



The “family-friendly” workplace

Implementing “family-friendly” policies is a business strategy with a dual agenda of creating a win-win situation for achieving both organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. Some measures may be costly for the employer, but also smaller cost-efficient, family-friendly initiatives can make a big difference for the enterprise and its staff and positively affect the bottom line of the business.

This Information Sheet considers some of the major business benefits that can be gained from implementing family-friendly practices in the workplace. It also gives a brief overview of different family-friendly measures and how they can be successfully implemented in the workplace.

What is “family-friendly”?

The family-friendly employer recognizes the family responsibilities of employees and accepts that such responsibilities can have an impact on employees’ working lives. A family-friendly organization tries to facilitate the reconciliation between work and family responsibilities for its staff and to make them feel supported in balancing their work and outside

work commitments. Being a family-friendly organization goes beyond being just child- or women-friendly, and under the wider “work-life” concept, many employers now recognize the importance of making “family-friendly” arrangements available to all employees, not just those with care responsibilities.

Creating a win-win situation

Benefits for staff

For the staff, some of the most important benefits of family-friendly practices are:

- Decreased stress caused by reducing conflicts between work and family responsibilities;
- A more supportive and positive working environment where each person is valued and needed, also contributing to making team work easier and more efficient;
- Increased job satisfaction and morale that can make employees more committed to their job, more cooperative, loyal, productive and innovative.

Employee satisfaction

The annual employee satisfaction survey of a Singaporean hospital showed the positive impact of the hospital’s “family-friendly” initiatives in terms of increased job satisfaction: 56% of the employees found that they help to reduce work-related stress; 66% felt more energized and motivated to help the organization; and 66% felt a greater sense of job satisfaction after introducing the “family-friendly” initiatives. Over 90% of the staff found the initiatives a help in better balancing work and family.

Source: The official website of the Ministry of Community Development and Sports, Singapore (<http://www.mcads.gov.sg>).

Benefits for employer

Some of the most important benefits employers can derive from family-friendly practices are that they can help to:

- Enhance the capacity to attract a broader range of candidates and retain high-quality employees, both men and women, in a competitive job market;
- Reduce staff turnover, which can lower the costs of recruitment, induction and training associated with the replacement of leavers;
- Reduce absenteeism and lateness;
- Enhance performance and motivation among employees and improve productivity;
- Create and maintain a competitive edge and innovation contributing to improved competitiveness.

Employer benefits

The managers in a pharmaceutical company in the United Kingdom were able to identify six people who had stayed in the company due to “family-friendly” offers at virtually no cost to the business. This had saved direct replacement costs of £7,500 per person; a total of £45,000 in one year. The same company reported that staff turnover had fallen by 15 per cent due to the improved atmosphere and positive responses to family-friendly practices.

Source: S. Dench; S. Bevan; P. Tamkin and J. Cummings: “Family-friendly employment: Its importance to small and medium enterprises”, in *Labour Market Trends*, Vol. 108, No. 3, March 2000, pp 111-120.

“Family-friendly” measures

Family-friendly arrangements are tied to the work itself and refer to arrangements in work systems and processes targeted at achieving work-family balance for the staff in their daily work. Such arrangements cover a range of options, including:

- Working hour arrangements (such as flexible working hours, part time, job-sharing, work from home and telecommuting);
- Child- and elder care (such as workplace nurseries or subsidies for childcare, breastfeeding facilities, workplace support for employees taking care of a family member, telephone to use for family reasons);
- Statutory and non-statutory leave (for reasons such as family emergencies, maternity, career breaks, illness or care of family members, etc.);
- Information services and training (information kits, information on policies, contact during leave, courses and workshops, etc.).

Specific measures related to working time arrangements and leave are presented in detail in Information Sheet No. WF-5 on family-friendly working time and Information Sheet No. WF-6 on leave and family responsibilities.

Achieving the “family-friendly” workplace

Implementation process

Being family-friendly is more than having a set of practices recorded in the organization’s rules and regulations: a commitment to these practices and a work culture supporting the values of work-life balance and encouraging the use of the practices is critical when successfully putting family-friendly policies into practice. Ongoing communication and employee participation in the design of the policies are essential for making the policies efficient in practice.

Using the practices themselves, high-level management can show their commitment and support to family-friendly measures and encourage their use among staff. Suitable training and guidance for line managers, who often have responsibility for implementing the measures, is also important for take-up rates and ensuring that these measures are used appropriately.

Each workplace is unique in terms of needs. The challenge when successfully implementing family-friendly practices is to meet the needs of the organization with those of its staff. A needs assessment is essential as a starting point for designing policies and practices derived from the need picture of the workplace and to target them to the varied needs of

the staff. The perceived equity of the policy programme among the staff is highly important for the acceptability of the practice. Childcare arrangements, for instance, may not be perceived as a benefit among staff without children. For this reason, many workplaces have introduced a so-called “cafeteria approach” for their benefits plans, allowing employees to choose the benefits most suitable for their needs among a fixed set of benefits.

Although some family-friendly measures are not expensive, many involve some costs. When undertaking the cost-benefit analysis of family-friendly programmes, an immediate short-term focus on the cost must be carefully weighed and balanced against longer-term benefits for the business. Adopting a longer-term perspective is essential, since not all family-friendly practices can be expected to produce immediate benefits at the beginning.

Putting family-friendly policies into practice should be seen as an ongoing and evolving process. Evaluation and review of the content of policies or practices becomes important since needs of staff and business objectives, as well as the external environment, constantly change and will have to be taken into consideration.

Shared responsibility

Developing work and family arrangements is about agreement making. A dialogue between management, employees and their representatives is important when developing practices so that they are tailored to the needs of both the staff and the organization. Making the enterprise family-friendly is most

effective when it is seen as a shared responsibility. Finding workable solutions requires collaboration and commitment from both sides. Trade unions can play an important role at the workplace by encouraging and supporting family-friendly collective agreements.



Promoting equality

Family-friendly work arrangements can improve the potential for equality of opportunity between men and women by reducing the interruption of careers, most often those of women due to caring responsibilities. They can also help men achieve a more active involvement in family life and facilitate a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men. Thus, family-

friendly arrangements are not just for women. When designing family-friendly arrangements, it is important to have a comprehensive view of the “family”, extending beyond childcare responsibilities of women, to include any person dependent upon any staff member (male or female) for care and support, such as an elder dependant or a disabled partner.

Checklist

- Promote family-friendly strategies in your organization.
- Survey the business needs.
- Survey the workforce to find out what the needs are.
- Identify and obtain general agreement on the aim of the family-friendly programme.
- Engage employees at an early stage in the process and listen to their views.
- Collaborate with trade unions to encourage family-friendly policies.
- Demonstrate/document both business and employee benefits.
- Include a long-term perspective when weighing benefits against costs for implementation.
- Provide relevant information so that everyone can take part in the policies.
- Clarify and agree eligibility criteria, e.g. which staff have a priority claim on the provisions made?
- Establish channels for open and ongoing communication.
- Make sure that information on practices is available to everyone in the organization.
- Ensure that top management sets the example.
- Provide support and relevant training to managers throughout the organization.