Chapter - II

Organizational Perspective on Work-Life Balance

Work-life imbalance and the associated conflict have been shown to be related to decreased feelings of well-being (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998), increased psychological and physical complaints (Frone, Russel, & Cooper, 1992), and increased job and life dissatisfaction (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). Maintaining the work-life balance of key employees helps reduce the risk of stress and burnout (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Conley, 1991) and can ultimately improve firm’s overall success (Arthur, 2003; Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Meyer, Mukerjee, & Sestero, 2001; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). The effects of burnout from extreme stress not only encompass physiological and behavioral consequences for employees, but may also include decreased job satisfaction, occupational commitment, and overall work success.

In order to better align business to the needs of employees with caring responsibilities, companies have started to implement family-supportive human resource (HR) polices over the last years referred to as work-life policies, work-family policies, or work-family arrangements. Work-life policies and benefits are the most visible indicators of a family-responsible workplace and can be defined as any employer sponsored facilities and benefits, designed to support the combination of paid work and family responsibilities of its employees (den Dulk, Van Doome-Huiskes, & Schippers, 1999). Work-life Policies aim at enhancing the ability of employees to manage competing demands from work and personal interests and to alleviate work-family conflict.

Poelmans and Sahibzada (2004) proposed a model of four main decisions that managers need to consider when thinking about the implementation of a work-life program in their company. Companies do not exist in a vacuum. The social, economic, legal, and technological contexts as well as the political dimension need to be carefully reviewed and incorporated into this political need to be carefully reviewed and incorporated into this decision. The approval process is an important determinant of the success of a work-life program only when employees actually can make use of work-family policies and their real needs and expectations are met.
It is necessary to focus specially on the adoption and design questions, i.e. which policies to adopt and implement. First, to briefly address the adoption decision, second, to describe various human resource policies that improve work-life balance and provide practical examples of companies that have implemented single policies as well as bundles of work-life arrangements. Third, to discuss flexibility policies, leave arrangements, care provisions, supportive arrangements, and conventional provisions for job quality and compensations/benefits. Finally, the importance of creating a family-supportive organizational culture and conclude as the new paradigm of harmonization between work and personal life.

The adoption of work-life policies

The extent to which companies provide work-life policies differs widely by country and the level of national family policy provision. Den Dulk (2005) used Esping-Anderson’s (1999) typology of welfare state regime to study differences and similarities in organizational policy provision in the Netherlands, Italy, the UK, and Sweden. She concludes that it is the (near) absence of public provisions of advanced public provisions. Sweden still has the highest level of provisions. In other countries, employers are on an average more active, but never fully substitute statutory provisions.

The design of work-life programs – the right fit

Organizations who decide to implement work-life programs have to choose between formal, written policies available to all employees or informal arrangements only available to certain employees in specific situations. Each case is different, and in order to be able to respond to unique needs of employees, companies are recommended to develop cafeteria-style benefits, where employees can trade off free time against salary, and choose benefits that correspond with their specific family or personal situation.
Bundling work-life policies

When companies decide to combine two or more disparate work-life policies into a group of interconnected and overlapping policies aligned with one another work-family bundle emerge (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). The implicit assumption which lie behind this effort is that the more is the better (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). Offering paid sick days when family members are ill increases profits just by the virtue of being offered. Tele-work, on the other hand, was found to increase a firm’s profitability only when the use is generalized within the company (Meyer, Mukerjee, & Sestero, 2001). Companies’ who seek policy effectiveness need to develop a specific and unique bundle of people, tailor-made for the specific work-family needs of its workforce and aligned with the company’s business model. The right “fit” is the relevant approach (Poelmans, 2003).

Types of work-family policies

Although there is no single, widely accepted approach to classify work-family policies, it is possible to categorize them in five basic groups (Poelmans & Beham, 2005a): (i) Flexibility policies, (ii) leave arrangements, (iii) care provisions, (iv) supportive arrangements, and (v) conventional provisions, for job quality and compensations/benefits.

Flexibility policies

Flexible work arrangements allow employees to accomplish their work duties outside of the traditional and/or spatial boundaries of a standard working day (Rau, 2003). It is broadly assumed that the traditional work schedule is defined as a 40-hour and five-day working week within certain time limits that may vary across countries, industries, organizational policies, and social norms.

Distinction should be made between arrangements that create flexibility in terms of time (e.g. flexible working hours, part-time work, and compressed work weeks) and those that allow for flexibility in space, such as satellite offices and tele-work.
Jobs with set customer service hours or those in production (shift work) may have limited compatibility with flextime. In such cases, other flexible arrangements such as staggered compressed work weeks, other types of work-life policies, or a combination of different policies need to be considered.

**Part-time Work**

Employees on a part-time work are those who work a specific number of hours below the standard work week on a regular basis (Galinsky, Friedman, & Hernandez, 1991b). Motherhood and part-time work are often strongly linked. With the arrival of children many women shift to part-time work (Blackwell, 2001). Part-time jobs often tend to be found in low-paying industries (e.g. retail, sales, etc.), and offer less benefits, and limited career advancement opportunities. Companies should start creating part-time jobs in professions and management that have adequate salaries and benefits, and allow climbing the career ladder (Barnett, 2003).

**Reduced Working Schedules**

Employees with reduced working schedules work part-time on a weekly basis, with a working time reduction (anything between 50% and 100%) spread over a week resulting for instance in an employee working three days a week (60%). While reduced hours options are typically voluntary and arranged on a case-by-case, conventional part-time jobs are generally negotiated on a formal basis. A special type of reduced hours is V-time (Christensen & Staines, 1990). In a V-time arrangement, the agreed hours worked are scheduled throughout the year in such a way that some weeks might require 45 or more hours, whereas other weeks require substantially less hours.

Another form of reduced working schedule is referred to as compressed workweeks. Compressed work weeks offer flexibility on a week – to – week basis. Under a compressed workweek arrangement, employees typically work a standard 40- hour week but may only work three or four days a week.
**Job Sharing**

Job sharing can be described as a specific form of part-time work of reduced working schedule where two employees share the same job, reduced a full-time job or even more between the two of them. From the employer’s point of view the job sharing is usually introduced when organizations want to maintain consistency with respect to its clients but it may also be an interesting option for highly demanding jobs like executive assistant or school director, that often extend well beyond eight hours a day (Barnett, 2003).

**Flexibility in space – tele-work**

Tele-work or telecommuting, is a subset of flexible work arrangements that allows employees to conduct work at an off-site location (e.g. from home or at a satellite office) during regular work hours by using telecommunications technologies, including computers, video and telephone systems, fax machines, and high – speed data lines for transferring data (Galinsky & Johnson, 1998).

**Leave Arrangements**

Leave arrangements allow employees to return to their jobs after temporarily shifting their attention to their family or personal life. When taking a leave is seen as an alternative to quit employment, it improves outcomes for leave takers (Poelmans & Beham, 2005a). The availability of liberal, even unpaid-leave policies, has been found to increase the likelihood of returning to work after childbirth (Hofferth, 1996). In addition, leave policies have been found to be positively related to loyalty and productivity, and reduced employee turnover (Lambert, 1990, Waldfogel, 1998).

**Care Provisions**

Care provisions refer to care functions which are performed by others during the time employees are at work and refer to both care for children and elderly people (den Dulk et al., 1999). In terms of childcare, companies may offer on-site childcare centers
that are owned and operated by the company or a third party, or collaborate with other companies nearby and run a common childcare center (e.g., in technology parks). On-site childcare or close-by facilities allows employees to reduce transport time by cutting distances. Instead of leaving early to pick up children from school, this time can be invested in an extra hour at work or at home.

Supportive Arrangements

Supportive arrangements cover a wide range of services which can either serve as a support for the actual implementation of all other policies, or directly support employees with information and training to improve their own work–life balance (Poelmans & Beham, 2005a). The first group of arrangements may include service such as a work–family handbook, an intranet web page that communicates the company’s work-family policies, distribution of information to increase the awareness of work-family coordinator who is responsible for work-family initiatives within the company.

Arrangements that are directly aimed at improving employees’ work-life balance include work–family management trainings which provide management personnel with skills necessary to manage a diverse workforce and to implement family-responsive policies and programs: workshops/seminars for all employees on topics related to advantages and disadvantages of referral program.

The costs involved for providing such services to employees can be optimized by carefully selecting the service provided, and by evaluating the impact and results of the program and training.

Conventional Provision and Compensation / Benefits

The last group of arrangements is comprised of conventional compensation and benefits / services provided by the company to attract and retain talented employees. Especially women, managers and HR professionals may have to rethink traditional career models. While some may choose to advance to vice-president level in five years, others
may opt for ten years or more because of young kids, elder-care responsibilities, or to avoid heavy travelling or a relocation.

**Family – Friendly Programs and the Role of the HR Department**

Within organizations, the role of the HR department is to identify and implement programs (i.e., family-friendly programs) that best address the needs of employees and facilitate the development of a healthy work-life balance. Previous research suggests that employees who have difficulties managing their work and non-work lives may experience productivity losses including increased absences, turnover, and reduced output among other adverse effects (Comfort, Johnson, & Wallace, 2003). Furthermore, HR departments are concerned about retaining valuable employees whom they have recruited and trained as well as reducing employee withdrawal behaviors such as decreased work effort, lateness, and absenteeism (Konrad & Mangel, 2000).

HR department typically implement such programs to address the following business needs like attracting new employees, retaining employees, reducing employee stress, and increasing employee productivity. The assumption underlying employee attraction is that job applicants desiring family-friendly programs will be more attracted to firms that offer these options, thereby increasing the size of applicant pool. Family-friendly programs also may help enhance the organization’s image for prospective applicants (Lee et al., 2002). The underlying assumption regarding family-friendly programs with the reduction in employees stress is that these programs will benefit employees therefore resulting in increased job satisfaction and a better work-life balance. Furthermore, organizations that employ individuals with generalizable skills are concerned about employee retention, because employees with generalizable skills can move easily to other organizations (Coff, 1997; Konrad & Mangel, 2000).