

“Family friendly concepts and tools in different-sized Hungarian organizations based on empirical study”

AUTHORS	Habil Andrea Bencsik Tímea Juhász  https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5386-0678  https://www.webofscience.com/wos/author/record/GQH-2702-2022
ARTICLE INFO	Habil Andrea Bencsik and Tímea Juhász (2010). Family friendly concepts and tools in different-sized Hungarian organizations based on empirical study. <i>Problems and Perspectives in Management</i> , 8(1)
RELEASED ON	Tuesday, 23 February 2010
JOURNAL	"Problems and Perspectives in Management"
FOUNDER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”

		
NUMBER OF REFERENCES	NUMBER OF FIGURES	NUMBER OF TABLES
0	0	0

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Andrea Bencsik (Hungary), Tímea Juhász (Hungary)

Family friendly concepts and tools in different-sized Hungarian organizations based on empirical study

Abstract

In today's world, more and more people have been thinking whether to put their family or their career to the foreground as there does not seem to exist any balance between the two aspects today. The reconciliation of work and family life can be seen today not only as an individual, but rather, as an organizational problem. After all, an employee who is tense, exhausted or tired because of his/her responsibilities at home will not be effective at work and vice versa.

It is no wonder, then, that several Hungarian organizations are putting more and more emphasis on solving these occasional problems. In this article, an empirical survey is used to present the different tools used by different-sized Hungarian companies to help employees reconcile their work and their private lives.

Keywords: family-friendly places of work, family-friendly practices, organizations of different sizes, reconciliation of work and family, work-life balance.

JEL Classification: M19.

Introduction

We all attempt to live a life which enables optimal physical and mental balance. The term "standard of living" is a very complex notion, which, among other things, includes an individual's emotional, material, physical etc. wellbeing; it encompasses all the factors which help people to live the most favorable life possible (Akranaviciute & Ruzevicius, 2007).

Work-life balance, as one of the key aspects of our standard of living, is about the balance of work and private life. The problem of reconciling work and private life is the product of the 20th century as the spreading of women taking jobs from the 70s caused them not only to accept home responsibilities, but also to actively appear on the labor market. Owing to this phenomenon, researchers have been treating work and family not as two separate entities, as earlier, but as parts of the same interlocking system. Through this way of thinking, it was supposed that the events at work influence an individual's home life and vice versa (Clark, 2000). The problem today is more complex, and regarding genders, men are also involved in terms of reconciling work and family life. In their case, however, it is more difficult to identify the problem as they are more reluctant to talk about this question in public. For this reason, employers continue to treat the problem of the reconciliation of work and family as primarily a female problem (Levin, 1997).

This individual problem level, however, did not and does not leave the organizations untouched either, especially because one of the most important sources for a company is human resource (Pfeffer & Salanick, 1978). This resource ensures the knowledge capital of the organization, enabling it to de-

velop dynamically and stay competitive. One of the basic goals of any company is to attract and keep the important professional knowledge which could also be important for other companies as well (Konrad & Mangel, 2000). This is an especially big problem when knowledge is easily marketable, and rival firms are willing to offer considerable reward to get that knowledge.

A well-qualified labor source, however, expects today a lot more from an organization than in previous times. While the primary tool of keeping an employee used to be a rise in salary, the new motivational interpretation suggests that managers cannot ignore the question of individual family needs, or the necessity of spreading family-friendly views at the workplace. According to Gyula Bakacsi (1996), 'it is not true that a bigger salary makes employees stay in at work even hours after work time or make individual system repair and set higher goals' (p. 319). As an individual's goals depend on several factors like physical and social mobility, personal experience and personal value systems (Chikán, 2008), individual goals can be reconciled with those of the organizations. This means that firms should be realizing that their economic efficiency and the needs of their employees are not opposing concepts.

The truth is exactly the contrary. As Attila Chikán (2008) puts it, 'organizational goals are eventually built on mutual compromises formed from the conflict between corporate and individual demands. An organization is effective when the management chooses to use inner dynamical methods to allow room for conflicts of goals and objectives instead of oppressing the same problems' (p. 41). This way, employees may find solutions for their working and family problems in cooperation with their organiza-

tions. Owing to this, employers had to realize that the changes in family as well as work life make it impossible for them to stay out of the process of finding a solution for this crisis (Kamerman & Kahn, 1987).

At the same time, however, a different approach to this problem means that we cannot forget how much the social responsibility of corporations is becoming more and more of a social expectation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Since it is no longer possible to solve every social issue on a state level, the business organizations have to take an active role in problem solving just as governments do (Juhász, 2008).

The governmental role in this context serves a certain framework for companies which adapt the decisions and policies of the state on their organizational level, creating a specific action program during the process (Bencsik & Juhász, 2008).

It is true that the social role and responsibility of the companies have been a matter of economic debate. One group has been formed around economists like the Nobel price-winning economist Friedman, who refused the notion that a company should only deal with the goals set in its founding document (like profit-maximization). At the same time, however, people like John Ladd were of the opinion that corporate entities cannot face moral expectations as they are basically unintelligible for a company (Oláh, 2009). The new expectations of responsibility companies are facing today are continuously expanded by new material, which means the reconciliation of work and family is getting more and more attention from the public as well as different companies. It is no wonder then that the issue of family-friendly policy and work environment is a timely question on the macro-economic as well as individual firm level.

1. The Hungarian society's view concerning family and child-bearing

The declining population in Hungary appears not only as a demographic, but also as a national economic problem. The primary reason for the dwindling Hungarian population is that the number of deaths has been higher than the number of births since 1981 (the natural reduction in the first 7 months of 2009 was 20,776 people, 1687 more than during the same period in the previous year). This reduction is high in spite of the fact that the so-called PPA II international survey conducted between 2000 and 2003 showed that 58.8% of those asked in Hungary said that the real source of happiness can only be a child, that is, people cannot consider themselves happy if they do not have children. The survey shows that the Hungarian society places

the children in the first place, and finds it unacceptable if somebody makes a conscious decision not to have a baby, yet the results showed that 37% of those women under 40 do not actually have a child (Pongrácz, 2007).

Women, however, have always been treating with scepticism the ideal state of a working woman and housewife so advocated by communism. This is especially true as researches (Pongrácz & S. Molnár, 1974, 1978, 1991, 2000) show that the Hungarian women and mothers are specifically family-centered, which is a tendency not just in the case of the older, but also, the younger, generation.

While the Hungarian society expects women to be role-model mothers on the one hand, at the same time, the same women must take their share of supporting their family (Konecz, 2005). This is also supported by a research conducted by Tárki in 1999, where 78% of women asked claimed that they work only to support their family, while only 14% found their personal career important. This means that in most Hungarian families, women are forced to take up a job out of financial necessity after their children have reached a certain age (Pongrácz, 2001). This also means that it is the women who are supposed to solve the difficulty of reconciling work and family chores, seeing as how men take their share out of child-rearing and housework to a smaller degree than women.

Zsuzsanna Blaskó (2005) showed in her research, however, that by 2002, both genders seemed to accept more the fact that 'finding a job can be a natural demand for women as well,' which does not necessarily affect the family in a negative way. While the financial status of the family does not give women the luxury of not working and not contributing to the family budget, the acceptance of the traditional gender roles has been strengthened since the change of the regime in 1989.

It comes from the above that women are more likely to be responsible for cooking, washing up and cleaning in the family, while men take a greater share from gardening and repairing the household appliances (Nagy, 2001). It can be said that Hungarian men take part in household chores to a lesser degree than their Scandinavian counterparts, where the notion of modernization is much stronger as opposed to the traditional Hungarian view (Falussy, 2005).

2. Hungarian employment policy through family-friendly approach

It is a fact that finding a job for women, and also some men, is widely influenced by their family commitment, which means that the reconciliation of work and family may appear on the labor market as an important question.

The European Union has listed the necessity of handling this question in its employment strategy, and from 1998, its policy of doing away with gender distinction included the harmonization of work and family life, the facilitation of returning to work and the integration of disadvantaged groups into work. According to the integrated principles, the Hungarian government created its National Action Program for development and employment in 2005, including the economic and employment policies which enable the realization of the Lisbon Strategy. It is no wonder, then, that one of the basic aspects of employment strategy is to make work available and desirable. This way, the laborers' presence on the market should be strengthened, and the social security system should be modernized. On the other hand, the adaption skills of employees and enterprises should be elaborated on; finally, human resources should be developed with the help of education and training (National Action Program for growth and employment, 2005-2008). This indicates that a strong family-friendly approach is also needed because the Hungarian employment rates fall behind the European norm.

The Hungarian employment policy is also characterized by the fact that while in the 70s and 80s, the economic policy of the country was to reach the socialist goal of full employment, in the 90s, during the transition into market economy, the normal trend was falling employment and rising unemployment rates. Up to 1994, this reduction had been divided between males and females more or less equally (Frey, 2001), while by 1997, this problem had mostly affected women. There has been a slight rise since 1997 (until the arrival of the economic crisis), but the figures are still lagging behind the employment rates of the EU. While in 2008, the employment rate of those between 15 and 64, only reaches 56.7%, the average number in the EU is 65.9%. In terms of the employment of genders, the employment rate of women is especially low (an average rate of 59.1% for women in 2008 as opposed to the Hungarian 50.6%). The low rate of employment seems to be staying in spite of the fact that several legal procedures have been formed to take into consideration and tolerate the family commitment of employers as well as to facilitate the reconciliation of work and private life. It comes from the above that the Labor Code obliges both employers and employees to work regulations, but it also builds in safety precautions into the legal practice. There are two groups of law in the Labor Code which are designed to facilitate the balance of work and private life. One of these groups includes the special legal cases designed to help those in special life situations, the other contains the regulations concerning

family roles. The examples include regulations protecting pregnant women, legal institutions protecting parenthood and other similar laws aimed at other family roles (Barakonyi, 2007). It can be generally stated that the regulations of the Hungarian labor market basically take into consideration and tolerate the family commitments of employers, sometimes even at the cost of restricting the rights of the employer. It is also a fact, however, that although these regulations are binding, it is still questionable how much the labor market obeys them or how much they allow these regulations to take effect.

3. The family-friendly attitude of the Hungarian companies

As we have already mentioned before, the Hungarian society is strongly family-centered, which means that the reconciliation of family and work has been and continues to be a vital issue in the life of local organizations. The family-friendly concept of the Hungarian firms has been gaining attention following the change of regime, from the turn of the millennium, the Family-Friendly Workplace tender was written out by the then existing Ministry of Family and Social Issues (using German, Irish and Dutch examples). Almost ten years which have passed since then showed that the family-friendly corporate strategies have changed and developed quite a lot as well.

A quantitative survey has been launched by us to be able to examine the family-friendly practices of Hungarian organizations on a large scale. Similar foreign surveys aiming at the family-friendly employment strategies have already examined the connections concerning the size of a given company (MacDermid, Hertzog & Kensinger, 2001; Morgan & Milliken, 1992, etc.). We were primarily interested in our present research what the different family-friendly practices of different-sized Hungarian firms are and what kind of employment tools these organizations use. In the course of our research, we attempted to prove the following complex hypothesis:

Hypothesis: Regarding different-sized Hungarian organizations, there is a definite divergence between family-friendly practices, as well as the implemented family-friendly tools.

4. Research methodology

We are going to begin the presentation of the empirical research by specifying the samples first. The non-probability method, snowball-sampling has been chosen as a sampling technique. Our aim during the research was to receive answers from several co-workers holding in different positions at the same firms. However, this could not always be

achieved, which means that our questionnaire was filled in by 671 people from 559 companies. During the sampling, we managed to reach these organizations mostly via email or personally on the premises of the given company, perhaps through several professional forums. It is also a given fact that we have received promises from several organizations to take part in the research; however, some of the questionnaires were not sent back even after several inquiries.

For the sake of representation, conscious effort was made to collect sample material from as many Hungarian regions as possible. Owing to physical and monetary restrictions, however, some under-represented regions remained in the survey. The regional representative proportion was the following: Central Hungary 47.9%, Western Transdanubia 31.5%, Middle Transdanubia 15.9%, Southern Transdanubia 1.8%, Northern Hungary 1.1%, Northern Great Plains 0.5%, Southern Great Plains 1.3%. Taking into consideration the GDP per capita according to KSH (the Hungarian Central Statistical Office), most of the samples were collected from the three most developed Hungarian regions, as opposed to the results from the other four regions: the number of the received surveys was more or less equal in those regions, while still lagging behind the national average by approximately 32-37%.

During the creation of the survey, nonmetric, nominal and ordinal measuring scales were used as primary tools, the metric scales containing interval scales. Our questionnaire was mostly built on the 5-phase Likert scale (not a comparative scale). There were mostly structured scales, and, following the experience we had gained from previous researches, only two unstructured questions were included. Among the structured questions, selective closed as well as alternative closed questions could be found, but most of the questions were scale questions.

A probing test of the questionnaire was conducted at the end of 2008 with 10 subjects. There was no re-

quest from the subjects to change the content of the survey, so the research could begin. Although the samples did not cover every region in the country, and the survey could not be considered representative, we still believe that it can present the Hungarian practices quite well.

5. Research results

The following size categories were established during our research: firms with 2-8 people were considered micro-companies, organizations with 9-49 people were designated small enterprises, middle enterprises were the firms with 50-249, and big companies were the ones with 250 people or more.

As for the participants, 17.7% (119) of the samples came from micro-companies, 25.9% (174) from small, 27% (181) from medium, and 29.4% (197) from big firms.

We were interested in our research in the differences between different-sized companies concerning family-friendly practice; therefore, we raised questions about the firms' family-friendly practices, and the subjects had to use a 5-point scale to answer how much the given statement is true in their case (1 meaning the statement is not characteristic, 5 meaning it is absolutely true of them). After this, we checked if there was any difference between the means of answers of the firms concerning the firms' sizes. The research was solved using one-way ANOVA. To check whether the dependent variables were distributed normally, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were made, and although none of the variables were distributed total normally, the variables were distributed approximately normally. The homogeneity of variances was checked by Levene-test, and ensured in every case. The results of the research are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and F-probes based on size concerning family-friendly corporate employment

Statements	Size of firm	N	Mean	Std. deviation	F	Sign.
Your organization involves all employees in the reconciliation process of work and family.	Microcorp.	115	3.44	1.179	4.262	0.005*
	Small firm	173	3.02	1.146		
	Middle co.	181	3.27	1.182		
	Big firm	193	3.05	1.105		
Your organization sees the problem of reconciling work and family mainly as a problem for women.	Microcorp.	117	2.44	1.141	3.729	0.011*
	Small firm	173	2.42	1.073		
	Middle co.	181	2.78	1.208		
	Big firm	193	2.59	1.101		

Table 1 (cont.). Means, standard deviations and F-probes based on size concerning family-friendly corporate employment

Statements	Size of firm	N	Mean	Std. deviation	F	Sign.
At your firm, the measures taken to reconcile work and family apply to everyone.	Microcorp.	116	3.67	1.070	2.796	0.039*
	Small firm	173	3.31	1.204		
	Middle co.	179	3.42	1.080		
	Big firm	193	3.35	1.089		
At your firm, the measures taken to reconcile work may only be initiated by the management.	Microcorp.	117	2.60	1.253	4.342	0.005*
	Small firm	172	2.79	1.210		
	Middle co.	181	3.07	1.186		
	Big firm	193	2.97	1.136		
At your firm, the measures taken to reconcile work may also be initiated by employees.	Microcorp.	117	3.38	1.128	6.279	0.000
	Small firm	173	2.95	1.090		
	Middle co.	181	2.91	1.087		
	Big firm	193	2.87	1.070		
At your firm, the content of the measures reconciling work and family changes according to the position of the employee.	Microcorp.	117	1.89	1.032	5.556	0.001*
	Small firm	170	2.21	1.125		
	Middle co.	181	2.36	1.178		
	Big firm	193	2.38	1.154		
At your firm, the content of the measures reconciling work and family changes according to the time spent at the organization.	Microcorp.	117	1.86	1.082	0.627	0.598
	Small firm	171	1.99	1.049		
	Middle co.	181	1.96	1.026		
	Big firm	192	2.02	.954		
At your firm, the benefits aiming to reconcile work and family change according to the position of the employee.	Microcorp.	117	2.08	1.226	1.575	0.194
	Small firm	172	2.22	1.260		
	Middle co.	181	2.27	1.273		
	Big firm	192	2.39	1.261		
At your firm, the benefits aiming to reconcile work and family change by the time spent at the organization.	Microcorp.	117	2.15	1.222	0.615	0.606
	Small firm	172	2.02	1.043		
	Middle co.	180	2.10	1.163		
	Big firm	191	2.17	1.060		

Note: * $p < 0,05$.

It can be stated that firms of different sizes also differ in other factors, for example, who is responsible for the reconciliation of work and family matters, who is involved in family-friendly approaches, whether the system of remuneration changes according to the position within the firm, and, finally, who is allowed to suggest and initiate changes leading to family-friendly measures.

In the following, our research concentrates on the practices found in different-sized organizations concerning specific family-friendly tools and methods (different working time models, training, contact with young mothers, employee bonuses etc.).

6. Working time models

The employment situation in Hungary is not really strengthened by atypical employment strategies, which is confirmed by statistical figures. In 2007 the proportion of people employed in part time lagged far behind average figures of the European Union (KSH). As for figures in gender analysis, 2.8% of all the employed men and 5.8% of all the employed

women were employed in part-time; these data stand out from the figures of the 27 member states of the EU (the average part-time employment being 7.7% of all men and 31.2% of all employed women). Scheibel and Dex (1997, with reference to Purcell) were of the opinion, however, that the various flexible employment forms conform to the flexibility requirement of the firms themselves, not the requirements of the family-friendly concept. This way, among other things, several shifts or seasonal work may be organized in accordance with the firm's production demands and requirements, perhaps to the expectation based on their business profiles. Approximately 19.2% of the answerers claimed that there is no kind of flexible-work arrangement at their firm besides full-time employment. It was assumed that we would find some connection between the size of the firm – that is, the number of employees – and the fact whether the firm in question utilizes some kind of non-standard working time-model. To check the connection, a chi-square test has been conducted. Our assumption was correct, that is, there was a significant connection between

the two factors (results of chi-square test: 19.291, sign: 0.000, Kramer V result: 0.172 sign: 0.000). There have been some non-standard working-time models in the case of 81.2% of the sampled micro-companies, 69.6% of the small firms, 84.8% of the middle companies and 86.5% of the big companies.

We also wanted to know which working-time models show considerable difference at differently-sized companies. The research was done using chi-square test from the nominal variables (working time models/size of organization); the result is summarized in the following table:

Table 2. Chi-square test: between different-sized firms and different working-time models

Working-time models/size of organization	χ^2	df	Sign.
Flexible work time/size of org.	16.097	3	0.001*
Part-time job/size of org.	12.533	3	0.006*
Human resource hiring/size of org.	73.405	3	0.000*
Division of labor/size of org.	10.705	3	0.013*
Project work/size of org.	4.764	3	0.190
Seasonal work/size of org.	11.711	3	0.008*
Telework/size of org.	0.062	3	0.996
Other/size of org.	12.627	3	0.006*

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

As Table 2 shows, companies of different size are not homogeneous in terms of flexible work time, part-time job, human resource hiring, division of labor, seasonal work and other work models. Regardless of their size, the Hungarian companies seem to favor flexible working hours (63.5% of those questioned mentioned it) as well as part-

time work (51.4%), while the least applied working method was teleworking (14.4%). Table 3 presents the frequency of working-time models based on the size of the organization. The data show that companies with 50 or less employees are less reluctant to apply unconventional working-time methods than those with more than 50 workers.

Table 3. Frequency of working-time models based on company size

		Flexible working time	Part-time work	Human resource hiring	Division of labor	Project work	Seasonal work	Telework	Other
Micro	N	64	34	5	25	14	19	14	2
	%	67.40	35.80	5.30	26.30	14.70	20.00	14.70	2.10
Small	N	56	69	15	29	21	26	16	6
	%	47.90	59.00	12.80	24.80	17.90	22.20	13.70	5.10
Medium	N	101	79	40	30	31	14	22	19
	%	66.90	52.30	26.50	19.90	20.50	9.30	14.60	12.60
Big	N	115	90	80	20	42	20	24	21
	%	69.30	54.20	48.20	12.00	25.30	12.00	14.50	12.70
Total	N	336	272	140	104	108	79	76	48
	%	63.50	51.40	26.50	19.70	20.40	14.90	14.40	9.10

7. Training and additional training

In order to meet specific market demands and stay competitive against rival firms, it is inevitable for companies to develop and maintain the knowledge and skills of their employees. Training and further education, as well as acquiring additional skills and knowledge are important not only to employees with family, but to single workers as well.

The figures of KSH show quite clearly that almost half (49%) of the Hungarian companies offered some form of additional training to their employees in the year 2005. An additional third of the companies also sent their workers to professional conferences. There were rarer instances of trainings held directly at the workplace (18%). The firms

applied common study groups and self-training even rarer, with only 7% of those firms questioned using such methods. Rotation at the workplace and educational visits were the rarest forms of training type at the Hungarian organizations (3%).

While creating the questionnaire, we also examined the training methods in terms of being family-friendly or not. The people questioned needed to decide how much the statement about organizational questions is characteristic of their organization on a 5-level Likert-scale, 1 meaning it is not characteristic at all, 5 meaning it is absolutely characteristic. We checked how our samples can be segmented with the help of these variables.

Clustering was made using the K-means method,

during which 2 clusters were formed. The following cluster-centers are summarized in Table 4.

Based on the cluster-centers, the following clusters were established:

Cluster 1: in this cluster, firms do not organize

trainings, and they do not support the training of their employees either.

Cluster 2: as opposed to the previous group, these firms put emphasis on training, which is shown in inside trainings as well as training support.

Table 4. Final cluster-centers in connection with training practice

Statements	1	2
Your firm is ready to make sacrifices to develop and maintain worker's skills.	3	4
Your firm organizes trainings of their own for their employees.	2	4
Your firm gives financial support to train their employees.	2	4
Trainings are only organized during the working hours.	2	3

We examined whether there is a connection between organizations of different size and clusters. According to the chi-square test, there was a significant connection between the two variables (cluster and organization size) (chi-square: 50.827, sign: 0.000). As for the division of firms, 70.4% of micro-companies and 55.7% of small companies belong to cluster 1, while 58.1% of medium and 68.6% of big companies belong to cluster 2. This means that while the majority of medium-sized and big companies invest money and energy into the training of their employees, small-sized and micro-companies are mostly reluctant, or refuse to, support and take part in the training of their employees.

8. Employment benefits

The system of fringe benefits has a history of decades in Western Europe; however, in Hungary, it only started to spread among Hungarian firms about a decade ago. Organizations often employ the system of fringe benefits as a form of incentive method. Within the so-called "cafeteria"-system, employees today are free to choose among benefits supporting health preservation, eating, cultural pursuits, the internet, travelling demands etc. There have been several researches concerning fringe benefits in Hungary. In 2003, the basic aim of the research made by Fact Group was to describe the attitudes and applied practices of the firms with

regard to fringe benefits. The most important conclusion was that the commitment of fellow employees can be strengthened primarily through the newly-appearing benefit types. Another representative survey made by Accor Service in 2006 wanted to know how much the popularity of the cafeteria system had changed among employers and employees. A survey from that time showed that 54% of the interviewed local firms had no intention of introducing the fringe benefit system in 2006, and only 25% of all organizations offered any kind of fringe benefit at all. The same survey from 2008 showed much more positive results. Approximately 58% of the questioned companies were already using fringe benefits, the most popular of which proved to be food vouchers (70% of all cases). Gift and travel vouchers were also popular, appearing in the Hungarian cafeteria system in 30% of the cases. When our survey was being made, one of the reasons why fringe benefits were rated as one of the most important elements of family-friendly tools was their rising popularity. The people questioned needed to decide how much the statement about organizational questions is characteristic of their organization on a 5-level Likert-scale, 1 meaning it is not characteristic at all, 5 meaning it is absolutely characteristic. Clustering was made using the K-means method; the final cluster-centers were the following:

Table 5. Final cluster-centers based on employee benefits

Statement	Clusters		
	1	2	3
Non-monetary benefits are more widespread at the firm.	3	3	2
The amount of employment benefits is equal for all employees.	4	3	2
Employment benefits change according to position.	2	4	3
Employment benefits are available to everyone.	5	4	2

Clusters were interpreted according to the following factors:

Cluster 1: this includes all organizations where employment benefits are available for everyone, and employments receive these benefits on a roughly equal basis. At the same time, the amount of the benefits does not change with position, and benefits

themselves are not of a monetary nature.

Cluster 2: the organizations in this cluster offer employment benefits according to position, but everybody receives them in some form. It is also true that these benefits are more or less the same, although there are instances of non-monetary benefits as well.

Cluster 3: these organizations do not typically follow a system of same-degree employment benefits for everyone, and non-monetary employment benefits are also infrequent. At the same time, benefits at these firms seem to change according to positions in an average number of cases.

After forming the clusters, we examined whether there is any kind of connection between the different sizes of the organizations and the clusters themselves. A chi-square test was made, and a significant connection was found (chi-square: 23.181, df: 8, sign: 0.003). Irrespective of the size of the company, 48.2% of our observed items belong to cluster 2, with 30.4% and 21.4% belonging to cluster 1 and 3, respectively. Judging primarily from the point of view of corporate size, it can be said that all organizational type belongs primarily to cluster 2.

9. Re-integration of young mothers

In the years 2007 and 2008, we interviewed approximately 256 women on maternity leave, asking them about their view of their chance of re-integration to the Hungarian labor market. In Hungary, women have the right to stay home with their children for a very long time – about three years in the case of a healthy, even longer in the case of a sick, child. That research showed that approximately 70% of the interviewed felt having a baby a disadvantage on the labor market. The aim of our present research is to examine the different ways companies use to keep in contact with young mothers provided there are people on maternity leave at the firm.

Table 6. Forms of contact according to company size

		E-mail	Invitation to events	Participation in programs	Personal	Company newspaper	Mentor	Other
Micro	N	16	16	5	25	0	0	2
	%	44.40	44.40	13.90	69.40	0.00	0.00	5.60
Small	N	40	59	20	65	3	3	5
	%	45.50	67.00	22.70	73.90	3.40	3.40	5.70
Medium	N	81	80	17	90	9	3	17
	%	57.00	56.30	12.00	63.40	6.30	2.10	12.00
Big	N	78	80	21	69	22	1	14
	%	53.80	55.20	33.30	47.60	15.20	0.70	9.70
Total	N	215	235	63	249	34	7	38
	%	52.30	57.20	15.30	60.60	8.30	1.70	9.20

Table 6 shows that companies keep in contact with young mothers mostly personally, and without any distinction in the size of the firm. At the same time, young mothers also receive invitations to corporate events, and e-mails are often sent mothers on maternity leave as well. Analyzing the question from the point of view of company size, it can be seen that personal contact is more characteristic in the case of smaller organizations, which is understandable given how the smaller size of the firm allows for more informal, deeper and more personal contact. It is also worth mentioning that this form of contact is the least expensive type as well. It was also interesting to hear, however, that every third person working at big companies mentioned that it is a well-established practice at their firm to invite young mothers to professional programs. This is extremely important as all the young mothers interviewed complained about lagging behind professional developments in their sphere of work, being unable to catch up with new information. This also has a negative effect on their self-esteem, as well as on their chances of re-establishing themselves in their former work. At the same time, it is also important that only 10% of those questioned claimed that their firms can offer some sort of child-care facility for

their children. The samples showed that the firm type with the greatest percentage child-care facility offered was the group of big firms (13%), while the group with the smallest percentage of such facility offers was, surprisingly, not that of micro- and small-sized companies, but that of medium-sized firms (7.4%). It is a given fact that the greatest problem for women who wish to re-integrate themselves to the labor market after a maternity leave is the lack of available child-care facilities. In 2005, KSH made a survey among the people between 15 and 64, finding that of those people raising a child under 15 alone, 4% of men and 8% of women would have liked to work more or just appear more on the labor market while being hindered in this goal. 13% of the women asked said they do not work because they do not find a suitable facility for their children in the neighborhood with a timetable which is non-standard. On the other hand, 6% of them claimed that they find the amount they would have to pay for a child-care facility too high. The number of kindergartens has been drastically reduced since the change of the regime in 1989, which was explained by the reduced number of children born. It is true that there are legal regulations concerning these kinds of tasks for the local governments; however,

KSH data shows that 7% of the settlements do not possess a crèche, a kindergarten or any similar facility (Vucsko, 2007). At the same time, EU regulations state that by 2010, member states have to harmonize the demand for daytime child-care facilities with the abilities provided by their national service systems. The aim is to provide child-care for 90% of children over 3 but under school age, as well as for 33% of children under 3. For this reason, the number of crèches and daytime child-care facilities must be raised, and governmental normative support must be raised as well.

Conclusion

The European Employment Strategy (Ágnes Simonyi 2005) states that the organizations wishing to react flexibly to challenges must take into consideration a lot of different factors in the future, and, among other things, they also have to support their employees in reconciling work and family. More and more Hungarian companies have been realizing this, and they have all included this policy in their strategic human resource practices (Juhász, 2008).

In our research, we have presented some of the results of the examination of the family-friendly concepts of different-sized Hungarian organizations. After examining the results, we can say that there was no clear divergence either in the case of family-friendly practice or the applied family-friendly tools, which means our hypothesis can only be partially accepted. Researching the general family-friendly practice, the average results showed that, for example, in the case of micro-companies, it could be seen that a low number of employees (2-8 people) means a more visible connection between family and work than in the case of bigger companies. The appearance of these employees in deciding family-friendly policies was stronger, although it should also be mentioned that a lower employment number involves a less structured hierarchy and shorter red tape, meaning there are no specific rules as to who should implement certain family-friendly elements.

As opposed to the above case, middle- and big-sized companies are less inclined to listen to their employees when utilizing family-friendly methods, perhaps as a result of the higher number of workers. At the same time, unlike their smaller counterparts, these firms also separate the different positions with application authority.

In our research, we examined some specific and widely used family-friendly tools (different working time models, training, contacting young mothers, fringe benefits). Hungary is peculiar in terms of non-standard fam-

ily friendly methods, which is the result of demand surpassing supply. To find a remedy for this, measures have to be taken not only on a corporate level, but also by the government on the level of the macro-economy. At the moment, for example, Hungarian firms blame the present tax and social security regulations for the low number of part-time employment, which is a vital issue in the case of smaller companies. As it was seen in the samples, telework was one of the least widespread forms of employment, which can be explained by the fact that there is a low number of people with the facility to do this type of work (Tésits & Székely, 2005). As Németh (2004, with reference to Tésits & Székely, 2005) puts it, 'telework in Hungary does not require high-level qualification, and, as such, it can be seen as cooperation between intellectual workers with routine and people offering low intellectual work' (p. 17). This has to be corrected in the future, and the new forms of flexible-time work have to be made popular among employees as well as employers.

Efforts of equal magnitude must also be made to support training and re-training. This is especially true in the case of micro- and small companies as these firms, having smaller resources than their multinational counterparts, have bigger need for people with a wide range of skills. Multinational companies, on the other hand, require less skills especially from the workers they hire for assembly-line type of work, which means they are able to replace their lost human resources in the case of a fluctuation in their pool of employees (Adler, 2001).

Fringe benefits in general are used to be quite popular owing to the tax allowances they involved; however, the new tax regulations earmarked for next year will probably cause their popularity to fall irrespective of company size as a lot of previously tax-free benefit types will be taxed.

Finally, atypical forms of employment must be more firmly implemented to help the re-integration of young mothers to the labor market; alternatively, kindergarten service must be strengthened. If women see that they will have a place on the labor market even after the expiration of maternity leave, and if employers offer them favorable employment terms, then they will not feel that they are discriminated because of their children. This means that they will be more willing to have children, which, irrespective of company size, is not only an organizational, but also a national economic and even a demographic interest (Bencsik & Juhász, 2008).

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