WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY SCENARIO IN HRM PRACTICES INCLUDING GENDER FACILITATIONS

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Abstract: Work-family policies are a necessary but insufficient strategy to help employees effectively manage their work and family demands. Most employees focus on specific work-family policies, such as, dependent care or flexible scheduling, to solve work family dilemmas. It would be desirable to consider a broad range of human resource practices as component of systems which, taken together, shape employee’s capacity to meet work and family demands in an integrated manner without compromising with the explicit objectives of the corporate.

Keywords: Workplace flexibility, work-life balance, Career couples, Work-family conflict.

I. INTRODUCTION

Discussions of work-life balance begin with employees, as employers and managers seek to interpret and accommodate employee’s needs and situations. Necessarily, of course, there must be reference to organisational objectives, but a focus on work-life balance implies a rather softer approach to HRM, beginning with more holistic view of employee. Despite the differing starting points and emphases, there is of course a relationship between the agendas of flexibility and work-life balance. For individuals, flexible working patterns can provide additional opportunities to work, can enable family incomes to be supplemented, and can allow work to be fitted in with family responsibilities. In the experience of most people, no clear-cut distinction can be established between the word of work and the word of family, friends and social network and community. In practice, over the length of our lives it is impossible to establish neatly-constructed demarcation lines. Moreover, the word-balance- implies the existence of a settled equilibrium that can be achievable between paid employment and a life outside the job. This is highly questionable (Brewster, C., Sparrow, P., & Vernon,G.,2010). Very often decision of work-life balance revolves around a need for ‘family-friendly’ policies, in recognition to the very severe difficulties which work can pose for family roles, and of the significance of those roles to so many employees, most obviously in terms of parenting but also in terms of caring for older relatives and friends. Annual hours contracts typically offer full time employment without necessarily offering consistency in hours week-to-week. Although annualised hours have been becoming increasingly common and their incidence across nations varies markedly. It is in France that they figure most prominently, around half of the organisation there reporting more than 50% of their employees are on annual hours contracts. This is in large part a response to the French working hours legislation, which reduced the length of the working week. In principle, annualised hours offer the possibility that parents might be able to work heavier weeks in school terms in order to be able to take the entirety of school vacations with their children, although it is not clear that this is a common practice.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Work and family are the two most important domain in a person’s life and their interface has been the object of study of researcher’s world-wide. There is a felt need to balance and integrate family needs and career requirements (Sturges & Guest, 2004) and research in the field of work-family interface has increased dramatically in the past two decades (Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997). The changing social structures arising out of dual career couples, single parent families, an increasing number of parents with dependent caring responsibilities for children and ageing parents have all contributed to increasing research in the area of work-life balance. Dual earner families now constitute a considerable size of the workers engaged by the corporate sectors. As a result, the difficulty of managing work and family demands has increased for many working adults, and many employers have come to view “Family-Friendly” policies as an important attraction and retention strategy. Comparison of UK with Japan and Finland shows that it is in the latter that employees have the best mental health, and in which work-family and family-work conflicts have the least severe impacts on mental health. This is particularly the case for those employees who are single parents. Japanese employees experience the poorest
mental health, their work-family and family-work conflicts showing the most severe impact. In the UK organisations adopting family-friendly policies did so to retain staff. They also found, though, that arrangements were often not formalised and considerable discretion was left to the managers. Moreover, their work suggested where unions were present, family-friendly provision was more widespread. Of late, thinking emerged towards the opinion that it is employee’s and not employer’s, responsibility to balance life and work. This view also is on the decline, however, perhaps in response to a series of public policy initiatives aimed at improving the position of working parents (Prone, M.R., Yardley, J.K., & Markel, K.S.,1997).

Formal work-family policies now encompass a wide range of programs including referral and financial resources for child and elder care, on-site child care, family leave, and flexible scheduling and work arrangements, including telecommunicating. Employer’s use of work-family policies has grown significantly in recent years, and this represents a continuation in the expansion of average benefit packages, which grew from 25% of total compensation in 1959 to over 42% in 1996 (Milkovich & Newman,1999). While a growing number of studies find that family-friendly policies benefit employees (Label,1999).

There are few studies that examine a broad set of human resource practices as they relate to work-family outcomes. The literature review draws on two streams of research. First discusses the literature on work-family policies and then turn to the research on high involvement human resource systems- Family integration; Work-family conflict (i.e. The opposite of integration) and perceived employees control over managing work and family demands (Thomas & Ganster,1995). They also found that employees with access to flexible scheduling had more control over managing work and family and higher job satisfaction, as well as lower work-family conflict, depression, and cholesterol. Work-family conflict can occur in two directions: Work interference with family and family interference with work. Work to family conflict, which is also reflected to as negative spill over from work to family or as work interferes with family, has been shown to be related to both personal and work characteristics (Wallace,1997). Batt & Valour (2003) compared the relative importance of three sets of policies; Work-family policies, HR incentives designed to induce attachment and commitment (compensation, career development, and job security), and the design of work (including decision making autonomy, participation in teams, and the use of flexible technologies). They examined outcomes of interest to employers (turnover intentions) as well as employees (their perception of work interference with family life and of their control over managing work and family demands).

Employer solutions to work-family conflict have focussed heavily on specific work-family policies and practices, such as child care services or flexible scheduling. A useful distinction is between policies designed to provide care services (information and referral services, financing of childcare or eldercare etc.) and those designed to create more flexible work arrangements (flexible schedule that permit flexible starting and quitting times, telecommuting, compressed workweeks, job sharing etc.). It has also been reported that a significant relationship between flexible scheduling and employee outcomes (job satisfaction, satisfaction with scheduling) in 18 studies of flexitime and 8 studies of compressed work weeks indicated positive outcomes (Baltes et al,1999). Several studies have found that when employees have supervisors who support work-family balance, job satisfaction is higher and work-family conflict is lower. Eaton, (2000) found work family policies affected organisational commitment, but only to the extent that employees felt free to use them without negative consequences to their work lives (e.g. damage to career development opportunities or workplace relations).

Grover and Crooker (1995) studied multiple family-responsive practices together and found that employees with access to more of these benefits showed greater organisational commitments and lower intention of leave. Their study supported the idea that corporate provision of programs symbolises concern for employees, thereby, positively influencing long-term attachment. Similarly, Lambert (2000) found that workers who considered the work-family benefits available to them to be useful were more likely to view their organisations as being supportive. Perceived usefulness of benefits was also related to organisational citizenship behaviour. Scandura and Lankau (1997) found that workers with flexible work hours had higher organisational commitment. The work design literature (Batt & Valour,2003), suggests that employees who enjoy greater autonomy at work will experience lower work-family conflict and more control over managing the work-family interface, and will show less likelihood of quitting their current employment. Of particular importance is the support from the husband who contributes in a variety of areas including earning and personal financial management (Kate, 1998), home and family responsibilities (Baron, 1987), Career Management and support (Gordon & Whelans-Berry, 2004) and inter personal support (Becker & Moen, 1999). The role of workplace support i.e. support received from supervisors and co-workers (Voydanoff,2002) is another critical element of work-family balance. Ezra and Deckman (1996) found that organisational and supervisor understanding of family duties are positively related to satisfaction with the balance between work and family life.

III. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The role of social support has consistently emerged in literature as an important factor that influences work-family balance in a positive manner. It might come from employee’s spouse or partner, parents, siblings, children, extended family, and friends. Numerous studies have demonstrated that personal social support is
positively associated with the work-family balance. Work place support via an organisational approach involves the implementation of family friendly policies, which are associated with satisfaction and work-family balance. Organisations offer a wide range of work-family benefits and programs to their employees, such as job sharing, telecommuting, job protected parental leave, part-time return to work options, flexitime, resource and referral services, unpaid family leave, dependent care assistance, shorter standard work weeks, improvement in job conditions, on-site childcare, support group for working parents, sports facilities, day care facilities, laundry facilities and canteen facilities.

Research shows that flexible work arrangements allow individuals to integrate work and family responsibilities in time and space and are instrumental in achieving a healthy work and family balance (Bond et al., 1998). In sum, the literature on work-family policies and supervisor support suggests that dependent care policies have little systematic to work-family outcomes or turnover. Employees who have more access to flexible scheduling practices or more supportive supervisors will have lower wok-family conflict (negative spill over from work to family), more control over managing work and family demands, and lower probability of turnover.

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