

Working Group 4 „Work-life balance“

June 25 2007 from 14h – 16h30

June 26, 2007 from 9h – 11h

Devise of the working group:

“The compatibility between family and profession, children and career, is to be improved for parents by adapting working conditions of families and by providing high-quality affordable child care according to the needs of families”.

Moderation: Dr. Ursula Matschke

Expert: Ursula Schwarzenbart

June 25, 2007:

Introduction:

The session started with a short introduction to the theme held by the working group expert Ursula Schwarzenberger from the Daimler Chrysler AG stating that she doesn't like the word “work-life-balance” so much because it sounds like men have a career and women a so called “work-life-balance”. A better expression for her would be “integrated way of living”. The topic work-life–balance for her mainly means the struggle of women to have a career and children while having no part time assignment but a full time job. A part time job is often supposed to be a career killer, at least it slows down a career.

Subsequent statements:

- Work life balance is often reduced only to the question of child care. The question of the personal care by the family members is often forgotten. One part of a possible solution could be to chose a day care facility near the working place that allows to combine family and working demands.

The position of the children:

- It is necessary and it would be very interesting to ask the children about their preconceptions on this issue. (Maybe one can design a questionnaire for children)
- It is very important that the parents spend some time with children as a personal and more constant reference point for them.

The Roll of authorities:

The public authorities can help to fasten a change of attitude in the whole society.

Enterprises and work-life balance:

- Today there is a tendency towards a new attitude of young managers who now stress the willingness and the possibility to have a career and children.
- It is very important that the management supports the family plans of the employees. "Erziehungsgeld" for instance is often taken if the parents can be sure that the management supports them.
- The management but also the whole society has to (re)learn to respect the structures and the needs of families. The problem is that one has often no influence on business appointments and therefore no chance to bring family and work into accordance.
- Important for employees who take a time-out is, that they stay in contact with the enterprise so that one is kept informed about what's going on in the enterprise while being absent.
- Once the mothers wanted to stay at home for 5 or 6 years after the birth of a child, now they want to come back to work after about ½ a year.
- It is important to include the man into the daily care of children in the family. Here should be tried out to find new working conditions for them to get along with those challenges for instance to establish the possibility of office work for man. Men should do more office work. More management by the fathers is needed.
- The solution of the problem demands compromises from both sides, family and enterprise.

Some experiences in France (Nantes):

- In France the problem with child care and career is nearly a non-topic.
- The opening time of the Kindergarten is oriented towards the working time of the parents. Their opening hours are from 8:00 – 18:00 h.
- A problem still to solve is what to do with the children of parents who work at night. In Straßburg has started a pilot child care project who doesn't cause any extra costs for the parents.

Some experiences in Eastern Europe:

In Eastern Europe the child care facilities work under specific conditions which cause specific problems.

- An enhanced lack of money, lack of workers and lack of resources in general compared to those existing in western European countries
- The fact that many people go to western European countries in order to work there because of the higher wages paid there. This causes specific problems and the child care facilities face different requirements as an outcome of this situation.
- Another issue is the problem of transition from school to work.

Other:

- An overall problem is the lack of material and human resources.
To give a structure to the theme it is suggested to divide it into three analysis categories: 1. Needs of the families 2. Needs of the children 3. Needs of the companies

Procedural questions:

Especially Mr. Gerold Lauber (Zurich) and Mrs. Dr. Vasiliki Argyropoulos (Graz) want to know more about the organisation and the overall structure of the network and

how the network will proceed and coordinate their activities until the next meeting which is supposed to take place in about one year. They wish to be informed about the following topics:

- Responsibilities
- Appropriate structure of the working group and the whole network
- The next steps
- Coordination and information flow
- Contact persons
- How to take part in and how to profit from the other working groups

In general is stated that first of all it is important to have the contact to the other participants. Above all this is assured via the internet platform.

June 26, 2007:

1. Structure and further proceeding

To meet the requests of the participants mentioned above, the moderation of the working group presented a timetable and a to do list indicating actions and dates until the end of 2007. There were also made proposals for the further proceeding of the working group and the network in general. (for the details see the presentation of the moderation) To ensure an efficient working structure and a good flow of information, in each working group one city has to take the responsibility for the task to manage the working group. During the meeting no city declared to take over this part. Graz, Straßburg and Nantes have to confer with their local authorities or majors before they can possibly agree. The moderator suggested a space of time of 4 weeks to come up with a decision on this topic. Furthermore each participating city has to name one contact person for Mrs. Freter, the Main coordinator for the whole "Cities for Children" network, who has to coordinate the concrete local work.

2. Presentation of the results

The working group agreed that "families in work" which means integration of work and family life by considering the needs of the male and female employees, the needs of the children and the needs of the companies should be the main issue of the working group.

Furthermore the WG is willing to focus their work on the change of cultural attitudes, the change of working conditions, the improvement of the supporting infrastructure and services for families and the management of organisational change in order to improve the whole situation of "families at work".

Questionnaire:

To ascertain the current situation and practices concerning the "families at work" related topics like child care or the behaviour of the enterprises towards family needs, a questionnaire will be developed. The questions asked should be held more general so that the Questionnaire allows to detect a country and city specific focus on the topics mentioned above. So a current state of affairs for every country will be ascertained, comparability between the countries will be assured and eventual progresses can be measured. It is also mentioned that maybe several Questionnaires have to be developed (for NGO`s, enterprises and local authorities)

Of course the work-life balance issue is related with the issues of the other working groups. For the benefit of all participants it makes sense that the different working groups cooperate with each other. (For further details see the presentation of the moderator)

Benefits expected from the network:

- Exchange of best practices, ideas and know how will facilitate work and help to solve problems efficiently
- Cooperation on specific problems with different partners and different countries
- Share experiences
- Implement common projects (France)
- Apply for European incentives (France)
- To know where to ask questions related to the topic
- Maybe it's the beginning of a political process
- Making some substantial progresses in the field of work-life balance

Protocol by Sebastian Amrhein, Robert Bosch Foundation