length of the meal break needs special consideration. Employers have to ask whether, for example, 30 minutes is enough time for employees to walk to the food service, choose a meal, pay, find a seat, eat and return to work. The type of work must be considered too. Workers performing hot, exhausting labour need more time to rest. Industrial workers need extra time to change from their protective clothing and wash.

The proposed food solution must fit the time allocation. Voucher use may require more than a 30-minute meal break, or else the company will find the employee bringing food back to the workstation to eat. Building a canteen that cannot serve workers quickly, or that does not have enough seats, is a poor investment. Crowded canteens or mess rooms can accommodate workers better

if the lunch hour is staggered. If management holds firm on short breaks, then unions and workers must petition for food solutions that work within this context. In Chapter 6 we present a case study of a rose farm in Kenya that provides a two-hour midday break because it is simply too hot to work. Another manufacturer in Kenya built a mess room so that workers do not have to walk several kilometres for street food; and workers accepted a cut in the meal break (now 35 minutes) so that they could leave earlier at the end of the day.

Workers naturally must be allowed to utilize the time given to them for the meal break. Workers at hospitals or those who deal with the public, such as clerks and operators, often cannot leave for a break until another worker is available to replace them. Their break is sometimes shortened or completely eliminated. Other workers feel pressure to work through lunch, eating at their desks. Still others – as a result of understaffing, impossible targets, piece-work pay, forced overtime or harassment – cannot stop for a meal. Employers must remove such barriers to proper nutrition, and unions must remain diligent in demanding that the break times secured in collective bargaining are a reality for workers.

3.3.3 Comfort and accessibility

Canteens and mess rooms can offer workers a place to relax and bond; they should be within safe walking distance from the work area, offer affordable food, and be sheltered from the weather. In Singapore, workers revamped the Glaxo Wellcome Manufacturing cafeteria to create a more pleasant, relaxing atmosphere with a greater selection of healthy foods. Without it, workers would have at least a 20-minute round trip to a restaurant or street food vendor, which would significantly cut into their 40-minute meal break. The Musselwhite Mine in Canada has special refuge stations underground to provide a clean, quiet, safe and convenient spot for lunch and breaks. Workers have a place to change clothes and wash before eating. Without it, workers would have to return to the surface and travel across the mine to the canteen, which would take some time. These two examples, the subject of case studies in subsequent chapters, demonstrate how properly designed dining areas can help workers maximize their time to enjoy a meal.

Regardless of the time allotted for a break, the food service must be accessible. Workers with physical handicaps or other impairments should not be forced to travel far for a meal. Workers should not be expected to travel across busy areas of traffic or through dangerous parts of town. Special consideration must be given to shiftworkers and to night workers, who toil after hours when the canteen or local stores are closed. Vending machines stocked with nutritious meals are one solution here. Yet shift work and night work can have adverse effects on the heart and digestive health

(Spurgeon, 2003). Employers must be aware of the toll of prolonged shift work or night work and its interference with natural biorhythms, rest and the body's ability to absorb nutrients from food; and they must act accordingly, with regular health examinations, and provide ways for shiftworkers and night workers to eat wholesome meals. Workers on the road, such as truck drivers and sales people, are usually left on their own to find food. They often have little time or resources to eat properly each day. Meal vouchers can help ensure the worker has the funds to secure a proper meal. These vouchers are a signal from the employer that proper meals and rest are important.

Health education can help these workers understand which foods to eat and which to avoid.

3.4 Marginalized employees

3.4.1 *Non-core workers*

Policy-makers and union representatives cannot assume that all workers work during “business hours” at the same location each day or that all workers at a single location share the same entitlements. Aside from shiftworkers, night workers and mobile workers mentioned above, there are temporary workers, migrant workers, day labourers, part-time workers, contractors who perform non-core work such as cleaning and catering, and contractors who perform core work such as accounting and computer support; and their numbers are growing.

Consider the situation in the United Kingdom in the 1990s when large-scale and widespread redundancies led to increased outsourcing and subcontracting. This fragmented the workforce and affected workers' contractual entitlements, culminating in fewer core staff (permanently employed with entitlement to job security and benefits) and more “peripheral” workers (precariously employed with a different and usually inferior set of benefits). In the United States many government facilities are largely staffed by contracted workers hired by myriad contractors who compete for government contracts. American government workers have benefits such as public transportation vouchers that many contracted workers are denied; and it would not be surprising to find a situation in which contracted or temporary workers have inferior access to meal vouchers or other meal arrangements, such as a canteen discount.

At any given workplace, all employees must have equal access to meals and rest. Employees working outside business hours should be able to benefit from meal vouchers, access to safe food storage, or access to vending facilities. Day labourers should benefit from meal vouchers, local catering, safe food storage or access to safe street foods (see Chapter 7). Migrant farm workers should benefit from temporary shelters to eat, safe places to store food and

access to clean water to drink and wash. Migrant factory workers from rural areas living in urban slums should benefit from two or three meals each day at the factory because they often have little means to store or cook food in their ramshackle dwellings. Ensuring proper nutrition for the multitude of marginalized workers is a great challenge but nevertheless paramount due to the sheer number of those who find themselves in such a category.

3.4.2 Gender

Female workers sometimes have specific nutritional needs not met at work. Women of child-bearing age are at risk of low blood iron as a result of poor nutrition coupled with menstrual bleeding. Adequate nutrition before, during and after pregnancy is crucial for healthy babies, a nation's future. Folic acid is one key nutrient required before and during pregnancy to prevent certain birth defects. Pregnancy and nursing make enormous demands on the body, and women need extra calories and additional rest during these periods. Safe food and water become all the more important during pregnancy. Access to healthy foods during pregnancy and nursing, as well as the right to nurse at work, will help ensure better health for the baby (cognitive and physical development) and mother (protection against osteoporosis and other diseases.) Women working through menopause sometimes must increase their fluid intake to combat dehydration or hot flushes brought on by hormonal changes.

In general women are more susceptible than men are to anaemia and osteoporosis; iron- and calcium-rich foods, respectively, can help ward off these diseases. Women do not necessarily require fewer calories than men. Many women must work at work and at home; and the work at home (carrying water, cleaning, gathering fuel) can consume a significant amount of calories. Employers who provide just enough calories for their employees to get through work may find their workforce chronically tired and unproductive as a result of insufficient nutrients and calories.

3.5 Occupational safety and hygiene

Malnutrition will make workers lethargic, mentally and physically, which increases the chance of workplace accidents. Contaminated food or water can sometimes sicken workers within minutes and can also lead to falls, spills or other accidents that can kill or injure a large number of workers. Employers must approach nutrition as they would other aspects of occupational safety and health. Food and water and dining areas must be free of chemicals or other hazards that could be ingested. Workers need facilities with soap and water to wash before eating. Food and water must be stored in suitable containers

intended for food storage. Food handlers must understand the principles of proper hygiene. If employers do not offer a canteen, they must learn about the local food providers (street vendors, restaurant owners) and take special precautions to ensure food safety if necessary, such as providing vendors with access to clean water. A bout of food poisoning from one meal can sicken an entire workforce and could be as deadly as a toxic spill. Workers at the garment factory Kukdong in Mexico went on strike in part because of rotten food that made them sick. In Uganda, sugar-cane harvesters quarrelled with the cook over bad food. Food quality is an important concern among workers.

Workers working outdoors need protection from the elements. Some, but clearly not all, construction sites set up clean tents or trailers for the construction workers to escape the cold, heat or dirt of the construction site. As relayed in Chapter 7, construction workers often have poor access to proper meals and rest. In summary, workers have a right to protection from heat, cold, rain, workplace chemicals, noise and other workplace hazards during the meal break.

3.6 Special diets

Workers on special diets for health or religious reasons often are faced with a limited selection of food options at work. Employers need to understand the dietary needs of the employees, whether these workers refrain from meat products, pork, foods high in salt, fat or cholesterol, or foods that might cause an allergic reaction. Culture often dictates when one can eat as well as what one can eat. Muslim workers, for example, fast from dawn to dusk during the month-long period of Ramadan. Understanding these needs will help employers with food provision, labelling and timing. Workers with HIV/AIDS and other conditions that suppress the immune system are particularly vulnerable to colds, flu and more serious diseases; proper nutrition and foods free from pathogens (bacteria, parasites) are very important. HIV/AIDS affects over 25 per cent of adults in certain regions of sub-Saharan Africa; and millions more are infected in India, China and other parts of Asia, making this a pressing workplace concern.

3.7 International equality

The ILO has consistently advocated for international standards so that workers everywhere can enjoy the same rights. Multinational corporations can help in this regard too. An instructive example is the Nike code of conduct for subcontractors, featured in the Chapter 4 case study on Tae Kwang Vina in Viet Nam. Employers are more willing to invest in meal plan improvements knowing that their competitors must make similar improvements.

Progress has been made on the workers' nutrition front. A few governments, most notably Austria, Canada and Singapore, each highlighted in this publication, have established programmes to help businesses provide workers with access to nutritious foods during working hours. Some businesses on their own, too, have come to understand the value of a properly fed workforce and have made improvements. The following chapters in this publication highlight a multitude of food solutions. There is no single solution for all enterprises, no "one size fits all". As stated in the 1956 ILO Recommendation No. 102, food solutions may entail a canteen, a trolley, or a mess room. Some companies now offer meal vouchers, another food solution. In some places street vending is emerging as a solution.

This chapter began with a demonstration of how practical the workplace is for addressing the topic of nutrition. Whether this realization is a key priority difficult to tell. The WHO *Global strategy on diet, physical activity and health*, published in 2004, allocates only 60 words to the topic:

Workplaces are important settings for health promotion and disease prevention. People need to be given the opportunity to make healthy choices in the workplace in order to reduce their exposure to risk. Further, the cost to employers of morbidity attributed to non-communicable diseases is increasing rapidly. Workplaces should make possible healthful food choices and support and encourage physical activity. (WHO, 2004b)

The WHO provides no guidance beyond this. *The Fifth Report on the World Nutrition Situation*, published in 2004 by the United Nations System Committee on Nutrition, is a 143-page document and it makes no mention of the workplace whatsoever (United Nations, 2004). Little information is available in the scientific or business literature.

Chapters 4 to 8 contain case studies of food solutions involving canteens, vouchers, mess rooms and kitchenettes, and local vendors, respectively. Chapter 9 contains solutions to an often-overlooked issue in nutrition, access to clean water. These case studies serve as a snapshot of current provision and by no means represent industries or countries in their entirety. The reader may notice a hierarchy among food solutions. This is unavoidable. Canteens and vouchers are usually a more advanced social benefit compared with mess rooms and access to safe street foods. Canteens serve large enterprises quite well; and they are difficult for smaller enterprises to maintain because of the investment and maintenance costs involved. Vouchers cut across enterprise size. Investment will improve food solutions, but much can be accomplished with small budgets.

Figures 3.2 and 3.3 provide graphical representations of the practicality of various food solutions depending on an enterprise's budget and location.

Figure 3.2 The food solution continuum. Investments in infrastructure or food subsidy will improve any food solution, leading to a range of effectiveness

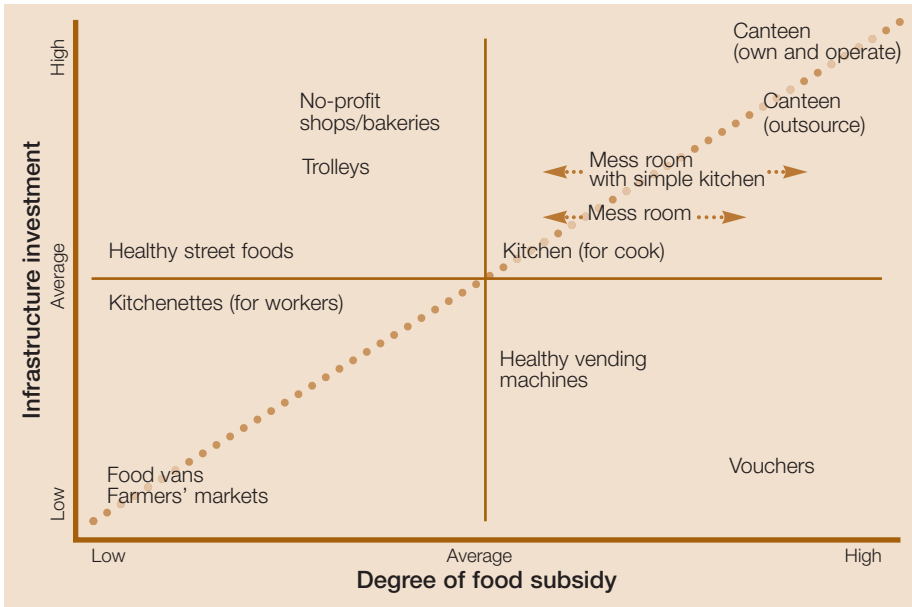
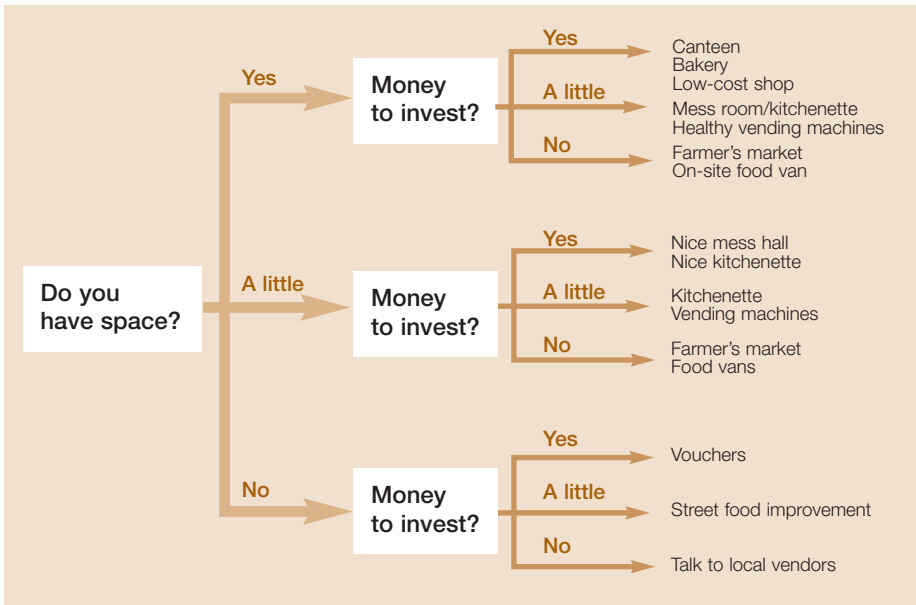


Figure 3.3 Decisions on food solutions might come down to budget and space



Food at work: Workplace solutions for malnutrition, obesity and chronic diseases

The first depicts the food solution “continuum”. The second sums up an employer’s choice with two questions: Is there space? What’s the budget? Following this, we begin the case studies.