BENEFITS FROM THE SIDE OF EMPLOYER TO SUPPORT WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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Abstract: *The article presents the current reality in the area of paid workforce in order to draw attention to the need of dealing with the issues of balance between work and family life. It points at the changes in the nature of workforce that has taken place in the course of last decades in the industrial countries. It also deals with the issue of interconnecting work and family from the point of view of chosen theories, thus also pointing at the possible conflict sources between these systems. Attention has also been paid to the role and possibilities of employing organisations when creating policies focused on the support of work and private life.*

Keywords: *family, employer, employee, conflict, work-life balance.*

JEL Classification: *M525, I31*

1. INTRODUCTION

For Slovakia as well as other countries, the period from the end of World War II up to now has been marked by several social-political changes leaving marks on the society functioning and having significantly influenced the formation of human sources and functioning of labour market. After the World War II, science and art have started to develop promisingly and dynamically. Development of research in the area of science has become an essential precondition for scientific and technical revolution. It can be said that since 1950, under the influence of social, political and economic changes, , the nature of workforce in the industrial countries has started to change dramatically and it is still developing. Since that time, the proportion of women in the paid workforce has increased considerably. The main reasons are assumed to be the following: increasing rate of women education, which supports the proportion within the workforce; decreasing birth rate, which increases the availability of women for the labour market; increasing drive to succeed, and economic needs [9].

Over the last decades, not only the number of women working has increased, but the structure and characteristics of families have significantly changed, along with the attitude towards masculine family role. The above mentioned social and economic changes have had noticeable influence on the family structure, demography and characteristics of families. Today, changes of family roles are typical – the dominant position of father is retreating, mothers devote more time to their professional career, functions of family (social-educational function has been partially taken over by schools and other institutions), and the size of the family [12]. In many countries there is an increased number of childless couples, families with one parent, families with children from previous marriages, and homosexual couples, as a result of family transformation. One of the most notable changes in family has been the growing number of households where both partners have been working on their work career. The number of people combining work and family duties has increased as well, which results from the number of women in the labour market and the increasing desire of men to spend more time with their children [9]. In the current European society, finding balance among work, family, and life style has become important. Organisations, especially in the private sector and industries with prevailing women employees, are getting adjusted to the needs of their workers by implementing framework of balance between work and life. That brings about economic assets predominantly perceived in the area of workforce effectiveness [4]. Therefore, this article focuses on the issue of harmonization of work and private life. It is viewed via roles which people take throughout their lives. It points at the interconnection of work-life as a source of possible conflict. Subsequently, it deals with particular formal supports of employing organisations aimed at supporting the harmonization of work and private life of their employees.

2. CONFLICT OF ROLES: SOURCES OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

People in their lives takes several roles. They can be workers, parents, students, volunteers, etc. at the same time. In each of them it is possible to ask, what a person wants to reach. What they want to reach for example as parents, or as employees. However, to reach their goals, sources such as time and energy are necessary. The idea of work-life balance is thus based on the presumption that these sources (time and energy) are limited. Put in another way, transferring sources into a role necessarily means that they are limited or even unavailable for other roles. That can potentially create a conflict among roles [3]. Generally, role conflict is a situation when a person does not adequately identify with performing a role (for example, in the work area), they begin to fail at it, and thus he consequently fails at performing other roles (e.g. in personal life). The fact that in many modern societies, happiness and inner content of a person are currently perceived as a result of successful participating in various roles "adds" to the role conflict. Healthy lifestyle as one in which people are able to find time for exercise, relax and fun, for preparing healthy meals, is still more and more promoted. Yet in real life few employees successfully reach such balance. Many have to juggle with their duties and sometimes they are forced to

make unsatisfactory compromises like eating semi-finished products, reducing time spent exercising or relaxing, relying on the paid childcare, or omitting important family events [9]. Work-life balance can be thus perceived as supporting the effort of employees to divide their time and energy among work and other important aspects of their lives. The effort of employees to reach such balance thus presents everyday effort to find time for family, friends, social activities, mental and personal development, selfcare and other personal activities, apart from demands imposed upon them by their workplace [6].

In fact, the more emphasis one puts to taking part in several roles, the more likely they will feel stress and strain if these systems (work and family) get into conflict. In connection with the above-mentioned, Greenhous et al. Focused on finding "contributions" i.e. that what contributes to the arousal of work-family conflicts. They state two types of direct predictors: 1/ *predictors on the time basis* constituting commitments relating to the duty being carried out, i.e. amount of time spent engaged in a certain area (e.g. in connection to work it can be the number of hours spent at work, working overtime, night shifts, etc), 2/ *predictors on the strain basis* where e.g. insecurity of employment, time and work load causing anxiety and dissatisfaction when carrying out a certain task can be included (cit. as in [9]; 86). Time spent commuting to/from work, bringing work home and unsupportive home environment can all be considered as work-life conflict predictors. It is therefore obvious that stressful experiences arising in one area of life (e.g. work) can cause the effect of negative mood which is then "transferred" to another area of life (e.g. family area) [7]. Work-family conflicts almost always take their toll in the form of reduced well-being, increased stress level or increased fatigue. Excessive stress can decrease the effectiveness of an employee and thus can endanger the performance of organisation, causing various physical or mental diseases, and it can result in the inability of coping with work demands, which can subsequently cause even more stress [1]. Generally, these are the reasons why organisations should not consider stress of their employees a minor issue. The effort to establish work-life balance not only decreases the amount of stress employees feel, but it also gives them a feeling that all important aspects of their lives are dealt with. Nevertheless, reaching many of their needs, either personal or professional or financial, tends to be quite demanding.

3. INTERCONNECTING OF WORK AND FAMILY LIFE

Several research studies have been conducted over the past few years in the area of interconnecting work and family, predominantly in countries such as the USA, Australia, but also in Ireland, Germany or the Great Britain. When it comes to Slovakia, there is little research in this area. Statistics from Slovakia usually tend to be transformed into European survey (e.g. into European survey of working conditions under the name: Working Hours and Reconciliation of Work and Family Life In Terms of Life Expectancy). With regard to popularity of this topic, the amount of research dealing with the issue of interconnecting work and family has been increasing within the EU basis. In the research area, there often is a situation when various authors describe the mechanisms interconnecting work and family with different terms. Edwards and Rothbard (cit. as in [9]; 118-121) criticize in particular the descriptive nature of most studies of work-family environment, identifying the need of defining the direction of causal relations between variables in work and family area, and they have come with their own description of interconnecting mechanisms:

Segmentation theories. Segmentation presents separation of work and family so that these two domains do not affect one another. Accordingly, it means setting impenetrable boundaries between work and family life. For example, when an individual is at home with their family, they actively suppress thoughts of work, they refuse incoming phone calls connected to work, they prefer family visits and solving personal matters, etc. Such active segmentation can be considered a mechanism not allowing an employee to transfer strain from one area to the others. On the other hand, in spite of good intentions, many employees are unable to separate their work and family/personal life well enough. To some extent it can be a consequence of the influence of information and communication technologies. Excessive use of e-mails and the Internet, mobile phones, is blurring the boundaries between work and family environment. Thus, these boundaries are becoming more penetrable which results in the fact that it is possible to contact employees anytime during days and nights.

Spillover theories. "Spillover" is a situation in which the interaction between work and family affects moods, values, and behaviour displayed in one domain to be similar to those of another domain. For example, work satisfaction is often significantly correlated with family satisfaction, or work fatigue is often associated with home inability to fulfil family role demands. Spillover therefore refers to a kind of similarity between something in the work domain and something in the family domain, regardless of whether it is positive or negative for an individual. Put another way, spillover can be either beneficial or harmful, depending upon its nature.

Crossover theories. Within these theories, "crossover" refers to the transmission of stress and strain from one member of a dyad to another. It can be investigated with regard to the amount of work and family tasks or duties, with regard to marital functioning, or with regard to the above-mentioned work-family conflict.

Compensation theories. Compensation (Lat. compensare = to consider, balance) is a kind of mechanism used to demonstrate efforts to balance something unreachable. It is a NAHRADA of something for something else [10]. With regards to the topic of this article, compensation refers to a mechanism describing a situation when an individual is trying to compensate for dissatisfaction in one domain (e.g. the family domain) by seeking greater satisfaction in another (e.g the work domain). One frequently cited example of this is the theory that people who find work more satisfying than family withdraw from family life and become even more intensely immersed in their work [9].

4. ORGANISATIONS AND EMPLOYEE CARE
IN THE CONTEXT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Employing organisations present a kind of social system/BODY. Regardless the type of activity carried out,

their operational principles are more or less the same. Such organisations are defined by the existence of goals, hierarchical arrangements, the nature of communication platform, interaction with the environment, etc. An explicitly stated goal presents the only source of company´s legitimacy, it justifies its activities and its existence as such. From this point of view, all employing organisations can be perceived as goal-oriented systems. In order to reach their set goals, these organisations need content and efficient employees. The policy of establishing work-life balance presents one of such tools.

The policy of establishing work-life balance is based on the abstract principles of social responsibility of organisation/business. "Corporate social responsibility" refers to voluntary effort of organisations exceeding common frame of complying with legislation. This concerns a wide range of domains. In the social domain, corporate social responsibility is demonstrated by monitoring and reducing negative consequences of organisation´s activities on the environment where they operate. These are for example the health and safety of employees, complying with the policy of equal opportunities, balance of work and personal life of employees, organisational philantropy, lobbing rules, anti-corruption effort, life quality increasing, etc. Corporate social responsibility thus presents continuous commitment of organisations to behave ethically, contribute to sustainable economic growth, and at the same time to contribute to the increasing of life quality of their employees, their family, as well as increasing the quality of local community and society as such [11]. The requirement for implementing policies to support work-life balance comes with a simple recognition of the fact that employees in return for offering their services are entitled to receive more than just a salary, employee benefits and healthy and secure work systems. "They have the right to be considered living human beings, especially when bearing in mind that many of their problems arise from work issues". Human troubles and the resulting stress can be caused by work and they can relate to security, money, health and relationships with other people. Similarly, people bring their personal problems to work and many of them cannot be sorted out without help from their employers – it can be a day off to take care of sick children or partner, or other family members ([1]; 686).

Supports aimed at improving work-life balance include a wide range of practices designed to help employees reach balance between their work demands and non-work life. Some of the supports are in the form of special services,

such as dependant care, while others establish flexibility by giving employees certain amount of control over organising their work duties. One of the problems organisations can face (and they often do) is that in spite of the existence of many supports, a lot of them are too expensive to be implemented. Furthermore, managers d not know which combination of supports would gain maximum benefits for employees and for the effectiveness of work [9].

The following can be considered formal supports aimed at balance work-family life on the organisational level:
1. flexibility in the work environment,
2. career break,
3. maternity leave and parental leave,
4. child care services,
5. mental health and wellness services.

Flexibility in the work environment includes both employment flexibility and work flexibility. It can be flexible working hours, home office – whether for several hours, one day or more days a week, a month, when an employee works from home, part-time job, job-sharing by sharing responsibility for one full-time position, and others. It is necessary to bear in mind that organizing working time depends on specific needs of particular employing organisation, e.g. its opening hours, workload, the availability of corresponding work force and the like [4], [13]. Policy of managing working hours on the employing organisation level thus sets possibilities as well as limits to its employees to adjust their working hours according to their own needs. When it comes to Slovakia, labour legislation offers considerably satisfactory prerequisites for creating job opportunities and conditions for employing citizens with family demands. In spite of their availability, flexible arrangements of working hours do not tend to be used frequently. The 2014 Report of Gender Equality [12] states that flexible work arrangements and adjustment of working hours that could be beneficial to help employ people with parental demands are used only marginally in Slovakia, despite being made possible by the Slovak legal system. The proportion of part-time job for women and also for men is ranks amongst the lowest in the whole EU.

Career break. A break in career has become more popular over the last few years. Career usually gets interrupted from 1 month up to 2 years and can take the form of a paid or unpaid leave. The unpaid leave form occurs more often. A break in career not only presents the time of unemployment. People often use this time for their personal or professional development.
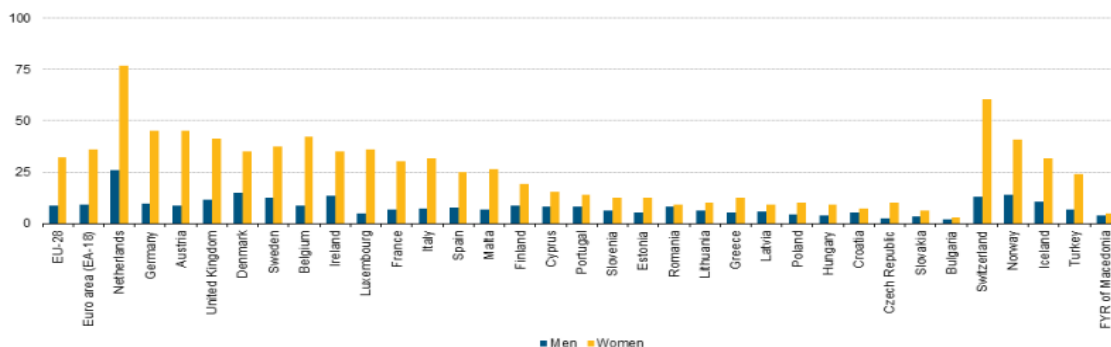
Graph 1 Proportion of employees with a contract of limited duration, age group 15-64, 2013 (% of total employees)
Source: [2]

Table 1 Proportion of maternity leave in Slovakia

Average number of maternity allowance recipients		
Year 2011		23 213
Year 2012		24 221
Year 2013		23 858
Year 2014		23 132

Source: [5]

Such breaks also tend to be used for travelling, conducting voluntary work, conducting paid work in a foreign country, study or professional training, upbringing of children, recovery from an illness or an injury, etc.

Maternity leave and parental leave. Maternity leave and parental leave and the resulting entitlements are one of the most important mechanisms to support integration of work and family life for working parents. In Slovakia, maternity leave is provided by an employer to an employee in connection with childbirth and newborn child care. A woman is entitled to maternity leave for the duration of 34 weeks (out of it 6 weeks, resp. 8 weeks before the expected date of childbirth). Entitlement to maternity leave is defined by a child reaching 3 years of age, resp. 6 years of age for a child with a disability. Upon the agreement with the employer, it is possible to interrupt the parental leave and exhaust the eligible carry-over later, until no later than 5 years of a child´s age at the latest (in case of a child with a disability, up to 8 years of age). Maternity leave is in its full extent only available to a mother of a child, to a father only upon the birth of a child under adverse circumstances such as the death of serious illness of a child´s mother, or upon agreement with a child´s mother after 6 weeks from the birth. Parental leave is justified time off work provided by an employer to an employee – parent in order to deepen the child care, if requested by an employee. It is equally available to both men and women – but only to one of the parents or other eligible persons. Specific leave for a father´s child care, so called "paternity leave" is not known in Slovak legislation. On the other hand, experiences from many European countries suggest that apart from parental leave it is useful to establish an opportunity for fathers to take care of their children. Many countries have implemented the "daddy quota", i.e. several non-transferable months of parental leave intended only for fathers, which has positive effects. Claims related to maternity or parental leave vary from country to country and in various countries it can have various forms [12], [14].

Child care services. These services include *nursing services* provided either on-site or close to the workplace. This way, employees can leave their children in the custody of professionals. Company nursery or company kindergarten can be established. Other benefits include financial support for costs regarding child care (e. g at the birth of a child). Employing organisations can offer child care assistance or information-referral services for dependent care.

Child care services are more controversial than other types of supports, because even their name suggests that they can only be used by employees who have children. Childless employees can find them unfair, because they cannot benefit from such services [9].

Providing services aimed at child care by employing organisations in Slovakia could help in the current situation when demand constantly exceeds supply and availability of services is not improving significantly. The lack of child care services is one of the factors negatively contributing to bad ranking of Slovakia in economic activity, employment rate and economic independence of women.

Mental health and wellness services. Such services include counselling for employees seeking help with non-work problems, either psychological, emotional, or family-related. Such counselling is conducted by hired professionals in particular areas. Some organisations employ their own professionals, especially psychologists, sociologists, or social workers. The reason for providing such services is simple – many of employees´ problems result from work and it is best to solve them with regard to work. Other offered services include workshops and seminars on family and parenthood, wellness programmes such as a fitness centre membership, offer or contribution to leisure stays, health and relax stays, educational programmes, smoking cessation programmes, stress reduction programmes, dietary counselling, health and fitness assessments and the like [4], [8], [9].

Policy of implementing work-life balance can mean benefits for employing organisation, taking the following forms:

- improving quality and productivity of employees´ work,
- improving loyalty and morale of employees,
- decreasing occasional absence of employees,
- decreasing of employee turnover.

M. Armstrong ([1]; 686) notes that "growth of morale or work productivity does not necessarily have to reflect in measurable or any other growth of productivity, whereas too much fear and worries can cause lower effectiveness". He adds that even if employee care could not improve productivity, it can minimalize its drop. When creating policies, it is important to take into account the fact that support of employing organisations aimed at work-life balance is influenced by labour law, collective agreements, policy of job opportunities equality, as well as cultural factors of particular countries. That is the reason why there are considerable differences in supporting work-life balance in legal norms of various countries [4]. In relation to the European Union, the harmonization of work and family life has become an important part of many areas of its policy. The fundamental frame for measures in the area of harmonization of work and family, resp. privacy (so called work-life balance) was set up at the beginning of the 90´s within the EU. Subsequently, it has been strengthened and revised up to its present state where the policies of harmonization form one of the most important ways how to reach the goals of *Europe 2020* strategy [12]. In the context of fulfilling these objectives, Slovak employers have a chance to take part in the development project under the name "*Family friendly, Gender Equality Friendly and Equal Opportunities Friendly Employer*" every year. This project is implemented under the umbrella of Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and its aim is to appraise employers who are family friendly, gender equality friendly

and equal opportunities friendly. It means that employers receive appreciation for implementing measures which support equal opportunities of men and women at career development, at balanced proportion in management, at remuneration, as well as for creating conditions which are family demands friendly and which support harmonization of work and family life [11]. Although there is just a small number of employers intensively dealing with supporting work-life balance in Slovakia, it is probable that in the context of modernization of labour marker as well as the effort to solve current problems in the labour market more effectively, there will be more and more such organisations.

5. CONCLUSION

Policies of employing organisations play an important role in the process of harmonization work and non-work life of employees. Strategies of supporting the harmonization of work and personal life comprise a variety of different elements and they require the commitment of various constituents. Entitlements to time off from work for family commitments and flexible adjustment of working hours seem to be key factors. However, it is important to realize that employing organisations in order to reach the best level of work-life balance not only need the above mentioned supports which should be tailored for their workforce, but

also supports which are used by most of their employees [9]. It is obvious that in the present time which is characterized by high level of competition among enterprises or employing organisations disposing of the same or similar technologies, what is crucial are the processes where people are in charge. Focusing the attention towards employer care can improve the image of a company as a good employer and thus helps in attracting and recruiting the staff [7]. It therefore presents a competitive advantage on the company level, because educated and qualified workforce would seek such employing environment that would present flexibility and consider the needs of families.

The need of dealing with the issue of work-life balance is necessary on the government level, employing organisations level, as well as individual level, too. Yet all these elements have to be a part of systematic and constructive change which is necessary in order to solve the problem [12]. Using various measures in the area of organising work and conditions of work is currently considered an inseparable part of modernization of labour market and accordingly an effective solution of current problems in labour market.

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