

Tackling Work-Life-Management: Recommendations for Trade Unions

Based on the results of the project
“From Work-Life-Balance to Work-Life-Management“

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1. A multilevel task: Work-Life-Management in a Trade Union Perspective

Reconciling work with private life – work-life balance – is not a matter for individuals alone. It also challenges politicians, companies and trade unions to come up with new approaches. The high number of stressed-out professionals and managers, as well as the increase in work-related psychological disorders, speaks for itself. The widespread incidence of high work pressure and the possibility of being continually online have created a "culture of urgency", from which many people cannot - or do not want to – escape. There are managers and high performers who hardly ever experience times that are wholly free from work. That is often detrimental to their personal well-being and health, as well as to their families and private lives.

Surveys in several trade unions show that many members want their unions to emphasise work-life issues in their programmes, and some organisations have already done so. There are, however, limits to outside influence: highly qualified people typically have a strong identification with their work. What motivates them and what burdens them cannot always be clearly distinguished. Knowledge workers see themselves as shapers of their situations, not as victims. It is therefore important to improve basic conditions and to offer assistance without curtailing employees' professional autonomy or conveying an impression of paternalism.

Special attention must be paid to the specific situation of managers. "Sandwiched" between executives and employees, they are often exposed to the conflicting demands coming from above and from below, and, not least, from the customers. While juggling with the problems of their own work-life balance, managers are also affecting the work-life balance of employees. Also, their function as role models for employees should not to be underestimated.

Factors influencing work-life balance are found at several levels. Whether people are able to bring their

working and private lives into balance depends of many factors. They include legal and social circumstances, company-specific conditions, and the personal preferences and choices of the individuals concerned. Consequently, work-life management is not an isolated issue, but should instead be integrated into a wide range of matters, from team organisation and working time arrangements, to designing communication media and child care facilities.

In the EU-sponsored project "from work-life balance to work-life management", UNI Europa P&MS examined what trade unions can do to support managers and knowledge workers in effectively balancing their work and life. That included the preparation of a series of recommendations for the work-life management of highly qualified personnel. They are structured around three key points: support services for members, collective bargaining, and exerting influence on the political and societal environment.

With this paper, UNI Europa is making the know-how developed in the project available to its member organisations. It should be borne in mind that baseline conditions vary a great deal from one country to another, including the demarcation between governmental and collectively agreed regulation; for example, in respect of parental leave or working time. The aim of the key points is to provide unions with suggestions, which, depending on their specific circumstances, they can apply or adapt. In addition, an annex lists a wide variety of possible activities in the field of work-life management. Trade unions are invited to supply feedback to UNI Europa P&Ms, in order to help the exchange of best practices in work-life management (contact person: Birte Dedden, UNI Europa; birte.dedden@uniglobalunion.org).

2. Recommendations: Trade Union Approaches to Work-Life Management

2.1. Trade Union Support for Members

- *Capacity building*: strengthening trade union competencies in the field of work-life management
- *Mainstreaming*: establishing work-life management as a permanent theme in all relevant fields of trade union activities
- *Workplace representatives and European Works Councils*: encouraging the integration of work-life balance issues, disseminating information
- *Development and dissemination of best practices by UNI Europa*: design-oriented input for member unions (transferring know-how, avoiding duplication)
- *Trade unions as role models*: good work-life management practices within our own organisations
- *Campaigns*: information campaigns geared to the target groups, and work-life management activities focused on events
- *Help desks*: specialist tele-counselling services for trade union members
- *Guidelines*: practical advice, leaflets for professionals and managers
- *Communication*: using social media to reach target audiences

2.2. Collective Bargaining

- *Systematic consideration* of work-life balance in collective bargaining. Central objective: “well-being at and through work”
- *Evaluation* of the concerns of members and potential members and of companies as a starting point for the development of a trade union position
- Treatment of work-life balance as a *cross-cutting issue*, to be routinely and explicitly taken up in a variety of collective bargaining subjects

Working Time & Work Location:

A crucial factor in work-life balance is working time. However, a mechanical reduction of working hours will fall short. Needed are flexible work schedules and *co-ordination with programmes for health promotion and parental/care leave, and with policies for older people*:

- *We do not recommend a reduction of working time as an isolated measure, as that often entails a risk of increased workloads*

We recommend:

- *Flexible working time* arrangements
- *Working time accounts*, employees can decide for themselves when to begin and end their working day
- *Long-term time accounts* with the possibility of claiming sabbaticals, extended leave or early retirement
- *Clear contracts with defined premiums for overtime work*
- *Career break* entitlements, not only for parenting but also for further training (lifelong learning)
- *Teleworking options*, in accordance with the European Agreement on Telework, negotiated by the European social partners
- *Adjustment of meeting schedules* to the needs of parents/part-time employees (predictable ending time of afternoon meetings)
- *Meetings and training during regular working hours* (not in the evening or on weekends)

Workplaces:

- *Realistic objectives* and timelines, clear prioritisation of tasks
- *Avoid frequent work interruptions*
- Install *regular feedback mechanisms*
- *Avoid task overload* and establish burn-out early warning systems
- *Mentoring procedures*: confidential dialogue on job & stress issues
- Regular *health checks* for P&MS

Parental/Care Leave:

- *Benefiting from the pay developments* of the reference group during absence
- *Connection to the workplace* during parental/care leave (e.g., through the mentoring system)
- Systematic and early *workplace re-entry planning*
- Extension of schemes to *reconstituted families and gay couples and families*
- Corresponding schemes for *other dependants requiring care or attention*

Company Services:

- *Health programmes* (e.g., medical consultation, blood pressure measurement, eye tests, back exercises, massaging ...)
- *Sports facilities, rest areas*
- *Workplace nurseries* or equivalent vouchers
- *Residential services*

Measures for Older Workers:

- *Adaptation of job descriptions*, taking into account the particular skills and interests of older colleagues
- *Reduced / flexible working hours* (while ensuring stable pension benefits at pensionable age)
- *Support for long-term employability*, promotion of skills development and lifelong learning

2.3. Trade Union Influence on the Political, Legal and Social Environment

Lobbying: Actors and Channels:

- *Local level (if possible to be addressed through local trade union)*: local politicians, religious and cultural communities, sports clubs, nursery schools, welfare facilities, etc.
- *National level*: parliament (e.g., on issues of employment law, working time and lifelong learning), employers, NGOs, referendums, media/PR campaigns (also action within trade unions)
- *EU level (co-ordinated by UNI Europa)*: European Social Dialogue, revision of existing legislation, and advancing work-life balance issues through new initiatives

Relevant Themes:

- Child care
- Dependants care
- Flexible working time models
- Mobile working
- Parental leave, leaves of absence and sabbaticals
- Lifelong learning
- Health, physical activities
- Workplace re-entry after career breaks
- Limiting working hours (also unrecorded hours)