

Final version

An original and data based approach to the work – life balance

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1 Introduction

1.1 Focus on the combination family life - business life

Over the past decades, the social responsibility of companies has increasingly become a subject of social debate. As a reaction to this, companies seem to pay more and more attention to their position in society and do so with a growing sense of responsibility for a sustainable development of society. The increased focus of companies for the environmental effects of their behaviour, e.g. in the energy sector, is a clear example of this. Accountability towards the environment has now become almost a condition for a healthy competitive position. In accordance with this the attention to the social responsibility of companies has also increased. An important part being the daily combination of family life and business life, with which all families and companies are confronted. Under the title “Work – Life Balance” this has become over the past decade more and more a part of company policy in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Also in various European welfare states the challenge of a better combination of private, family and professional life is getting more attention.

The shortages on the labour market over the past years make it a hot topic. A lot of companies still seem to have a lot of problem job vacancies. Due to fierce competition a lot is being asked of personnel and the work pressure is very high. Also from research it appears that employees nowadays seem to value the quality of life more than the amount of salary they gain. These developments strengthen the search of companies for better ways of accommodating some of the expectations of the employees with regard to the combination of family and professional life.

Companies are looking for a more effective work organisation within the very competitive market system. A number of developments on the labour market force organisations to use more sophisticated forms of communication and a better anticipation to the specific needs of their employees (Benschop en Verloo, 1999; Ghoshal en Bartlett, 1997; Van Dongen, 1993; Van Dongen, Omeij en Wijgaerts, 2001; Van Dongen, Beck en Vanhaute, 2001; Vloeberghs, 1989, 1997). Employees are being approached in a more differential way as individuals with specific competence, experience, expectations, needs, and a specific private and family situation. In order to keep their personnel and make better use of them, companies have to take into account the life course of their employees. Companies with mainly young people in their twenties should anticipate to the needs of young families with children within the next ten years and adapt their mixture of facilities to accommodate this. Companies with a large group of experienced people in their fifties in the near future, should prepare for adapted programmes in order to make full use of them for the transfer of their knowledge.

Apart from this the daily life within families has changed. The traditional breadwinners family no longer is dominant. Most men and women wish to combine a professional job with their private and family life. The breadwinners model is being replaced by the contemporary combination model in which professional and family labour is being divided between men and women in a more equal way (Van Dongen, Malfait, Pauwels, 1995; Van Dongen, Beck en Vanhaute, 2001). The new model is still fully developing. Government agencies, companies and families have their specific role and responsibility to fulfil.

In our approach we aim for a win-win situation for all actors. This requires an adapted conceptual and normative framework that includes the perspectives of all the actors involved. Consequently, there is need for a practical instrument to measure the present state and afterwards steer the situation in the desired direction. We describe here the development process of the Family & Business Audit (FBA), within the Flemish context.

1.2 The project Family & Business Audit

Since April 2000 an audit-instrument for the realisation of a more family friendly and emancipated work organisation within companies is developed on behalf of the Flemish government. The instrument consists of a diagnostic tool and a management plan. The project links to the development of research within several scientific institutions and is situated at the crossroads of several domains, approaches and forms of expertise. This takes concrete shape in the co-operation between three research institutions within the project.

Firstly the project originated from the research at the Population and Family Study Centre in Brussels (scientific institution of the Flemish Government) on the daily life of men and women within families and society: the division of time within families, the combination of family and professional life, the presence and upbringing of children within the family and society, policy instruments at government level and social organisations.

At the same time, the project has much common ground with research within the Faculty of Applied Economics of the University of Antwerp on the development of new forms of work organisation and the development of contemporary human resource management approaches in companies.

Finally, the project is an extension of the basic activity of the European Centre for Work and Society in Maastricht (ECWS), that is the development and implementation of specific audit instruments and guidance programs relating to labour, work organisation and human resource management in companies.

2 Background and starting points

2.1 Project Background

The project stems from the research done over recent years at the Population and Family Study Centre (CBGS) and builds on the results of the co-operation between a number of scientists of different disciplines, within the framework of the Flemish round table conference “Family life – Business life” (1998-2000). Two developments are of central importance (Van Dongen, Beck en Vanhaute, 2001; Van Dongen, Omeij en Wijgaerts, 2001).

Firstly, the development from the breadwinners model to the combination model is essential. During the fifties and sixties one could speak of a strong breadwinnersmodel. The strong breadwinners family was clearly the dominant type of family. The majority of women did no part, or only a small part of the professional labour. Since the seventies and eighties one can speak of the moderate breadwinners model. More and more women became active on the labour market and remained professionally active after the arrival of children. The strong breadwinners model lost importance and the number of combination families increased. As from the nineties on one can speak of a moderate combination model because the majority of families belong to the combination model in which a more equal division of labour exists between man and woman. This process is coupled with the more equal division of family labour, income and the professional position within companies and other organisations.

A second development we find in the government policies in which this project was framed. Over recent years the “active welfare-state” is being promoted in Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands as a new societal project for the next decades (Vandenbroucke, 2000). One could see the project as a first phase of developing a new basic model for society. The challenge will be to formulate how the government can contribute to an improvement of the daily life of men and women and children within families and companies through adaptation of its policy instruments.

Another development of importance to be mentioned here, is the fact that modern company management has more need for quantitative analysis. The EFQM (Van Nuland et al, 1998) is an example of this.

2.2 Basic concepts

2.2.1 Integrated approach

Within the human and family sciences the integrated approach (Van Dongen, 1993; Van Dongen, Omeij and Wijngaerts, 2001; Van Dongen, Beck en Vanhaute, 2001) offers useful clues. This approach pays explicit attention to the combination of family life and professional life, and looks at both domains in a coherent manner.

The daily combination of family, professional and social life of men and women is the driving force of society. The daily life of social actors is being described as the daily division of different activities (the division of time) and the means. The life course is an encompassing term for the development or change over time of this daily life, of the division of time and means. Individuals, men and women are placed within various sorts of organisations of society: nuclear and extended families, associations, clubs, companies, and government bodies. All actors are part of bigger, more comprehensive systems, but at the same time they themselves are made up of smaller systems. For all of their activities, individuals are connected to or incorporated in different organisations. Families are composed of family members, but at the same time they are part of other, often more complex organisations. All activities produce a certain output or return, and are brought about through the general mechanism of demand and supply. All activities of all subjects (individuals, families, companies, organisations, etceteras) are productive processes, regulated by exchange or demand and supply.

The activities of men and women can be divided in some larger categories: paid labour or professional labour, external education, social labour, personal care and leisure time. The individual division of time of people changes according to age, gender, level of education, family form, and so on. Of importance here is the portfolio perspective. Men and women strive on a daily basis for an adapted, balanced portfolio of various activities. Each activity brings a specific output, which will be in turn the input for other activities. Thus one activity forms the basis for the other. All activities therefore are in principle equally important for the daily division of time and means.

Besides this there is the perspective of the life course. During the various phases of the individual's life course, the composition of the activities and means changes. From birth each individual strives for the most adequate composition of activities and means.

2.2.2 Management sciences

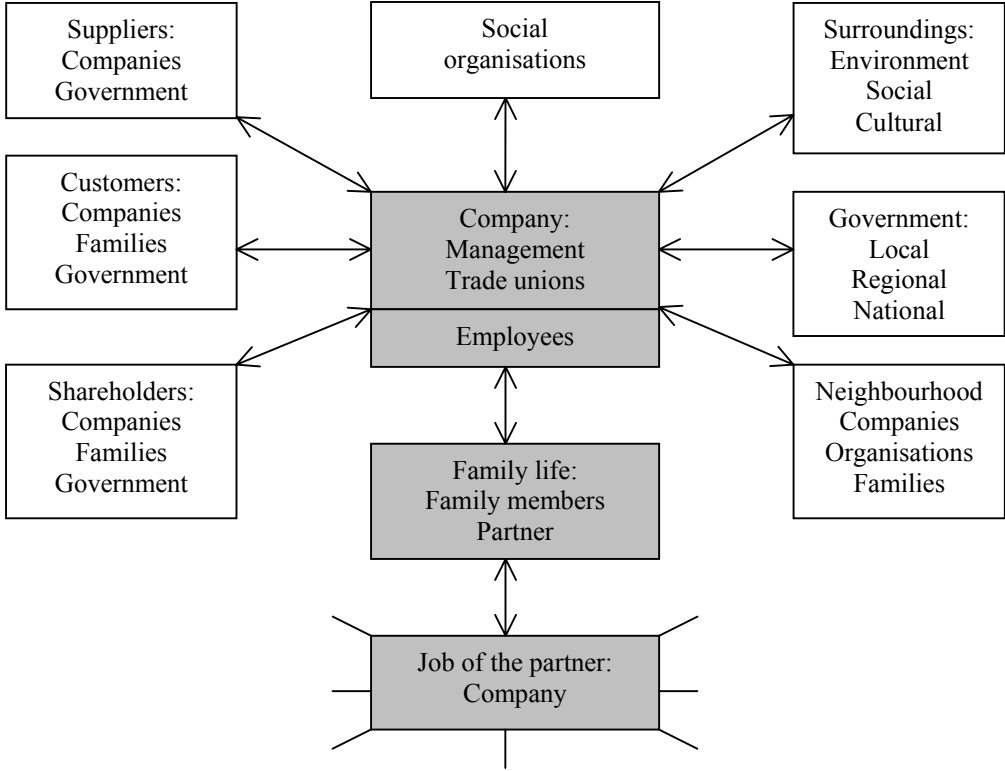
Within the management sciences the stakeholder model (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Wempe, 1998; Wempe, Kaptein, 2000) and the triple bottom line approach (Elkington, 1999) offer interesting clues for the extension of the responsibilities of companies towards the private and family life of the employees. But for an important part these 'new' models are still mostly theory. By choosing these theories however we look for a connection with recent developments in the debate on the social responsibilities of companies.

The stakeholder model and the triple bottom line approach depart from the more traditional management models. Of central importance is the idea that the view of companies must be extended to stakeholders and areas of attention outside the traditional management thinking.

The principle of the stakeholder model says that a company holds responsibility for other than the traditional interested parties inside and outside the company. Examples of the traditional stakeholders are the shareholders, the clients, the suppliers and the employees. Limited to these actors, the company is being looked at from a mainly financial economical perspective. In the recent past other stakeholders are coming to the foreground. We can

think of families, neighbours, all sorts of social organisations, and governmental institutions. Concerning the Family & Business Audit attention will be focussed mainly on the company, the employee(s) and the family (see figure 1). Moreover the company is being looked at more and more as being responsible for other than the traditional areas of attention. An important example of this is the responsibility for the environment, one of the pillars of the triple bottom line.

Figure 1



Donaldsen (1995) describes three aspects of stakeholder theory: the descriptive accuracy, the instrumental strength and the normative aspect. The descriptive accuracy consists of an accurate description of the functioning and the characteristics of the company. Instrumentally the model helps in answering the question to what extent the management objectives and stakeholder management correspond. The normative aspect sheds light on the question what the function of a company is, what social responsibilities should be attributed to a company. Wempe (1998) describes the company as a project of co-operation between a multitude of stakeholders. For this he metaphorically makes use of the social contract (contract theory). To this co-operation demands of virtuousness can then be made according to Wempe. Both Donaldson and Wempe ultimately put most emphasis on the normative aspect when it comes to legitimising the stakeholder theory with regard to the more traditional approach of shareholder management. These are normative arguments that support the choice for the stakeholder approach. The same can be said for the triple bottom line approach. Elkington (1997, 1999) places three main points of attention on the agenda of modern companies. In the search for a sustainable future, companies must not only consider the financial economical bottom line but also the bottom lines concerning the environment and social justice. The social aspect has mainly been worked out relating to fair trading practices and human rights. Elkington recommends a range of factors companies should consider following from these basic criteria to stay in the market. Companies must adapt to the changing expectations society sets for them. The fine-tuning of the relationship between family life and

professional life must be seen in this respect as a factor which companies will have to take into account.

New concepts of human resource management must be developed. The historical evolution of management and organisation theories reflects, be it only in a limited way, the broader view on social aspects like the environment and social responsibility. In the more traditional models there is only limited attention for the combination of family and professional life. A modern model such as EFQM (Van Nuland et al, 1998) emphasises the importance of the personnel and translates this into a set of criteria. Nevertheless no reference is made to the employee as a family member and the chances and limitations linked to this. Still with EFQM a first operational step has been made to look at personnel as a crucial asset.

Gradually a shift from a more collective form of personnel management to a more differentiated policy appears. Striking is again the broadening of views from more traditional educational qualifications to acquired competence and skills. Competence management illustrates this. Individual employees are being screened for their competence for professional development. Also lifelong learning is a new viewpoint. Tailor-made work enters the scene. No more talk of "the personnel". More and more distinction is being made to groups of employees with specific possibilities and limitations. Differences between employees become more an advantage than a problem. The growing attention for diversity management shows that new concepts of management are being searched for in order to put forward diversity as a strategic advantage.

2.2.3 Social audit

The FBA wants to start a discussion on the combination of family and business life. Because attention for this topic is seen as a broadening of the company view towards a more sustainable society, it is relevant to outline some developments in this area. Sustainable entrepreneurship has three dimensions (Reynaert, 1998): the urge for continuity of the own company, striving for a sustainable social relationship with all stakeholders and the continuous search for a balance between different expectations and values, and last but not least striving for a sustainable society.

Over the past years a strong effort has been made to the development of instruments and standards for measuring these dimensions systematically and in order to steer them. We can think of following examples. AccountAbility 1000 (AA1000), SA 9000 and the social audit. We will in short tell something about the social audit (Reynaert, 1998). The social audit wants to give companies insights into their impact on society and their behaviour. This means not a one-time examination of the social functioning of the company, but a continuous process in which monitoring and learning is essential. Social auditing is the process organisation uses to reflect on the social impact of its behaviour. The social audit measures, evaluates, reports and steers in function of the objectives and values of the organisation and of its stakeholders. The stakeholders are defined here as all people or groups with an interest in the company, who can influence it and who are being influenced by it.

2.3 Reconciliation between Work and Family Life

In a recent OESO-paper, J.M. Evans provides an international comparison of 'family-friendly' work-arrangements voluntarily introduced by firms.

The first part of his contribution is based on information coming from mainly Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Many firms in these countries go beyond the legal minimum in the provision of family-friendly arrangements. He points towards some factors that might influence the differences between those arrangements. So the public sector is more likely to provide family-friendly arrangements. Large firms are more likely

to do so than smaller ones. More highly skilled workers, and those with higher tenures, tend to be offered more family-friendly benefits. There is also some evidence that family-friendly arrangements are more common in firms with a written Equal Employment Opportunities statement and where there is a 'high commitment' style of management. These employers tend to adopt a strategy of delegating higher levels of responsibility to employees.

In his second part the author compares the data available for the European Union. Here the extent of a number of family-friendly arrangements in the 15 Member States of the European Union, as well as some limited comparisons with the non-European countries is offered. The difference in provision and use of family-friendly arrangements between types of firms, and different types of employees is confirmed. Possible reasons for these differences are discussed in terms of the differences in social welfare systems, the role of the family, and the degree of labour force participation of women.

In his third part, he discusses the possible effects of four potential 'motors' for family-friendly arrangements within firms:

- The 'business case': this builds on the suggestion that family-friendly arrangements are often justified by direct financial considerations. Positive effects can refer to lower staff turnover, reduction in stress caused by overlap between work/family roles, better recruitment possibilities through the attraction of a wider range of employees, greater range of diversity, and overall flexibility in deploying staff. On the other hand there are also possible costs: direct costs, due to e.g. the extra-work space, retraining or refresher courses, new equipment, supervision costs and administrative costs (framing the policies, informing staff, advising, dealing with all kind of decisions concerning pension rights, holiday leave, health and safety issues). This complex situation leads to the necessity to find a 'balance' between the benefits and the costs. Some firms (e.g. large firms, the financial sector) or some categories of employees (those with high-value skills, long tenure, specialised staff) might be given more family-friendly arrangements than their counterparts. Here we can refer to the idea of 'manoeuvring room' in the competency literature (Flood P., Gannon M.J. & Paauwe J, 1996): it depends on all kind of internal and external factors to what degree the dominant coalition has the possibility to build up a broader or a narrower set of empowering practices

- Some trends in human resource management, such as a move towards 'high-commitment' or 'high-trust' management, lead towards greater mutual commitment between employers and employees. The argument is here that the complexity of modern business methods requires practices such as more complex jobs, more team-work, and increased delegation, and that these practices require higher levels of trust between managers and workers to make them work properly. The primary motivation here remains economic, so that this potential 'motor' might be considered to be an offshoot of the former. Moves toward such high-commitment management seem to have a positive effect on the incidence of family-friendly arrangements. There is considerable support for link between family-friendly arrangements and high-commitment work systems (Osterman, 1995). Family-friendly policies tend to be introduced by firms whose management places a high value on employees' welfare in respect to their family situation, perceives a bottom-line benefit from providing family-related benefits, is careful to consult with the workforce, and gives a high priority to the achievement of employee commitment (Wood, 1999). Also here we have evidence of contrary tendencies: other trends in human resource management are not so favourable for the development of family-friendly arrangements. Here we can think of the increased importance of economic and accounting criteria in the management of companies with often short-term focus, the decrease in some countries of the importance of personnel

rules and practices in general, and the tendency towards temporary employment, and also the trend for increasing work hours in professional and managerial jobs.

- Gender equity programmes are often linked with family-friendly policies: policies which alleviate the tensions between work and home are likely to improve the access of women with family responsibilities to senior jobs. Another possible link between the two sets of policies lies in the fact that both are concerned with increasing the diversity of the workforce. However, also here some ambiguous implications are mentioned. Family-friendly may even lead towards to gender discrimination (Bergmann, 1997). Too strong a link between family-friendly arrangements and gender equity considerations may mean that men find it harder to support family-friendly arrangements. This is both because the link will tend to cause family-friendly arrangements to be seen as 'women's-issue and because, in some situations, men feel threatened by gender equity policies.

- As a last factor, which grows in importance, the increased possibilities for homework can be mentioned: modern communications technology, including the mobile telephone and the Inter/Intranet, allows easier and faster communications between off-site employees and their enterprises. Also here a general judgement is difficult: one author argues that this technology will strengthen the family (Check, 1996), another emphasises the danger that work will intrude family relationships within the home. It is still too early to state a final evaluation.

From these considerations it is clear that none of the four 'motors' has an unambiguously positive impact on family-friendly arrangements. The business case is not always clear, and its force varies from firm to firm. In addition, it is likely to lead to differentiation within the workforce, with more valued employees being offered more, or more valuable, family-friendly arrangements. While modern "high-commitment" management styles may be associated with a greater consideration of family life, their underlying motivation is that of securing greater commitment by employees to the company. Other trends in human resource management practices, such as decentralisation of the HR function, may be less conducive to the spread of family-friendly arrangements. Gender equity policies might not always fit well with family-friendly policies, because of the enduring asymmetry between the sexes in family involvement, even in dual earner couples. Family - friendly arrangements tend to be used to a disproportionate extent by women, and it has been argued that this will lead to discrimination against them. However, while the argument may be strong in theory, it is less evident that there is a clash between gender equity policies and family-friendly arrangements in practice. Finally, while modern communications systems may be developed to allow an easier combination of work and home activities, they might also extend the reach of the company into the home in unhelpful ways. In any event, there seems to be little evidence that they have yet encouraged working from home by parents to any great extent.

In his conclusions J.M.Evans suggests areas for further research. On the macro-level he thinks about the role of national legislation to control economic behaviour that is harmful to family life, and to encourage firms to support families. But also the role of value systems cannot be overestimated. Different case studies have pointed to importance of changing values through the introduction of national policies; in this context also the phenomenon of 'family-friendly employer of the year' by different governments has to be situated. Rigorous study of the impact of such methods remains still to be done. At the micro-level, he suggests to investigate the relationship between family-friendly arrangements and gender equity programs, in order to 'clarify the possible synergies and conflicts between them that may occur in practice, and find ways in which both objectives can best be met'. This refers directly to the consideration of family-firm relationships in terms of a 'balance' model,

where a win-win situation has to be looked for. This fits clearly with the approach in our study. Also here we use as a general reference frame the equilibrium idea.

2.4 Starting points of the Family & Business Audit

If company-management as well as employees wishes to fine-tune the relationship between professional life and family life, a diversity of characteristics, activities, possibilities, limitations within both domains must be considered. It will be a challenge to detect the space for fine-tuning, choices, the policy scope for different types of actors as the basis for an enhanced process of mutual fine-tuning.

An important goal of the Family & Business Audit (FBA) is that for the company involved an integrated picture of the current situation develops with regard to the balance family life – business life. This means that by way of a horizontal approach the relevant actors and areas of attention must be looked into in mutual coherence. In a vertical approach focus is put mainly on partial domains or a selection of actors. Because of this only a limited picture of the situation develops. The FBA aims at a win – win situation for the company as well for the employees and their families, in order to come to a constructive process of improvement. The relationship between family and professional life will only become visible through an integrated approach. A condition for this is that the instrument anticipates the specific characteristics of the company being investigated. Also we have to look for ways to link with existing systems, e.g. the administration of personnel data. The instrument must be user-friendly and must not be too demanding for companies in terms of the time needed for the participation.

The audit starts a process of improvement, which means that there will not be one definitive solution, but it has to be repeated in the future because of the constantly changing circumstances within families and companies. It is also important to find a balance between the short and the longer-term processes.

3 Instrument of diagnosis

3.1 Research questions

Firstly, a diagnosis is made of the current situation within the company with regard to the combination family and business life. We ultimately detect demand and supply concerning an improved fine-tuning of the relationship between the family life of the employees and the company. It is important to detect the preferences and visions of all relevant actors, or stakeholders. Most important in this context are on the one hand the employees and on the other hand the policy actors within the company. Based on this we have to define the common policy space for an improved fine-tuning. Next we look at the obstacles and incentives for implementing measures for this.

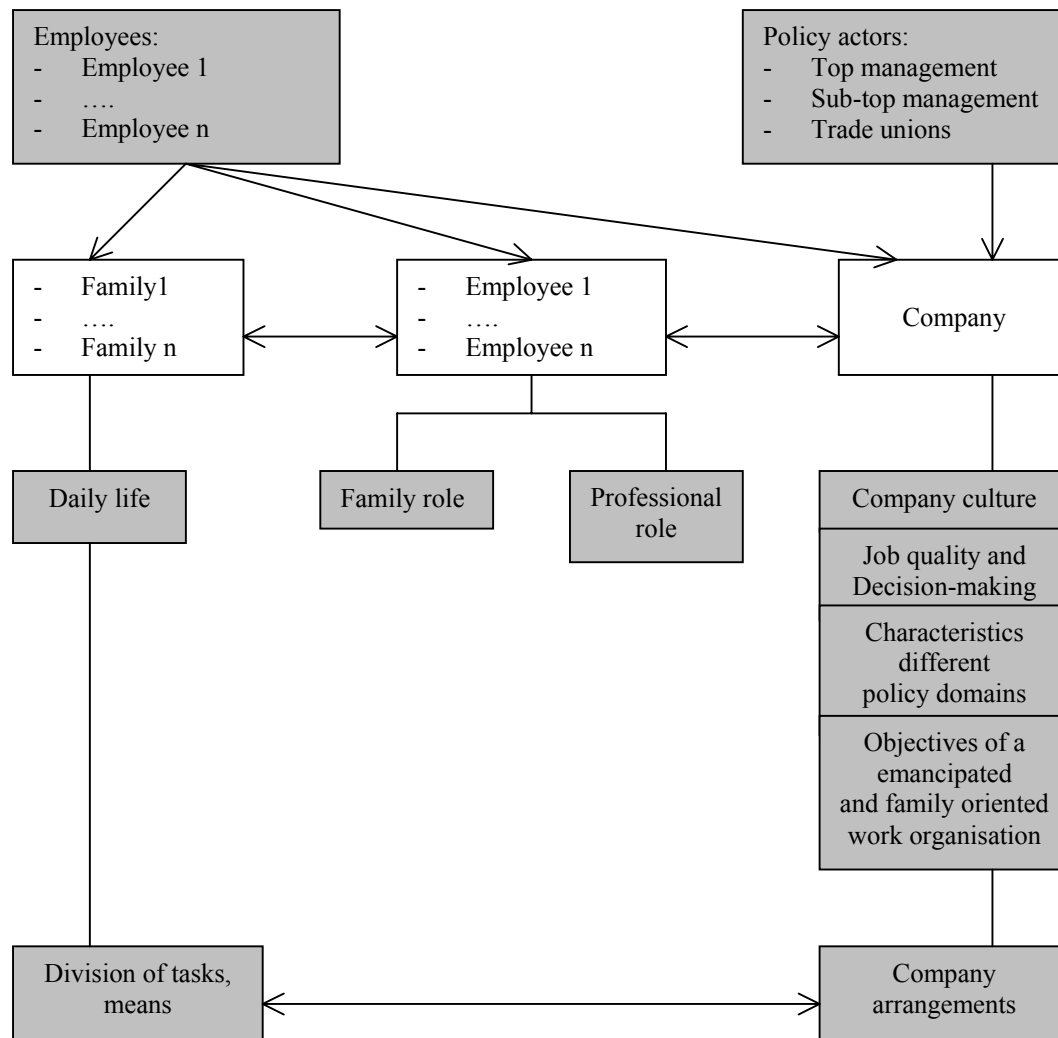
Based on the diagnosis a proposal will be formulated for a practical management plan (see Chapter 4). Also recommendations for government policy will have to be formulated.

3.2 Daily life within the family and the company

The main research domains for this audit are the daily life within the company and within the families of its employees. The employee is the binding factor. All forms of families are included, so single people as well. Furthermore, a diversity of activities and means within a family are being surveyed. We define companies as all professional organisations, no matter what sector. Large as well as medium sized or small companies are part of our target group.

Different actors will be involved in the audit concerning a diversity of aspects (see figure 2). The employees will be asked about both domains. The policy actors will only be asked about the company situation. We will go into this at a later stage.

Figure 2.



We characterise the family in a more general sense by asking about its composition. More specifically we look at the care-responsibilities within the family. Points of attention are the need for care of children present in the family and other housemates, and the wish to have (more) children in the future. Through this we hope to detect important family tasks that may have an effect on the combination family life – professional life.

We typify the employee in the first place through a number of characteristics such as age, gender, ethnical origin, and education. Then we describe the family role and the professional role. The family role we describe through the housemates and the care responsibilities. The professional role we characterise by the professional situation in past and present and the wishes and expectations for the future, the workplace and function within the company and the motives for having a paid job.

In a minimal way the partner (if any) of an employee is studied: age, children, education, work, income and the professional situation of the past, present and future. For reasons of practical feasibility we only ask these questions via the employee.

The company is characterised in a general sense by aspects such as the sector, the basic economical data, the products, the mobility situation and the composition of its workforce. More specifically we zoom in on the quality of work inside the company and the process of decision-making, company culture and the characteristics of several policy domains, amongst which family friendly policy. Furthermore, we look at the objectives for the company of a family-friendly work-organisation.

3.3 Division of tasks, means and company arrangements

The FBA analyses the division of tasks within the household, the expenditure for paid household services, child care facilities, and income. These are all aspects that have an influence on the possibilities for the employees in order to manage the combination of family and professional life. Combined with the more general typification we can form a picture of the type of family. Roughly we can distinguish the more traditional breadwinners family from the more modern type of families where both partners (if there is mention of a partner) divide the professional and the family tasks more or less equally.

With regard to the relationship between the company and the employees, we look at a diversity of company arrangements that are relevant for the daily combination of the family and professional life of the employees. Generally, we speak about matters like time, place, and means. More specifically we distinguish working time arrangements, leave arrangements, workplace arrangements, travel facilities between home and work, child care facilities inside or outside the company, different kinds of personal and household services, material facilities and financial arrangements. Companies have the opportunity to mention company specific measures.

Working time arrangements refer to the contractual number of working hours per week, the working time arrangement per day, the number of working days per week, the working schedule per week and the number of shifts. Furthermore compensation arrangements for overtime are relevant. Workplace arrangements consider the possibilities for working at home or a decentralised workplace. Personal and household services include matters like household support, shopping facilities, cultural and sport services, and advice about the combination of family and professional life. Material services are a.o. a computer for use at home, a restaurant, cultural and sporting facilities, a room for breastfeeding. Financial arrangements include e.g. meal tickets and insurance, but also allowances for the care for a sick family member or a subsidy for children's holiday activities.

This forms the basis for future policies of companies. The FBA diagnosis focuses on the range of company arrangements that is helpful for an improved management of the combination of family life and professional life. Five aspects of these arrangements are outlined. First of all we make an inventory of the arrangements available within the company at company-level. Hereby we distinguish between personnel with managerial and personnel with performing jobs. We also investigate to what extent free choice exists for employees to make use of working time arrangements and workplace arrangements. For other arrangements we ask to what extent the company is providing financial reimbursement. Identical lists of arrangements are presented to all actors in order to compare different aspects.

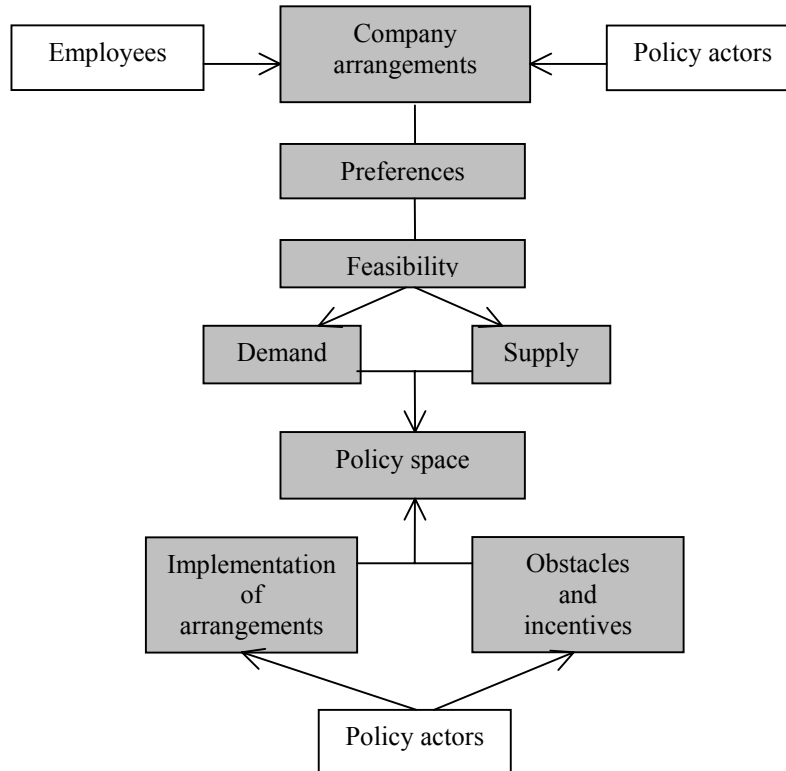
Furthermore the employees are asked what arrangements they actually use and to what extent they are satisfied with these. Then we ask about their wishes for certain arrangements. Only a limited amount of choices is allowed per type of arrangement. Finally we ask them to what extent they think their wishes are feasible. Hereby they have to consider the possibilities and limitations of the company. This way we hope to avoid unrealistic sets of wishes.

The policy actors also can reveal their wishes about the company arrangements, starting from the arrangements already available in the company. They are asked for which arrangements they think the use should be stimulated or limited in the short term. They have to distinguish between different sorts of personnel categories. This is done in order to find out whether a difference in possibilities exists for the different categories. We also ask them to what extent they think their wishes are feasible. Finally, they have to give their views on the difference between men and women concerning the different types of arrangements.

3.4 Common policy space: obstacles and incentives

Based on this multi-dimensional questioning we determine the common policy space for an improved combination of family and business life (see figure 3), showing more clearly the demand and supply.

Figure 3



With the policy actors we then further focus on this potential policy space. On the one hand this concerns more specific aspects of the implementation of the arrangements inside the company. Here we can think of issues like free choice for employees, participation of employees, the possibility of exchanging certain arrangements e.g. time for money (the cafeteria system), financial implications and target groups for certain measures.

On the other hand we look at obstacles and incentives regarding the implementation of the arrangements both inside and outside the company. We can think of the characteristics of production. Place or time bound production offers fewer possibilities for flexibility than easily moved or less time-bound work. The same can be said of the indispensability of employees in certain functions. Here the possibilities of replacement will set limits to flexibility. Also the economic performance of a company will be of influence. The same counts for market developments. With regard to the labour market e.g. scarcity of some types of jobs is currently the case. Furthermore, financial or organisational aspects of arrangements can be of influence.

The chances for a more family friendly and emancipated work organisation will also depend on the company culture. For instance, is the company open to new ideas? To what extent are the employees autonomous in the organisation of their work? Can employees decide on issues that affect the quality of work? How is family focussed policy related to other policy domains? To what extent does family-focussed policy actually exist within the company? To what extent is it formally supported by the company management?

We look into the role that the different stakeholders can play (see figure 1). Government-policy can for example have a stimulating or an obstructing influence. Examples of this are tax policies in favour of family friendly company arrangements, or complex and time-

consuming regulations for starting up childcare facilities. The same can be said for other stakeholders, inside or outside the company. In order to get a complete picture of the possibilities and limitations of a family, one should involve the partner in the audit. This however is practically not possible at this stage.

3.5 Definition and data collection

It is important to realise that we only audit within a single company. This does not mean that we do not consider relevant issues outside the company. It means that we only look at them from the viewpoint of the company. Because of this family members only have an indirect voice in the audit, or possibly even fall completely outside the investigation. The first is the case for the possible partner of an employee who takes part in the audit, the second for the professional situation of this partner: the partner's company is not part of the investigation.

It is too complex to ask the employees about the obstacles and incentives concerning all the specific company arrangements. We do this only with the policy actors and do this by use of a structured interview and on the basis of the common policy space as determined earlier. We expect that the trade unions represent the voice of the employees in a satisfactory way on this. Maybe in the future we will organise group interviews with employees.

The results of the diagnosis must be comparable for all stakeholders. Standardisation and quantification are essential for the data collection.

3.6 Course of the diagnosis in a case study

Figure 4 describes the course of the diagnosis in a case study. In preparation of the fieldwork we put together a dossier of candidate companies. After sending these companies a FBA brochure with an invitation to participate in the project, we then contact them by telephone. We visit companies that show interest for a further presentation of the project to the management. After this the company has some time to consider its candidacy. Often the project has to be presented to the board of directors, which can take up to two or three weeks before a definitive answer is given.

Figure 4

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Pre investigation:</u><ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1. General information company1.2. General information company units1.3. General information company arrangements1.4. First interview top management2. <u>Written questionnaires:</u><ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1. Employees2.2. Top management2.3. Sub-top management2.4. Trade unions3. <u>Main interview:</u><ol style="list-style-type: none">3.1. Top management3.2. Sub-top management3.3. Trade unions |
|--|

Once a company has confirmed, a second interview takes place in order to discuss the audit in more detail and plan further steps. We also ask some documents with more information about the company, e.g. about work arrangements, the annual report, the organigramme and information about the personnel. We make up a co-operation agreement. This agreement describes the effort that both the research-team and the company will make in order to let the audit run smoothly. Also a decision has to be made on what entities within the company will

take part in the audit and which policy actors will be involved (top management, sub-top management and trade unions).

The audit uses different forms of data collection. The first interview with the top management is a combination of open and closed questions. The main purpose is to get a better insight of the company and to collect the first information on family friendly policies. In a second step written questionnaires are given to different actors. Departing from a first analysis of the so far collected information, interviews will be held with the policy actors. To make this work more efficient, sometimes group interviews are an option. The purpose is to get a differentiated picture of the views of the various actors.

Together with the company a communication strategy concerning the FBA will be developed. Some companies ask for additional presentations of the project. Often a memorandum is sent to the personnel in which the project is explained and the management puts forward its motives for taking part in the project and encourages everyone to co-operate. In the audit emphasis lies on reporting and providing feedback. This will stimulate the commitment and enhances the chance for a constructive process of change. Based on a first analysis a report will be made, on the basis of which a reflection interview with the policy actors will be held. The analysis of all data will lead to a final report for the company. That report will be the starting point for the management plan.

4 Further steps

4.1 Starting points for the management plan

The diagnosis instrument shows the present Family & Business policy within the company and the policy options for the future from the viewpoints of the various stakeholders. The results from the diagnosis form the basis for the policy discussions between the parties involved, as part of the management instrument.

It is impossible to develop a standard management plan for all companies. The management plan must be guidance for the process of change, in which dialogue is essential. It has to be tailor made.

The involvement of various actors and the broad range of topics imply a broadened view on change. Therefore, we formulate in short five starting points (ECWS, 2001) for a process of change within a company. First, because every organisation can be characterised by a strong interdependence between the parts, components, and processes inside and outside the organisation, changes brought about in one part will have consequences for the other parts and processes of the company. Secondly, it is necessary to look into the cumulative effect changes have and to monitor this. Some changes can solve one specific problem but cause other, new problems. The context of the company is a third essential factor when a process of change is started. This concerns not only the internal company specific characteristics of the work organisation but also the environment in which the company operates. The fourth assumption concerns the involvement of all employees at all levels, which will strengthen the support for the changes, and makes better use of all the knowledge available inside the company. It is advisable to open up the discussion and to talk to different actors. The acceptance of the issue of combination family life and business life as an important subject is a new one after all. A lot of prejudice and questions will exist about this issue. In the past this subject was already on the agenda but this was mainly done because of other reasons such as the fight against unemployment through programmes for working time reduction, the negotiating of new time schedules and the reorganisation of production processes. The combination theme was taken up implicitly in discussions but did not have high priority by itself. In order to make a change in mentality on this issue, the management must be prepared to give it enough space in the company policy. A policy that is supported and

carried out by the management offers the best chances for success. Also a strong support from the employees is necessary. The final assumption is that all parties must benefit from the changes. For the company this mainly means higher productivity, less absenteeism and turnover of personnel, a more flexible and efficient work organisation. Benefits for the employee will be less stress at home and at work, more spare time, more autonomy and responsibility, and a better motivation and job satisfaction.

4.2 Approach of the management plan

We formulate some steps as guidelines for the management plan. FBA-team members will support this search process during some meetings. The FBA-team does not give guidance with the implementation of the plan. However this process will be monitored for research purposes.

a) Composition and authority of the management group

A FBA management group will be composed that will start up the management plan, with the representatives of all stakeholders involved. Other parties can be involved as well, as an option. The involvement of different stakeholders can vary. Also the authority of the working group has to be determined: an advisory status or decision-making power.

b) Determining the common view on the Family & Business policy

Firstly, it is necessary to develop a common view on family friendly and emancipated policy and long term objectives. To support this the FBA team suggests a number of possible lines the company may follow based on the results of the diagnosis.

It will be interesting to see to what extent the company is willing to adjust its policy to developments in society, e.g. regarding the division of labour between men and women. Next the concept of family orientation has to be determined. Does this imply a more flexible employee or more autonomous employee? Who decides on this? Also the extent in which differentiation is possible within the life course and the extent, in which the policy can be individualised, are main focus-points. Finally, one has to think about the extent of formalisation of the policies.

A second step concerns the integration of the family-friendly and emancipated policy into the general company policy. Because it is a novelty for many companies Family & Business policy will remain a challenge for a number of years. One can look for links with existing policy domains (e.g. job satisfaction, quality, stress, competence, selection, diversity, and equal opportunities), to develop a more efficient and better-integrated policy concerning the human potential.

c) Formulate objectives

The company has to translate its general vision into a number of objectives for the short and longer term. For example the scope of the policy must be described, as well as the target groups. This must be done on the basis of the results of the diagnosis.

d) Plan of action

The objectives must be translated into plans of action, based on a number of scenarios. The results of the diagnosis point out gaps in the existing policy and the needs for adjustment. Probably this will concern a certain mixture of factors like the presently available company arrangements, the practical results of the policy and the communication and decision-making on the combination theme. At the same time however, other aspects can be detected as being problematic, such as an overload of job tasks, shortage of personnel, problems in the production process and an inefficient meeting culture and work organisation. When drawing up the management plan one has to take these aspects into consideration. Partly the desired company arrangements and the elaboration of these will determine the policy. At the same time preconditions must be realised that enable family friendly policy.

The search for the right mixture of company arrangements for a certain company is to a great extent being determined by the possible implications for the functioning of the company. It is here that a win-win situation must be realised. A database is being developed to support this process. It's a relational database, relating company arrangements to sources of information and a company index. The database is based on a broad literature review and has no connection with the data collected in the case studies. The table company arrangements collects nuclear data such as definition, target group and legal-administrative modalities. In order to look for more detailed information reference is being made to specialised institutions or texts. Besides this the company arrangements are being screened on the possible implications for the production process, the costs, the personnel, the work organisation, the communication and the company culture. The reversed investigation is being done as to see to what extent the functioning of the company forms incentives or obstacles to the realisation of these arrangements.

From the organisational point of view it can be interesting to see what forms of organisation are more able to deal with the implications of certain company arrangements. New organisational and management concepts, forms of work and systems of control come to the foreground. Thus a change from a more direct form of supervision towards co-ordination based on mutual trust can be an opportunity. Control mechanisms can evolve from input control and presence control to a system of output control or management by objectives (Illegems, Verbeke en S'Jegers, 2001). Innovative work forms can be introduced, such as teamwork, empowerment and self-steering teams.

Possible implications concerning the realisation of certain company arrangements will be confronted with the obstacles, incentives and feasibility that did appear in the diagnosis. Per scenario a costs – benefits analysis is being made up for the various actors involved and for the different aspects of the functioning of the company. Next we look for possible solutions. Obstacles that go beyond the company such as laws, fiscal system etc must be listed. This can be communicated to the appropriate authorities.

During the decision-making process several scenarios will be confronted with each other in order to make the best choice. Because the FBA deals with many aspects that are subject to formal company dialogue, the involvement of the representatives of the employees is essential.

There are different ways of shaping the management plan and formalising it. For example it can lead to fixed procedures, information brochures, training packages, support programs and so on. It can also become part of the employment contract or long-term labour agreements. All sorts of variants are thinkable.

Also a communication-strategy is necessary to promote the action plan inside the company. A transparent reporting on the possibilities and limitations to all employees and a facility to turn to for further questions are necessary. Within the FBA project a part of the management plan will be extracted for an experiment in the short term. This experiment will be monitored for a few months.

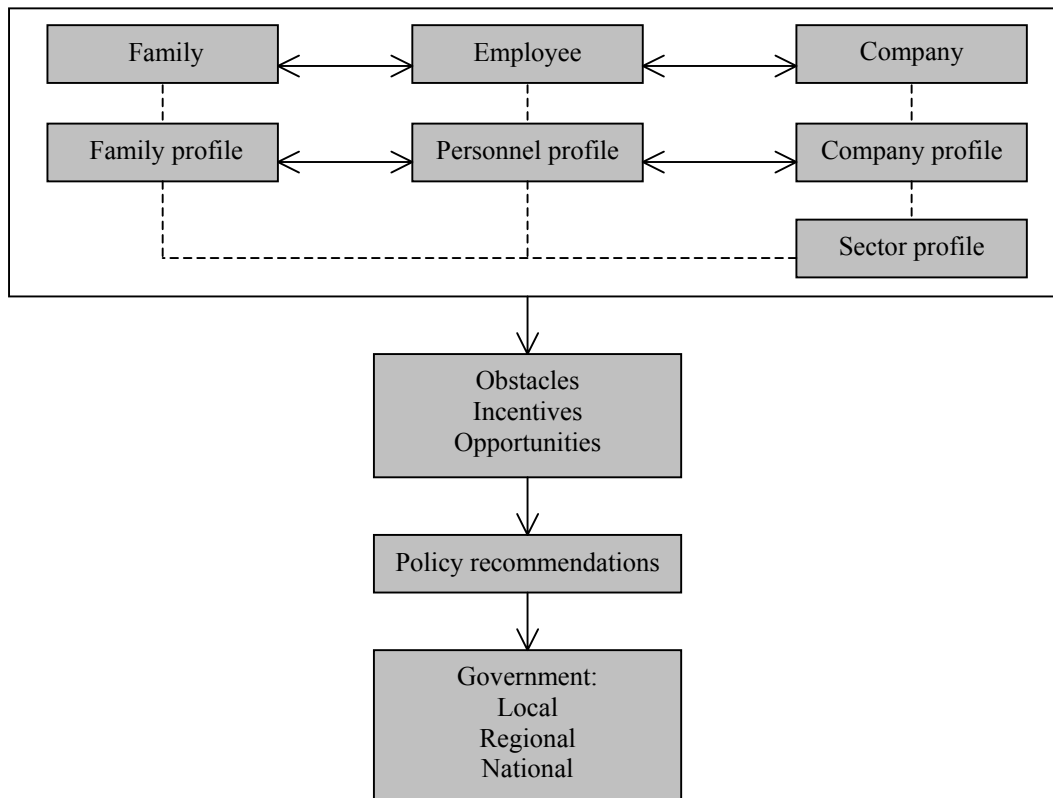
e) Evaluation

To evaluate the action plan after a while, various indicators must be formulated. We can think of the availability of a certain budget, the appointment of someone in charge of the project, or the use of certain company arrangements. For this we can use the diagnosis instrument once again, for example in a simpler format. It is advisable to select the indicators in dialogue with the stakeholders involved, and to set up a system to monitor the evolution of the indicators. It is important to see whether the objectives are met and to analyse unexpected effects.

4.3 Benchmarking and policy recommendations

At an aggregated level we want to compare companies regarding their Family & Business policy (see figure 5). Because we do not want to compare apples to pears, for benchmarking we need to consider the specific circumstances of a company. A sector typification, a typification with regard to the personnel and in connection with this a typification of the families of the employees will be made here.

Figure 5



Based on the information from the case studies we try to formulate recommendations for government policy, with respect to the combination of family life and business life for the employees and their families, and for the companies. The data on the availability and the use of company arrangements and the obstacles and incentives will provide the basis.

5 Sister-instruments Family & Business Audit

During the development process of the Family & Business Audit we gratefully made use of already existing instruments concerning the combination family life and business life. We mention here from the United States of America *The Corporate Reference Guide to Work-Family Program*, from the Families and Work Institute from New York (Gallinsky E., Friedman D. E., Hernandez C. A., 1991) and *The Link. A Practical Guide to Conducting a Work/Life Workplace Assessment* from The Centre for Work & Family (Pitt-Catsoupes, Bankert, 1998) from Boston. From Great Britain *The Work-Life manual. Gaining a competitive edge by balancing the demands of employees' work and home lives* from The Industrial Society, London (Daniels L., McCarragher L., 2000) and from Germany the *Audit Beruf & Familie* (Fauth-Herkner & Partner 2000) were studied. Also a research-project is set up that wants to investigate family friendly work place initiatives in Wallonia and Scotland

(Department of Social and Politic Sciences, Catholic University of Louvain and The University of Aberdeen).

To compare the FBA here with all of these sister-instruments goes too far. *The Link* and *The Work-Life manual* are instruments meant mainly for self-assessment, and the last one mainly focuses on small and medium-sized companies. Important forerunner is the Families and Work Institute in New York, that already developed a likewise instrument in the early nineties. It is the work of this institute on which the German audit was based. On some points the German audit is identical to the FBA. Moreover, do we now co-operate in the development of a European variant. We therefore best compare it to the German audit.

For the Hertie Foundation, Fauth-Herkner & Partner developed in the middle of the nineties the Audit Beruf & Familie (ABF) (Fauth-Herkner & Partner, 2000) with regard to the combination family life and business life in Germany. Important source of inspiration was The Corporate Reference Guide to Work-Family Program from the Families and Work Institute in New York (Gallinsky E., Friedman D. E., Hernandez C. A., 1991). Also thanks to a series of case studies they were able to fine-tune their instrument. Now they have plans for a European audit concerning the same topic.

There are some important differences between the German ABF and the Flemish FBA. The German audit also involves the different relevant actors, but the diagnosis takes place by way of a group interview. The danger exists that the stronger actors will dominate the audit. This does also mean that only one, more or less common vision will come forward. The differences and similarities between the different actors will remain in the background, whereas this is one of the strengths of the FBA. The picturing in a structured way of these differences and similarities forms the basis for a constructive process of exchange in the search for a common platform and a differentiated policy plan.

Another important difference concerns the score possibilities for certain questions. In general the German audit only asks yes or no questions. A more differentiated answer is not possible. The external auditor in the end fills in the answer he or she thinks does best justice to the group discussion. The FBA also makes use of an external auditor, but he or she is more an observer and less of an interpreter.

The Flemish FBA has more attention for the gathering of individual information from and about the employees and their family situation. The FBA differentiates more between the different types of company arrangements. The German ABF on the other hand pays more attention to the way certain arrangements are put into practice. The same counts for the support that exists inside a company for a family friendly policy.

In general, the FBA works in more steps and collects much more data during the diagnosis. The question is whether in time this will prove itself to be the most efficient way of working. Finally, the Flemish FBA appears for the time being to be more limited as a management instrument.

6 Fieldwork

6.1 Confrontation of the FBA with practice: case studies

The fieldwork has three objectives. Firstly, to test and improve the FBA instrument in practice. Secondly, we hope to motivate companies to invest in a more family friendly and emancipated policy, and to give them tools and knowledge for this. Thirdly, after some time, we want to make recommendations for government policy.

In March 2001 the FBA research-team started with contacting companies for participation in a case study. During a first series of presentations of the project in companies it appeared that there was interest for our project. Both profit and non-profit companies mostly react positively to the initiative. Often they do not know how to develop a suitable Family &

Business policy and they do show the need for more information. Taking part in our project as a case study can be a first step towards this.

Different motives are given as reasons for the participation in the FBA project, such as the keeping of good staff, the lowering of absenteeism, making the company more attractive to potential new personnel, higher productivity, an efficient work organisation, and a positive image inside and outside the company. The instrument is also geared to a more emancipated work organisation, meaning a more equal position for men and women within the companies and the families. We also can see the FBA against the background of a development towards integrated care for quality in companies. Moreover, the instrument offers the chance to detect new needs and at the same time it can be a first step towards a new policy plan. By means of benchmarking a comparison can be made between entities within the same company or group, as well as with other companies within the same or another sector. Finally, companies hope to gain a competitive advantage by taking part in the audit.

Despite the enthusiasm for the FBA at first, the preparedness in taking part as a case study appeared not that obvious. Most companies see obstacles. The FBA has a lot of impact on the company and puts the combination issue explicitly on the agenda. It is clear that a company has to be ready for this. The social climate must be open for the audit at that moment. Furthermore, it is impossible for the FBA to accommodate all wishes companies can bring forward. Companies that only want to look into a single arrangement or just a few, and do not have the need for a more horizontal investigation on all arrangements, have a lesser urge to participate.

In some companies a lot of investigations take already place, are planned or took place recently. They do not want to ask their employees too much. For example it can be too much if the FBA follows after a recently held investigation on job satisfaction. Also some companies fear that they will create expectations that cannot be met, which will only lead to frustrations. One speaks about the 'spoiled child syndrome', which means that people always want more without the willingness to give something they already have in return for it. Sometimes the combination theme just does not have priority because all sorts of changes are going on inside the company. Last but not least negative experiences with other research projects can withhold a company from participating.

For the first wave of case studies seven organisations have agreed to take part in the project. These companies are active in different sectors: industry (Agfa-Gevaert), insurance (BBL Verzekeringen), services (Rosenbluth International, Kind en Gezin), and healthcare (AZ Sint Blasius, Polikliniek Oogheekunde Universitair Ziekenhuis Gent, WZC Sint Jozef). Partly these are big organisations, of which either some smaller units are looked into, or a representative sample of the employees is being investigated.

Most of the cases of the first wave are at the same stage in the audit which means that the first phase of data collection from the written surveys now has taken place. Meanwhile, the statistical analysis programme has been developed and tested on the first data set. The feedback of the first results will take place in the beginning of October in the form of an interim report. On the basis of this interviews will be held with top management, sub-top management and trade union representatives.

On the basis of the research experience of the first wave of case studies a first evaluation of the instrument of diagnosis was started. We will use the improved version of the instrument in a second wave of case studies starting in November 2001. Our intention is that this second wave will consist of some thirty case studies.

The main scheme of the audit will remain similar in the second wave. Especially the surveys and the analysis of the data will be adapted. Next to that, a programme for a web-based input of data for the policy actors like employers and unions, is a next step in the automation of the instrument.

6.2 Bringing the discussion at a broader level: the open forum campaign

Based on the information from the case studies we will be able to formulate policy recommendations on company, sector, local, community & national level. The application of the audit on a larger scale in the second wave of case studies is a suitable moment to feed the discussion of the combination issue on a societal level. In that context we programmed an open forum day with two aims: the recruitment of new companies for the audit and the start of a larger discussion on the subject with relevant actors.

The open forum day consisted of a general presentation of the audit and a panel discussion with a representation of the companies that take part in the audit in the first wave. Main topics were the challenge of a family friendly organisation, motivations for participation in the audit and first experiences with the FBA in the organisations taking part. In order to enlarge the discussion of the Family & Business Audit we invited some organisations active on the family, company or combination topic as well as policy makers. Here we focused on the search for a balanced division of tasks and responsibilities between companies, the government, related organisations and the families. The Flemish Minister of Welfare and the Minister of Employment reflected on the issue and drew some lines for future policy.

The group of participants of the open forum consisted of some eighty five representatives of a variety of organisations: companies of different sectors, ministries, trade unions, employers' organisations, the press and organisations active on family issues, equal opportunities for women, the labour market, and so on. Among them some potential candidates for the second wave of case studies.

Three influential Flemish organisations commented on the Family & Business Audit. The three of them strongly support the project. The National Women's Council (NVR) underlined the issue of the combination of family and business life to be a gender-topic: one of the main starting points has to be equal opportunities for women. The NVR recommended to develop indicators on the issue of equal opportunities in companies and to look at it with regard to all aspects of company life. They recommended an integrated approach, in order not to put total responsibility for the combination of family life and business life on the shoulders of the employees. Furthermore they warned not to overlook the wish of employees to take up their care responsibilities themselves instead of putting it into the hands of others: a healthy balance is needed. Also one has to take into account the fact that the costs for services like childcare financially will be a bigger burden for those with lower education.

The Union for Young Families (BGJG) did some research among its members. On the question "what is most important for the quality of family life" the combination of family and professional life appeared to be the most important topic. The BGJG pointed out that the subject should be looked at as a matter of sustainability. Sustainable entrepreneurship requires that the employees are able to combine their family and professional life in a sustainable way. Parents have to get enough free time to take care of the upbringing of their children or the care for e.g. parents who are ill. Companies therefore have to listen to the needs of the employees. They advised to lay the initiative for taking part in the audit not only in the hands of the management, but also to make it possible for employees to request for an audit. This might result in a bigger number of companies participating in the project. The BGJG stressed the importance of giving the partners of employees as well as the children a voice in the audit. They also recommended seeing the care responsibilities in a broader way than just concerning children under twelve or sick parents living within the same house. Concerning childcare-facilities the union was worried about facilities within or near the company. This will make employees more dependent on the company. Furthermore the BGJG underlines the importance of taking care of children in their own neighbourhood. Finally the BGJG stressed the importance of developing indicators for the family friendliness of companies.

The Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV) stressed the need for the instrument to be pragmatic rather than scientific. It will have to focus on the company-level otherwise it

will not function. Another precondition is the support of company-management for the issue. Important issues according to the SERV are the growing burden of overtime and prevention of negative effects on career opportunities for employees who make use of company-arrangements like leave-arrangements. The SERV agreed on the worries of the BGJG on childcare facilities within or near the company. Finally the SERV stressed the need to enlarge the group of companies willing to take part in the audit with a larger amount of profit organisations.

The panel discussion with a representation of the companies that take part in the audit in the first wave gave the audience clear insights in the needs of companies concerning the combination issue, their own policies and their motives for taking part in the project. All of them stressed the need for a better combination of family and professional life for their employees, even though the origin of this differed from organisation to organisation. The origins varied from the request from employees to management initiative, from specific circumstances like the organisational change to more structural developments like a growing workload for the employees or a social company policy in general. The organisations brought forward a range of company arrangements and initiatives, varying from more responsibility and freedom in work organisation for employees, time arrangements, career arrangements, services for employees and their families, and questionnaires for employees concerning their needs. One can speak about these companies as being the 'white ravens': companies that belong to the leading group for the development of family friendly and emancipated work organisation in companies in Flanders. All of them show the commitment to a better combination for their employees and developed policies for this. Nevertheless they all appeared to be in need for better knowledge on the subject. On the one hand it concerns the needs of their employees as well as their background, their family situation. The latter is easier to find out via an independent and anonymous audit and has the advantage of the company being prepared for future needs of employees. On the other hand it concerns the need for suggestions for policy measures like company arrangements. The main advantages these companies sketch of a family & business policy is a better functioning of their employees, less absenteeism and more commitment to the organisation. Furthermore it is easier to recruit and to retain employees.

The representatives from the Flemish government showed their support for the Family & Business Audit first of all in coming to the open forum, despite their busy agendas. The Minister of Employment underlined the issues of equal opportunities and the combination of family life and business life as being of central importance to his policy. The unequal participation in the production process being one of the main policy issues. Personnel policy is becoming more and more a government task. To influence company policy government does not have to be directive but makes use of new instruments. The present shortages on the labour market provide an excellent background for convincing companies to join in the development of a better combination of family life and business life. Employment policy has now become time policy: the division of professional, family and free time for all. Main policy instruments are to be found firstly in professional education. Here the government can ensure equal opportunities. In dialogue with more and more companies and the scientific community the exchange of best practices concerning the triple bottom line (the Trivisie project) results in e.g. the insight that personnel diversity is an economic value. Also measures concerning career planning like the new measure of the time credit for employees: every employee is entitled to a certain amount of time credit during his or her career, and enjoys a financial benefit from the government for this. Childcare is another issue for government policy. On the one hand the availability has to be expanded, on the other hand the need for it has to be limited through better combination facilities. Finally the Minister pointed

out that the word “flexibility” has to become more of a social expression instead of a purely economic one.

The Minister of Welfare underlined the importance of the combination issue and the need for a new instrument. The demographic evolution will create a permanent shortage on the labour market. Men and women both are needed. The present welfare model does not provide a sufficient answer to social problems. New models are needed. Two paradigms therefore have to be changed. Firstly the one that says that government policy has to be aimed at the traditional family: two parents, children and one-and-a-half income. Despite the fact that the numbers of people living alone or families with only one parent are growing, this paradigm still is the rule. The starting point must be the quality of life depending on the life course. In function of this the work organisation has to change. A second paradigm concerns linearity of policy measures. In stead of this, flexibility has to be organised according to the employee, not the companies. New models of company management are needed. Essential is that the employee knows best what he or she needs, for example when parental leave is most necessary. Finally the Minister of Welfare gives the example of the company Dupont de Nemours, winner of the award for the most people friendly company of this year. The win-win situation proves itself in the high number of people applying for a job at Dupont and the successful retention of personnel.

Maybe the main result of the open forum day was the exchange of experiences and information of all sorts of actors involved and concerned with the combination issue. Also the start of a new network of professional organisations concerning family life and business life seems to have made a start here.

7 Conclusions

The increased focus of companies for the combination of family life and business life that occurred over the past years results in a growing need for (more) knowledge about this subject. In Flanders the Family & Business Audit (FBA) is being developed on behalf of the Flemish government to give an answer to this need. In this paper we described the development of this instrument.

Main starting point for the FBA is an integrated approach in which all relevant aspects and stakeholders are taken into account. Main goal is to bring about a win-win situation in which both employees and their families and the companies benefit from a better combination of family life and business life. For this a thorough diagnosis has to be made on the basis of which a process of better fine-tuning the relationship between both domains can be started.

A first version of this instrument of social audit is now being tested in a number of case studies in Flanders. Main challenge will be to show that the FBA is capable to live up to its expectations and goals. To find the right balance between taking into account all relevant subjects and actors and to make it an user friendly instrument will be essential for this. Lessons can be learned from experiences in other countries. Another challenge will be to convince more companies that investing in the work-life balance will benefit all stakeholders. The difficulties the international economy is facing during the last year will possibly make this an even bigger task. The way in which the audit has been set up is itself a concrete expression of the stakeholder model, which underlines a continuous co-operation of the different actors and partners: the employer, the employees and the government.

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