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## Work-Life Balance



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## Developing an Organisational Strategy for Work-Life Balance

Enabling employees to achieve a balance between their working lives and their lives outside work is a crucial issue facing employers today. A traditional view of employers would see them as being focussed on cost and productivity, but in today's society the wider view – one that addresses the issue of employee well-being, is necessary for the achievement of corporate and individual goals.

What does the term work-life balance mean, what benefits does a work-life balance strategy offer to organisations and how can they then in turn develop a working culture that supports it? These and related questions were posed and debated at a meeting of the European Enterprise for Health Network, which took place in London in April 2002. The Enterprise for Health Network (EfH) is an international network of companies developed in Germany by the Bertelsmann Foundation and the Federal Association of Company Health Funds (BKK) under the Chairmanship of EfH President Rita Süßmuth. The aim of the Network is to promote discussion and debate on issues surrounding the adoption of corporate cultures based on partnership and company health policies.

Increased pressure in the workplace resulting from issues such as globalisation, restructuring, increased competition, and organisational downsizing and rightsizing, can create a dilemma for both employers and employees, namely, which comes first, work or home life?

*Gisela Erler*, Director of *PME Familienservice GmbH (Germany)* – the largest work-life programme provider for companies on the Continent, addressed this issue in her keynote presentation. In Europe, work-life balance is slowly emerging as an issue in business and society. This is happening in the context of globalisation with all the well-known changes to the world of work and impacts on employees and their families (continuous restructuring, layoffs and increasing pressures at work). On the other hand, employees are being seen as more valuable and more difficult to replace: private needs are becoming more legitimate and the power of the individual employee is increasing. Taken together with the fact that there will be a scarcity of labour in the future ("war for talents"), these issues are noted as being the drivers for the adoption of working practices which promote a better work-life balance. Legislation is another often unrecognised driver. In the US it has been primarily legislation on equal opportunities, in Europe, it has been associated

with efforts to implement anti-discrimination laws. Although not always popular, legislation has put pressure on employers to take work-life balance issues more seriously.

Retention and recruitment strategies of companies are challenged by profound socio-demographic changes (ageing workforce and low birthrates, scarcity of high-qualified employees, more feminine and ethnically mixed workforce). This has initiated a new thinking about work-life issues. Management has to be aware of the different needs of the different individual employees in order to optimize investments in human resources.

Research in the USA clearly shows that work-life policies have an impact on retention, motivation and productivity. Another aspect is related to product innovation in the context of increasingly diverse markets. Companies need to have a high level of workforce diversity in order to compete successfully in diverse markets.

### What response can companies make?

Many companies have started to organise external support mechanisms including the provision of child care resources (also in-house), backup care (emergency resources in case regular child care does not work) and referral systems, they give support in the area of care of the elderly and offer

employee assistance programmes. The level and characteristics of company support strongly depends on the quality of public care systems and the respective national infrastructure.

However it would appear that providing many external support mechanisms, will only touch the surface of the problem. A fundamental culture change is necessary to bring about sustainable improvement in employee well-being as there is a clear link between well organised work, job autonomy and positive family climate. This *Gisela Erler* argued, means that companies need to address issues such as flexible work arrangements, diversity, employee resilience, work overload and burnout from within.

Culture change means that work-life policies are strongly supported from top-down and are regarded as an integral part of management with setting and communicating clear goals. *Gisela Erler* referred to available tools which support daily management of work-life issues in practice. Issues which need to be addressed include working time, work flows and job contents, the workplace environment, the information and communication policy adopted, leadership qualities, development of human resources and remuneration components.

# Experience from Corporate Practice

Work undertaken at **GlaxoSmithKline** (UK) *GSK* has resulted in the development of a new approach to employee health and well-being that is focused on building organisational and individual resilience and therefore on supporting work-life balance.

## At a Corporate level:

The company has identified a number of “Leadership Essentials”: Performance with integrity, people with passion, innovation and entrepreneurship, a sense of urgency, everyone committed everyone contributing, accountability for achievement, alignment with *GSK* interests and developing self and others. Individual performance targets are set and reviewed against these.

Employee Health Management Department within Corporate Human Resources Employee Health Management’s mission is to protect the health of people through effective and efficient risk management, enhance individual and organisational capability and productivity, integrate health considerations into business processes and work culture to enhance individual and company success and enable *GSK* to achieve the highest legal and ethical standards.

3 success factors have been identified namely the effective use of population health measures to identify priorities and drive targeted interventions: the identification of organisational issues that are barriers to health, resilience and productivity and the ability to identify and mobilize multi-disciplinary resources to work collaboratively to address health-related issues.

One of the tools used by *GSK* to improve health and obtain accurate group information is a Health Risk Appraisal. This enables employees’ health and lifestyle risks, health education needs/interests and their readiness to change behaviour to be identified. It focuses on the areas that have the biggest potential health impact on people’s professional performance and allows health promotion interventions and programmes to be tailor-made for employee populations.

The integration of this approach to the corporate culture and fabric of the organisation contrasts sharply with the more traditional lifestyle approach to workplace health promotion in which specific topics such as smoking, the management of stress or exercise for example are seen as “bolt-on” accessories.

As Sue Cruse, *GSK*’s Manager Employee Health Support, UK stated there are a number of business reasons for acting on work-life issues in an integrative way. These include: issues of recruitment and retention, addressing an ageing workforce and increasing employee motivation and loyalty.

She continued by highlighting several programmes implemented by *GSK* to support Work-Life Balance including Flexible Work Options and as the “Team Resilience” programme, which helps managers and employees understand the relationship between work/organisational and individual factors and individual and team performance. It leads teams to consider work-redesign, where appropriate. *GSK* has been able to demonstrate the impact of the Team Resilience work in terms of satisfaction and improved team results.

In describing his experience, *Carl-Sylvius von Falkenhausen* of **Ruhrigas AG** (*Germany*), one of the leading gas trading companies in Europe, highlighted the increasing importance of family-friendly policies in working life in Germany. To facilitate experienced and qualified mothers’ return to work, *Ruhrigas* has devised a system of employee/family-friendly working time models. These include over 170 individual arrangements such as daily reduction of working time, all day work on a few days, weekly change of working time and switching between morning and afternoon work.

In addition *Ruhrigas* offers a number of health and leisure activities to enhance employee health and well-being. These include the development of a healthcare programme for all employees and medical screening for managers over the age of 40. The company has in place a relief fund that provides employees with support in the form of an allowance in the event of illness, hardship or emergencies and also for special family events such as marriage or births. There is also an enthusiastic sports community and approx. 2 000 employees – and this corresponds to 80% of the workforce – are active in corporate sports clubs.

*Ruhrigas* takes its corporate social responsibility seriously, supporting employees involved in social projects and/or other relief campaigns (i.e. “Flood Aid”) by releasing them from work (after the assignment has been discussed and approved by the company). *Ruhrigas* also sponsors a variety of cultural events.

**REWE** is a large retail company based in Germany, consisting of many small operating units. The company has introduced a programme entitled Living better with work, the purpose of which is to shape work to enable employees to live better. As 76% of *REWE*’s employees are women, one of the programme’s functions is to help women combine working life and family life positively. Dieter Steinborn presented research results of an analysis, which had identified the problems faced by women in work.

*REWE* have also developed many different forms of working time arrangements for example the tandem model of job sharing in which employees work one week on and one week off. This has benefits for the company as it is able to call on the other half of the job share if, for any reason one person is not able to work. Individually tailored suggestions for job sharing are welcomed and where possible implemented. When running weekend training seminars in hotels specific childcare arrangements are put in place.

The company also intends to improve through management training, social skills and competence to enable managers to better address employee needs. *REWE* has an enterprise philosophy that aims to integrate the needs of economy with environmental and human requirements, and then find a balance that makes it possible to live better with work.





# From Practitioners for Practitioners – Successful Examples from Corporate Practice

**Hilti AG**, the Liechtenstein tool manufacturer is an example of an organisation whose employees have a voice in how they structure their working day. *Peter Hauenstein*, Head of Corporate Human Resources described how directly responsible teams manage their working hours themselves by using a whole range of shift patterns that make up to 40 hours a week. He questioned whether work-life balance is just a current fashionable topic as staff attitude surveys have revealed that employees in *Hilti* are extremely satisfied with their environment and the content of their work and yet more than a third of the workforce still say that they are unhappy with their work-life balance. In the perception of some employees, stress levels are still fairly significant.

In one survey, top Management in *Hilti* felt that work-life balance was not a major issue, a sample group of management-level employees felt that it was a minor issue and only HR management considered it a significant problem. *Peter Hauenstein* pointed out that perspectives on the topic of work-life balance vary hugely and because of this it is not easy for some to consider it to be an essential part of the business case.

However, *Hilti's* People Strategy emphasises that individuals are primarily responsible for their own personal development and ensuing action. Although the company offers support and direction, it is individuals themselves who are responsible for directing their own lives. New challenges

and experiencing pressure often dictate how employees manage their own work-life balance and companies such as *Hilti* often use employee surveys to assess how employees respond to such pressures. However, it is still the employees' responsibility to manage that pressure in a way that suits both themselves and the organisation.

**Zakład Energetyczny** is a utility company in Poland with headquarters in Toruń where the company employs some 1 400 staff. *Wiesław Szurmiej*, the Head of Human Resources demonstrated the close relationship between employee welfare and effectiveness in work. There is an extremely high level of pride in the company by the employees and this has grown as investment in employee care has increased. For example, Zakład have an extensive staff care programme that includes such things as:

- A comprehensive vaccination programme
- Women's mammography programme that has a 100% take-up rate
- Sports activities arranged for employees and their families
- Compulsory five year medical examinations for managers
- Holidays for employees' children.

The organisation also demonstrates a commitment to a range of wider community activities and pro-environment issues.

**Lagunaro-Mondragon** (Spain) is a co-operative that gives support in health and safety to about 100 member co-operatives, that are self-managed and self-governed. *Joseba Erauskin* and *Julian Valmaseda* used the **Maier Group** as an example of the co-operative to demonstrate good practice in work-life balance.

The *Maier Group* designs and manufactures parts for the automotive industry in Spain, Britain and Brazil and has an extremely strong Health and Safety focus. As a co-operative, the employees through the General Assembly decide the working patterns for

themselves to best meet the demands of the business. A whole range of health care and welfare programmes have been implemented for the workers. These range from the provision of pharmacies and hospitals to social security type benefits.

The Co-operative is a totally unique concept in work organisation and as the employees are also the owners of the co-operative, with a strong involvement in the decision-making process, the concern about quality of working life is the responsibility of every worker and is one of the fundamental core values of the group.





# From Practitioners for Practitioners – Successful Examples from Corporate Practice

**HÅG**, the Norwegian Office Furniture manufacturer has developed a wide-ranging approach to deal with the issue of work-life balance which complements national government policy. One of the key issues described by *Kirsti Vandraas* was that of maternity/paternity leave. In this context parental leave can be split between parents, which brings benefits to them as well as to their employers. The Norwegian Government is seeking to enable parents to remain at home with young children.

On the issue of work-life balance, she pointed out that at **HÅG**, managers have a responsibility to ensure that an employees' workload is appropriate. The annual work-climate analysis (WCA) is a review mechanism in which an employee's performance across a number of indicators is scored. The Results of the WCA are used in the strategy processes of the company; to make the managers aware of the climate in their department compared to the rest of the company; to identify areas for improvement in each department; as a basis for budgeting.

Receiving low scores would indicate that a manager is not dealing with work organisation and the allocation of tasks in an appropriate manner.

The Company provides support to employees to help them and their families maintain a healthy work life balance. *Kirsti Vandraas* emphasised that Norwegian Companies must remain competitive and that one outcome of a caring approach to employee relations is that employees feel valued and act responsibly in return.

**Caixa Geral de Depositos**, a major Portuguese Bank, places a high value on work-life balance. In an analysis of working time the Bank found that the number of hours worked each day rose according to managerial level – people at higher levels working longer hours than those at a lower level. *Manuela Neto* and *Cecilia Duarte* outlined the measures being implemented by the Bank to promote a healthy work-life balance. These included the introduction of “flexible working hours” (154 per month), the provision of support to employees who have to care for other family members – up to one month off, and the introduction of a health and well-being programme which includes the promotion of sport and exercise.

Managers are being encouraged to implement management by objectives, avoiding a “workaholics” culture, encouraging set working hours and creating conditions for professional re-adaptation.

A study has been undertaken examining employees' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, health and work. The study indicated a number of needs. These included – as far as employees were concerned – the need to reconcile work and family life, in particular for women on how to deal with the sometimes conflicting pressures exerted by work and the family and for men the need to take time off when children were ill. Older employees would like a reduction in working hours in the period leading up to their retirement. All the employees who responded to the survey indicated that flexible working hours and access to sporting activities were desirable.

The experience of **StoraEnso** (Finland) was provided by *Paavo Jäppinen*. He indicated that in many countries in which *StoraEnso* operates legislation relating to work-life balance is already in place – sickness absence, maternity and paternity leave etc. He commented on the changing role of the trade unions who are recognising that well-being and social issues have more focus and importance in collective bargaining processes than before. He indicated that *StoraEnso* is developing its position of social responsibility on three core elements, namely, business ethics, diversity and employee well-being & health and safety.

The company is as always ever conscious of the need to retain a “competitive edge”, and that a positive corporate image is beneficial in attracting and retaining the right people for the organisation.

He then focused on the measure implemented by the Company to promote a healthy work-life balance. These included flexible working time, part-time pension arrangements enabling older employees to reduce their working time, sliding daily working hours, extended maternity leave and the opportunity for employees to take a sabbatical year. However there are country-specific differences in the implementation of these measures, due to local legislation and agreements. The company also has a wide range of more general workplace health promotion measures in place, including individual ergonomic assessments, job rotation schemes, rehabilitation activities for employees, an employee assistance programme at the U.S. mills and similar activities in other parts of the company, as well as a number of free time activities.

**HÅG**

**Caixa Geral de Depositos**

**STORAENSO**

# Practical Consequences

## 1 Work-life balance: a core area for workplace partnership and corporate health

**The examples of best practice in work-life balance in these organisations led the network to establish a number of key factors to be discussed when debating the issue of work-life balance. These were:**

Work-life balance is a core area for inclusion in a corporate culture based on partnership. The understanding of work-life balance issues has moved from addressing the needs of mothers and families to responding to every employees individual social responsibilities and ties throughout their working lives. Companies who recognise and respect the different needs of different employees at different stages in life are best positioned and prepared to meet the challenges of the many changes to the world of work.

## 2 Work-life balance in the context of a diverse workforce

Corporate work-life policies should always reflect and be responsive to specific national and local circumstances; e.g. different welfare systems with different supportive public care infrastructures in the context of different labour market situations, result in differing needs with corresponding corporate support practices. Sociodemographic changes and changes to the labour markets are reflected in increasingly diverse workforces in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, family, health and lifestyle status. These differences lead to a diversity of individual needs to which work-life balance policies have to respond.

## 3 Culture change – fundamental for sustainable work-life practices in companies

Companies can organize a broad range of external support mechanisms providing care and other resources to specific needs of the workforce. If these activities shall have a substantial impact on important business targets (retention, recruitment, employee motivation and performance), they must be grounded on culture change which adopts a partnership approach. Furthermore, for work-life balance to be implemented successfully it needs to be an integral part of the management system. Only on this basis can investments in work-life balance be seen to be contributing to the business case.

Finally, work-life balance practices should not only consider balance in terms of employees and their families but also consider the wider impact on society and the environment. Companies who facilitate the involvement of their employees in community activities not only demonstrate their social responsibility but also strengthen social networks in a wider sense, in turn contributing to a higher level of employability of the workforce.