

## The organizational work-family culture. The organizational time as an element of the work-family balance, in Europe

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**Abstract:** Juggling work and family has become a challenge for any management system considering that the time to achieve is growing at the expense of the necessary time to complete the tasks related to private life. The achievement of this balance is done on one hand by legislative means, and on the other hand at an organizational level, through an organizational culture that supports the achievement of a balance between the employee's work and his family life – the work-family type of culture. The most important dimensions of the work-family culture discussed are those proposed by Thompson et alii (1999), who in the conducted research suggests that such a culture can be evaluated after three main components, three dimensions namely: the time request from the organization; the consequences of using the benefits of family-friendly policies on the career; managerial support. In this article we will discuss the aspects related to the organizational time in the European area and how the employees perceive the need for organizational time and harmonizing it with the necessary time for the extra-jobs. Of course, every organization must know the importance of each of these cultural dimensions to focus their changing efforts to the size that counts in the given organizational context. It would also be useful to determine how work-family culture perception varies depending on occupations, industry and the organization size.

**Keywords:** work-family culture, the demand for organizational time, work-family balance

### 1 The definition and characteristics of organizational work-family or family-friendly culture

Related to balancing work and family life, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, expressly refers to it in article 33 paragraph. (2), which states that to reconcile professional and family life, everyone is entitled to be protected from any dismissal on grounds of maternity. At the same time the **Meeting Document in Moscow in 1991 of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE** retains the judgment of the participating states to provide measures in facilitating the job combining with family responsibilities for women and men workers. In addition to these legal instruments the employees are supported in achieving harmonization of professional and family life primarily by the organizational culture, values, norms and practices endorsed at that level. That culture favourable for the harmonization of professional interests with private life, of family that encourages the employees in this regard is called **work-family** or **family-friendly** culture.

**Work-family culture** was defined by (Thompson et. all, 1999) as all the “assumptions, values and beliefs, regarding the extent to which an organization supports the integration of employees work values and family life”.

Similarly, **Warren and Johnson** (1995) (Andreassi & Thompson, 2004) has defined a company with a **friendly-family** culture as being one where “the general philosophy of the firm belief or layout is sensitive to family needs of employees and grants them support in the harmonious combination between paid work and family roles”.

An organization that would like to create a job and a family-friendly culture must take into account four interrelated components (Andreassi & Thompson, 2004):

- Firstly, must design and implement benefits, policies and practices to help the employees in achieving a balance between work and family life – private (eg. flexible works schedules, supporting care programs for dependents);

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- Secondly, they must create cultures and climates at the workplace that reflects a concern for “the life of the employees outside the workplace”;
- Thirdly, they must encourage work relations, which comply with the employees responsibilities outside work;
- Finally, they should review the processes, systems, structures and current work practices, determining which one of them lead to inefficiency at work, which in turn can create unnecessary stress and overwork for the employees.

A culture that supports work-family balance is reflected on the important results regarding the organization such as:

- Increased commitment to the organization;
- Greater satisfaction from work;
- Reduced absenteeism;
- Decrease work-family conflict;
- Decrease psychological stress;
- Less somatic complaints.

## 2 Dimensions that characterize the support culture of the work-family balance

To describe the dimensions that characterize a family-friendly culture we considered only three of these, dimensions on which was based the research of **Thompson et All.**, (1999). It suggests that a work-family culture can be evaluated by three main components, three dimensions:

- Time request from the organization;
- The consequences of using family-friendly benefits policies on the career;
- Support, managerial support.

The characteristics of these components of *work-family* culture are summarized in **Table 1**, which is meant to guide us better into understanding and analysing those key elements through which we can label an organizational culture as being or not favourable in obtaining a work-family balance of the employees.

**Table 1: The dimensions of a support culture of a work-family balance**

1. <i>The request of organizational time, waiting time by the organization</i>	- Refers to the extent where there is expectation from the employees for a long period of time at work and to prioritize work at the expense of family
2. <i>The consequences of using family-friendly benefits policies on career</i>	- Refers to the degree to which the employees perceive acquiring friendly policies and their practical application
3. <i>Managerial support</i>	- Captures the extent to which the managers are sensible to their individual needs and the employee's family by offering assistance that he needs to solve his problems.

\* *Adapted after:* Thompson et. alii. (1999, pp. 392-145)

Regarding the first matter of the organizational time needed or the time application of the organization, we can notify that in those organizations with lawyers' employees or investment bankers, known for the excessive demands of time (which often is working till late night and weekends), although these professionals can choose whether or not they respond to these expectations, by refusing to do so, often they can choose with negative consequences on the career. This is because at the level of the organization is a culture of long working hours that promotes such

expectations for longer working hours from the employees, arriving at a time to treat it as normal.

Regarding the second aspect, it refers to the reserve of the employees to seek a **work-family** benefit for fear of negative career repercussions and the third element of the culture regards the managerial support of the management for the individual/dual needs of the employee and his family, promoting the a support culture of employees that at a certain time has personal or familial problems.

In the specialized literature were also proposed other dimensions of supporting culture of the work-family balance, considered relevant by some researchers to fully understand the nature of work-family culture:

- Kossek, Colquitt and Noe (2001) proposed another two dimensions of work climate which are related to the employee's capacity to balance work and family: **the favourable climate** in sharing the concerns of the employees and the **climate that supports the sacrifices** form the employees;
- Kirchmeyer (1995) refers to another dimension – **the respect for the privacy of the employee**, which indicates us the extent to which the organization's value are involved in private life roles of the employees;
- Kossek, Noe and De Marr (1999) call into question the size of the work-family culture, **integrations vs. segmentation** that shows the extent to which the formal and informal rules from workplace combines or separates the work from family.

It is beneficial that each organization to know the importance of each of these cultural dimensions to focus their changing efforts on the dimensions that counts in the given organizational context.

Clearly, some dimensions are important in certain contexts, others not. Researchers should work to develop an accurate and comprehensive measure of the culture that supports the work-family balance and focus on understanding the range of dimensions that matter, in an analytical way and not only descriptive. It would also be useful to determine how varies the perceptions of the work-family culture, based on occupation, industry and the organization's size.

### **3 Opinions regarding the organizational time matching supply allocated to family tasks by the European workers**

The demand for organizational time is a characteristic of the organizational culture which refers to the extent where there is expectations form employees for a long time work and for tilting the balance in favour of labour and family expanses. A real support in interpreting the harmonization degree of work time – organizational with the one allocated to the privacy by European workers was to analyse the results offered by Eurofound, from the survey regarding the working conditions – EWCS 2010.

Starting from the key-questions used in the survey regarding the European working conditions – EWCS 2010, we analysed three aspects related to time spent on work tasks and the extent to which it harmonizes with family responsibilities, household:

- Time off work requests for the performance of their work duties;
- The possibility to get free during the program to resolve personal problems;
- The measure where time spent for work tasks coincides, it harmonizes with the time allotted for family tasks, household.

These aspects allow us to appreciate if the organizational necessary time is able to

affect or not the time needed to carry out the extra-job tasks.

### 3.1 Overtime work in order to achieve the service tasks

One of the biggest impediments in accomplishing the household and familial chores is the repeatedly overtime work. Some employees are forced to remain in the organization till late to perform their tasks, others prefer to continue working at home as far as the professional nature allows.

At the question – **How often have you had to work in your spare time in the last 12 months, to fulfil the office duties?** (EWCS 2010), the highest percentage of employees who said that once a week or more they work in their spare time is recorded in Romania – 23.6%, followed by Belgium – 20% and Germany – 29.5%, UK – 20.1%, Netherlands – 18.1% and the lowest percentage recorded in Spain – 10.4%, Portugal – 10.2% and Austria – 11.8%. the highest percentage of the employees who declared that never happened to them to work in their spare time to fulfil their duties is registered by Austria – 59.1% followed by Bulgaria with 56%, Portugal with 50.4%, Romania with 50.2%, Finland – 50.1%, Denmark – 48.9%, Spain – 49.6%, France – 49.1%, and Italy – 49.5%. (See figure no. 1)

**Figure 1: The assessment of employees in the European countries concerning work in their spare time to carry out duties**



\* After data provided by Eurofound (EWCS 2010)

[http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/smt/ewcs/ewcs2010\\_12\\_04\\_ro.htm](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/smt/ewcs/ewcs2010_12_04_ro.htm)

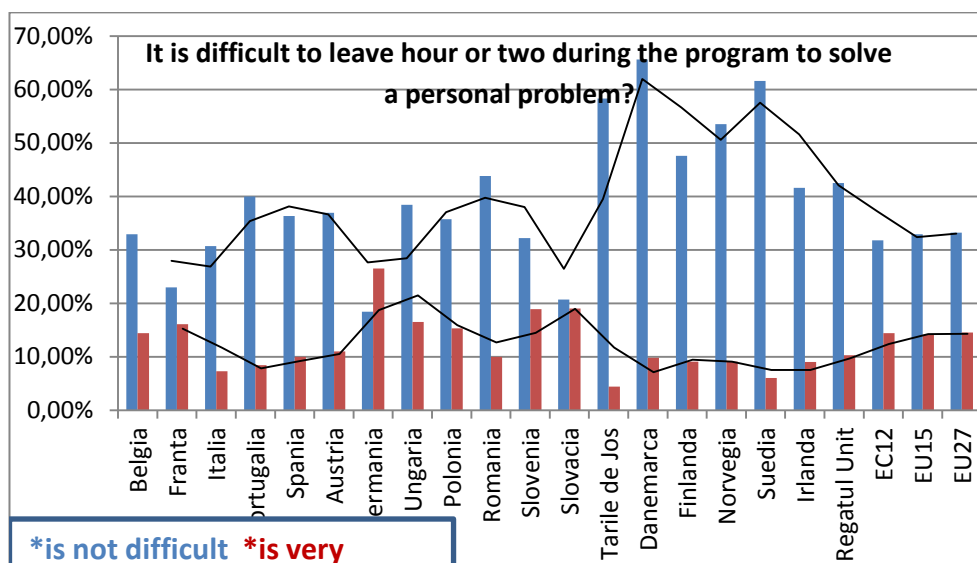
On groups of countries, we perceive that employees from developed Latin countries and the German countries are the most requested regarding the allocated time for professional tasks and in the Nordic countries we meet most employees who said that they never been in this situation.

### 3.2 The flexibility of the program based on the employee's needs

The flexibility of the program based on the employee's needs may be evaluated by analysing the responses of the Europeans to the question: **It is difficult to leave**

**hour or two during the program to solve a personal problem?** (EWCS 2010). We considered the responses: it is not difficult and is very difficult.

**Figure 2: The assessment of the difficulty of taking off for a personal or familial problem, during the program.**



\* After data provided by Eurofound (EWCS 2010)

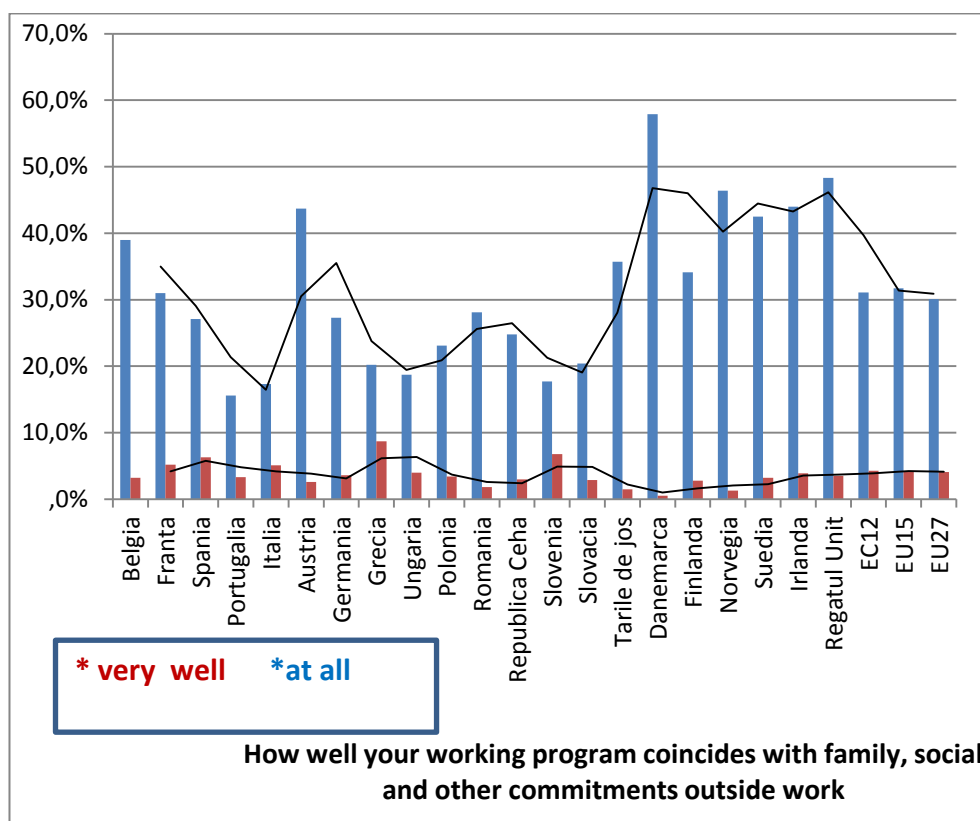
[http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/smt/ewcs/ewcs2010\\_12\\_05\\_ro.htm](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/smt/ewcs/ewcs2010_12_05_ro.htm)

As we can see from Figure no. 2, the employees that can get the easier this feature are the Nordic countries and those who have difficulties in obtaining a free-time for solving a personal problem outside the workplace are employees in countries such as France, Germany, former soviet countries such as Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, etc...

### 3.3 The harmonization of the work program with family responsibilities

To see the harmonization degree of the working program with family responsibilities we have analysed the responses to the question: **How well your working program coincides with family, social and other commitments outside work?** (EWCS 2010) – see Figure no. 3.

**Figure 3: The harmonization of the work program with outside commitments**



\*Adapt (EWCS 2010) [http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/smt/ewcs/ewcs2010\\_12\\_03\\_ro.htm](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/smt/ewcs/ewcs2010_12_03_ro.htm)

The answers to this question help us to appreciate if the organizational time affects the time allocated for family tasks.

The most satisfied regarding the harmonization of the work program outside service appears to be the employees in countries such as Denmark 57.9%, Austria 43.7%, Norway 46.4%, Ireland 44%, UK 48.3% (the last three being well also on matters of management support). On balance, the employees in the Nordic and English countries are the most satisfied. The countries in which the employees working hours are less favourable are the Latin countries (except Belgium, who has a casual weekly work schedule, below the average EU-27), and the western European countries, mostly former communist.

In general this approximation is better defined where the organizational culture does not encourage overtime work or during free time at home.

#### 4 The weekly time assigned for work duties in the European countries

Another clue, by which we can assess time's expectations from the organization in order to achieve the work duties in European countries, is represented by the total hours allocated weekly for work (paid or unpaid work activities) by employees.

Usually, in cultures that encourages the good standards of long working hours, the weekly number of hours worked is higher than in cultures that supports family. In Table no. 2 is shown the percentage response of the European workers regarding the numbers of paid and unpaid hours that they work each week.

**Table 2: The number of paid and unpaid hours worked by European workers (index)**

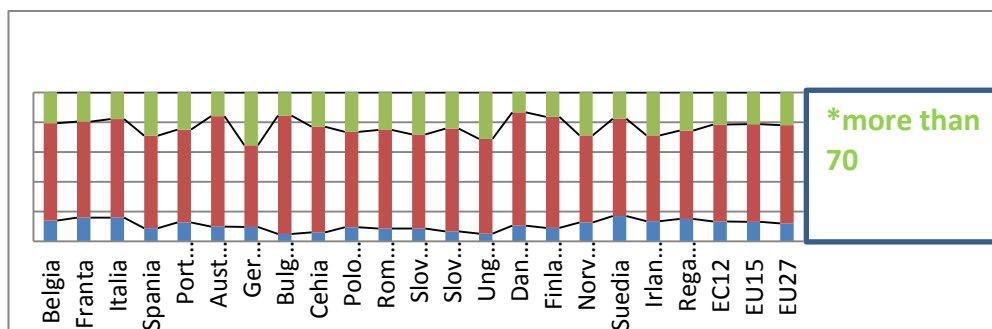
Country	Less than 40	Between 40 and 70	More than 70
Belgium	14.00%	65.40%	20.60%
France	15.90%	64.70%	19.40%
Italy	16.00%	66.30%	17.70%
Spain	8.8%	62.3%	29.0%
Portugal	12.80%	62.40%	24.80%
Austria	10.00%	74.10%	15.80%
Germany	9.80%	54.70%	35.50%
Bulgaria	5.10%	79.50%	15.40%
Czech Republic	6.10%	71.00%	22.90%
Poland	9.60%	64.10%	26.40%
Romania	8.70%	66.20%	25.10%
Slovenia	8.70%	63.20%	28.20%
Slovakia	6.80%	68.90%	24.30%
Hungary	5.30%	63.50%	31.20%
Denmark	10.50%	76.30%	13.20%
Finland	9.20%	74.70%	16.20%
Norway	12.80%	58.40%	28.80%
Sweden	17.00%	65.40%	17.60%
Ireland	13.60%	57.70%	28.80%
UK	15.10%	59.30%	25.60%
EC12	13.30%	65.30%	21.40%
EU15	13.20%	65.60%	21.10%
EU27	12.20%	65.90%	21.90%

*\*Adapted from Eurofound data (EWCS-2010)*

The largest index regarding the number of employees that works less than 40 hours per week are the Nordic countries (Sweden being the representative with 17%), followed by the developed Latin countries (Italy 16%, France 15.9%, Belgium 14%) then the English countries (Ireland 13.6%, UK 15.1%). The EU27 average of employees who said that they work more than 40 hours is 12.2%.

The employees working over 70 hours per week are more numerous in Germany 35.5%, Spain 29%, Hungary 31.2%, Norway and Ireland 28.8%. (Table no. 2)

If we relate the results to groups of countries, the most numerous employees working 70 hours per week we meet in English countries, followed by the ex-communist and German countries. (See Fig. 4).

**Figure 4: The number of paid and unpaid hours by European workers (index)**

*\* Adapted from Eurofound data (EWCS-2010)*

## 5 Conclusion

From the analysis made we can observe that at a European level there is a favourable environment to promote the work-family culture, especially in the Nordic countries where the management practice and managers supports the staff. Being feminist countries, with a low distance power they are particularly preoccupied about the working conditions and the quality of life, being particularly concerned of the well-being and satisfaction of the employee. Less advantaged are the individualistic countries oriented to performance.

From what we have seen there is no uniform expectation of the work-family culture elements across the continent. Some countries have an advantage of work-family reconciliation arrangements, others of cultural orientation at a social level that encourages those values to achieve good work-family balance, other countries have a shorter weekly working hours than the EU average (which are creating a availability of the employees to cope with extra-job) and not least some organizational cultures are favoured by the predisposition of the managers to assist and support the employees.

At the most fundamental level, the organizations must focus on work processes, and to explore how exceeded assumption influences the total number of hours that employees are expected to work. It should be overcome the assumption that puts in a direct link the work hours with the work productivity.

HR managers' play an important role in identifying those programs needs to balance work and private life that needs to be created and implemented in an organization for a better time management of the employee.

## 6 References

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