Work/family conciliation key to productivity

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Employees who are enabled to balance their work and family life commitments are four times more committed to their companies, according to the Edenred-IESE 2012 Conciliation Barometer.

Many policies aimed at reconciling work and family life do not involve any additional cost for the company and can significantly boost productivity, according to the Edenred-IESE 2012 Conciliation Barometer.

Employees who work for companies that help them achieve a healthy work/life balance feel four times more committed to their work.

In turn, companies can leverage this greater commitment to boost productivity by as much as 19 percent.

The latest study, based on polls of more than 7,000 workers in 23 countries, shows that 40 percent of the world's workers are not committed to their companies.

Employees with children appear to show near total commitment to employers that make an effort to help them reconcile their work and family responsibilities, compared with childless workers, whose commitment averages 85 percent.

Failing to address work/family concerns can see employee commitment plummet to as low as 20 percent.

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The role of "emotional salary"

In the current economic context, few companies can afford to give their workers raises.

Instead, they can adopt other measures, at little or no additional cost, that drastically improve their workers' state of well-being, and boost their sense of identification and commitment to the organization.

Such measures are described as "emotional salary."

Emotional salary is the perception that emerges when workers feel that their employer stands by them though tough times, takes their opinion seriously and is concerned about their overall well-being and level of satisfaction.

According to this study, the perception of emotional salary is greater in the case of workers with children, most likely because they stand to benefit the most from measures designed to encourage work/family balance.

By contrast, workers under the age of 28 tend to perceive less emotional salary in workplaces that encourage work/family conciliation. One likely explanation for this is that most young workers are still yet to assume parental responsibilities.

IESE Prof. Nuria Chinchilla, director of the International Center for Work and Family (ICWF) and coauthor of the study, says that emotional salary is about implementing measures that contribute toward a more humane treatment of workers, which, in turn, instills a better and more positive atmosphere

Social benefits

Among measures designed to create a perception of emotional salary, those which favor the reconciling of work and family life are particularly important.

While these benefits do not necessarily imply any additional cost for the company, employees value them greatly because, in most countries, social benefits are not considered taxable and are, therefore, deducted from taxable income.

According to the survey, the most common social benefits are medical insurance, which is offered to 38 percent of the workers surveyed, followed by subsidized public transport (16 percent) and discounted meal coupons (15 percent).

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Gender perspectives

The boss's gender can also have a significant influence on employee satisfaction levels.

Women in general tend to be much more satisfied with conciliation measures when their boss is a woman (92 percent) than when their boss is a man (76 percent). This figure drops to 58 percent when the women have children and their boss is a man.

Although the difference is much less pronounced, female bosses also get a better rating from male employees.

The study found that the greatest level of dissatisfaction is among men with no children and a male boss, particularly in companies with less than 100 employees.

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