

Family Friendly Benefits in the Work Place

Jaturong Sriwongwanna^{1*} and Vikanda Kasetiam²

^{1*,2}Faculty of Business Administration and Management,
Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University, Thailand

Abstract

This academic paper is prepared for human resource, employers and managers who are aware of the impact of the ASEAN Community and deals with the relationship between family friendly benefit and working condition. As modern workplace in this century, Human Resources professionals may be required to justify family friendly benefits by presenting positive links to organisational performance while mitigating associated costs. On the other hand, offering family friendly benefits will negatively influence productivity of conventional employees. Moreover, there are many types of family friendly benefits, including flexible working hours, childcares, eldercares, and so on. In this paper, it reviews lots of practical issues to prove that friendly benefits can prove beneficial in improving organisational productivity provided that both Managers and Human Resources professionals actively ensure that benefits are effectively implemented such they meet the needs of both the organisation and the wider employee group.

Keyword: Family Friendly Benefits

Faculty of Business Administration and Management, Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University
2 Ratchathani Road, Mueang District, Ubon Ratchathani Province, 34000, Thailand
Tel. +66-45-352000 ext.1303 E-mail: jaturong.s@ubru.ac.th

Introduction

In modern organization today, work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict play an important issues and could have a serious consequences for employees, family and organization as well. Fail to do so, could end up with job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, turnover intentions and lower productivity levels (Azmat, 2015). Therefore, Managers and Human Resources professionals must be aware of the benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of family friendly benefits, and their role in ensuring that these outcomes are as positive as possible.

“Family friendly benefits are benefits that offer employees the latitude to address their personal and family commitments, while at the same time not compromising their work responsibilities” (Lockwood, 2003, p.1). Family friendly benefits should aim to support employees juggling work life and family life following trends toward women remaining in the workforce after marriage and after having children, increasing numbers of dual-career households and single parent families and continued elder care responsibilities. Family friendly benefits may include benefits such as child care, elder care, flexible work schedules (such as flexi time, telecommuting, job sharing and family leave) and school and educational support. Sands et al (2007)

Types of Family Friendly Benefits

Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux and Brinley (2005) suggests that Family and working issues is related to physical health problem (e.g. hypertension), mental health problems (e.g. stress and burnout) and family dissatisfaction). With these negative effects, lot of organizations have started to offer family friendly benefits programme. The family friendly benefits emerges in a variety of circumstances, depending on whether employees in organization are, there are human resource practices, such as flexi-hours, childcare, part-time and telework that provide by organization and could help employees to better balance their work and family roles and yet to reduce their work-family conflict.

Flexible Working Hours

Flexible working hours allow employees to vary their hours and place of work and can include flexitime, compressed work-weeks, telecommuting, job sharing, paid time off, and other leave programs (McShane, 2005). As Kirby (2005) states that flexible working hour provides additional benefits to employees by allowing them to work when child care is less expensive.

- Flexitime: allows employees to vary the start and end times of work provided that they attend for a set number of hours for a given period and during core working hours, say 10am to 2pm.

- **Compressed working week:** allows employees to work full time hours over fewer working days each week Employers planning to implement compressed working weeks should be aware of potential negative impacts to productivity.

- **Telecommuting:** allows employees to work from home. Telecommuting reduces the time spent physically commuting to work and can assist employees to better meet family obligations (such as collecting children from school). While technological advances are making telecommuting a much more viable option, telecommuting does have downfalls due to supervisory issues, potential decline in productivity outside of a structured workplace, potential dilution of the organisational culture, and an inability to monitor occupational health and safety within the home office.

- **Job sharing:** splits a position between two employees thus allowing these employees to better balance work and family commitments. Despite this benefit, job sharing can be difficult to implement due to challenges in finding an appropriate partner and regular downtime due to handover between these employees. (McShane, 2005).

- **Paid time off / leave programmes:** assist employees to effectively manage health and family commitments.

Childcare

Maume (2016) mentions that the rise of a new economy lead to the demand for female labor. Moreover, it appears that women with a great work experience before their first birth, it has a high chance they will return to work. Thus, the issues of who will response for their child will take place. On the other hand, Laughlin (2011) suggests that there are many fathers who were primary childcare providers (see figure 1). However, it appears that more female workers still take a bit response for childcare.

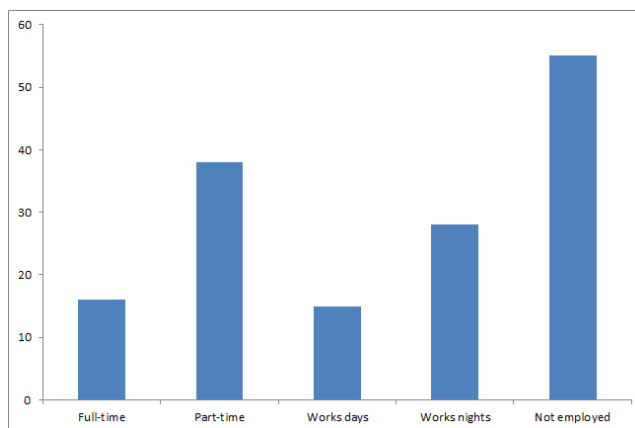


Figure 1 Percent of fathers who are primary providers to pre-schoolers while mother works by employment status. (Source: Laughlin, 2011)

Childcare includes onsite or subsidised care for young children and before and after school care for school-aged children. Onsite childcare reduces employee stress by eliminating the rush to drop and collect children from school and by allowing parents to check on their children throughout the day. Childcare related benefits are less common than other benefits discussed, with less than 9% of employers offering onsite or subsidised childcare. However, in terms of attracting and retaining employees, Managers and Human Resources professionals should note that 29% of Australian female employees stated that they would take a lower paid job if it provided onsite or subsidised childcare (McShane, 2005). Onsite childcare also increases rates of return for employees on maternity / paternity leave; First Direct provides onsite childcare and benefits with 90% of employees returning from maternity leave (Kirby, 2003).

Eldercare

Maume (2016) mentions that with advances in medical technology, it helps more people live well beyond retirement. Moreover, given that over one third of the American workforce now provides some form of elder care, organisations should not overlook eldercare as an important benefit to be considered when forming family friendly benefit packages. Along with extended leave, eldercare family friendly benefits can include educational sessions to support employees throughout the care process (Novelli, 2001).

In addition to these discretionary benefits, employers must ensure that legislative requirements are met. This includes parental, carers and / or personal leave and transfer to a safe job for pregnant employees. Legislation also requires protection from discrimination. An Australian government website, workplace.gov.au provides employees with information about their entitlements.

Interrelationship between Family Friendly Benefits and Organisational Performance

Human Resources professionals may be required to justify family friendly benefits by presenting positive links to organisational performance while mitigating associated costs. Steels (2015) supports that work-to-family programs were significantly and negatively associated with job satisfaction and significantly and positively associated with work-to-family conflict.

Fortunately, Human Resource professionals are able to draw on several sources to assist them in presenting a case for family friendly benefits to senior management. CIPD (2007) research shows that three-quarters of employers say flexible working practices have a positive effect on staff retention, and 70% say that flexible working has had a positive effect on staff motivation. Sands et al (2007) also cites Roberts

(2004) who suggests that family friendly benefits support organisational performance by increasing job satisfaction and organisational commitment and reducing turnover.

In addition, Strickland (2003) reviews the return that four family friendly benefits can bring to an organisation (telecommuting, flexitime, job sharing, and compressed work weeks) suggesting that correlations do exist between family friendly benefits and variables that contribute to organisational productivity. In addition, family friendly benefits add value to the organisation by retaining knowledge and attracting high quality candidates. Sparrow (2006) further suggests that it is flexible family friendly work practices provide the greatest benefits to organisational productivity.

In terms of theoretical explanation, Sands et al. (2007) draws on the Norm of Reciprocity and Perceived Organizational Support. First explored by Alvin W. Gouldner in 1960, the Norm of Reciprocity rationalises that people who have been helped should feel obligated to return the favour and secondly, that those that have been helped should not feel the need to take actions which could harm the giver. Thus, when an organisation offers family friendly benefits, an employee should act in a way which is beneficial to the organisation, such as increasing productivity.

Perceived Organisational Support was first discussed by Wayne et al in 2002 and explores the extent to which employees feel supported by their employer. Offering voluntary (as opposed to legislated) organisational support, such as family friendly benefits is thought to lead to increased productivity and job involvement and reduced turnover and absenteeism.

Maximising the Impact of Family Friendly Benefits

The extent to which a company can benefit from the introduction of family friendly work practices is however linked to the extent to which these benefits are utilised and sought by employees. Budd et al (2006) argues that many employees are not aware of the benefits that their organisations offer and further that some employees with access to these benefits are not able to use them. Budd et al (2006) suggests that family friendly benefits are not fully utilised because some employees can not afford to work part time, can not find a suitable job share partner or fear the repercussions of reduced visibility in the workplace.

In terms of the extent to which these benefits are utilized, Andrews cites Australian Bureau of Statistics data stating that flexible working hours (41%), permanent part time work (25%) and working from home arrangements (16%) are the most accessed family friendly benefits. The largest users of these benefits were working mothers, with 46.6% using flexible working hours, 35% using permanent part time work, and 17% using working from home arrangements. Statistics suggest that fathers with children under 12 have increased their use of Family Friendly benefits.

However, family friendly benefits can only be utilised if they first meet the needs of employees. Thus, Human Resources professionals must review the organisational culture to first determine if it is ready for the implementation of family friendly benefits. Federico (2005) suggests that ‘work-life needs assessment surveys’ should be viewed as a vital tool in ensuring effective implementation of family friendly work benefits. Effective use of work-life needs assessment surveys allow Human Resources professionals not only to gather information that could be useful in building a business case for the introduction / expansion of the organisation’s work life benefits programme, but also to ensure that the programme is structured to align as closely as possible with employee needs. Further, surveys may determine the extent to which work life benefits are valued by employees, to which family friendly benefits are of most value to employees, what further benefits employees like to see introduced and how important the organisation’s commitment to family friendly benefits is in attracting and retaining employees. This information should then be used to repackage and re communicate the organisations commitment to family friendly benefits

Organisations must communicate the availability of family friendly benefits to both potential and existing employees if maximum benefit is to be achieved. As a means of maximising utilisation of family friendly benefits, many companies promote their commitment to family friendly work benefits on their website and / or other attraction material. As an example, the University of Melbourne website promotes the universities commitment to family friendly benefits by stating that they offer employees:

- high morale and productivity and a positive secure working environment
- reduced employment costs associated with recruitment, training, absenteeism, and workers’ compensation
- the flexibility to re-negotiate work or work hours when an event or life cycle phase occurs requiring a change to different working conditions.” (University of Melbourne, 2007)

Finally, given that literature reviewed thus far suggests that the effectiveness of family friendly benefits is linked to the extent to which benefits are utilised, it is vital that Human Resources Managers are aware of their role in ensuring effective and equitable implementation of family friendly benefits. Sparrow suggests that “if flexible working is to succeed, then HR has to set an example, demonstrating the links between different work patterns and business continuity” (Sparrow, 2006, pg 21). Sparrow suggests that human resources professionals resist family friendly working hours due to a long hours culture and perceptions of a need to stay ‘close to the action,’ however suggest that family friendly benefits will not succeed unless Human resources professionals lead by example.

Challenges to implementation of family friendly benefits

Sparrow (2006) suggests that, despite many of the benefits discussed, family friendly benefits can attract challenges which must be overcome to ensure successful implementation. As an example, if not implemented equitably, some conventional employees state that they ‘pick up the slack’ for employees who work flexible working hours. Sparrow (2006) further suggests that this resentment can be overcome by ensuring that family friendly working hours are conducive to the needs of the business and administered in an equitable fashion. Senior males should play a role in ensuring the successful implementation of family friendly benefits, leading by example to ensure that family friendly work benefits are not seen creating a further gender bias. Sparrow (2006) provides paternity leave as an example of a method by which flexible working hours provides a benefit to both men and women.

Haskell et al (2003) are unique in their critique of whether family friendly work practices can be ‘too family friendly.’ Haskell et al (2003) quote the views of four CEOs in relation to the above question. The views of the CEOs are split, with those arguing ‘yes’ stating that family friendly benefits blur the lines between rewards and entitlements when aspects of the policy need to be revoked or reworked to meet the needs of the business along with arguments around direct and indirect discrimination. CEOs arguing ‘no’ state that family friendly benefits are required if organisations are to attract and retain the best employees and as a tool to increase employee morale. Jane Hanson, Head of HR at First Direct argues against the discrimination function by stating that when administered correctly, family friendly benefits should assist employees with family commitments while not disadvantaging conventional employees.

Hobel et al (2003) also explores the impact of family friendly work benefits on conventional employees. Hobel (2003) states that a perception exists that family friendly work benefits result in an unfair allocation of resources away from conventional employees while expecting conventional employees to work extra hours to accommodate this flexibility and meet deadlines. As a solution to perceptions of inequality, Hobel (2003) suggests that organisations offer packaged benefits whereby conventional employees, for example, may opt for additional annual leave rather than, say, a deluxe family dental plan. Ultimately, however, Hobel (2003) argues that such trade-offs should be accepted only to a degree stating that family friendly benefits should be viewed as a contribution to a better society.

Research carried out by Haar et al (2005) explored the potential for loss of productivity resulting from a ‘backlash’ by non-users of family friendly benefits who do not directly benefit from these initiatives. However this research ultimately concluded that there is no evidence to suggest that offering family friendly benefits will negatively influence productivity of conventional employees.

Inequality of Access to Family Friendly Benefits

Information gathered during the Workplace Employee Relations Survey (1998) (UK) suggests that the availability of family friendly work practices is positively linked to average current job tenure of the workforce, the proportion of the workforce on part time or fixed term contracts, the educational level of the workforce, gender breakdown of the workforce, the proportion of the workforce with children, the number of employees in the workforce, the presence and strengths of unions and the presence of a Human Resources department (Budd et al, 2006).

Further, Budd et al (2006) states that access to these benefits are not fairly distributed. Women in higher paid managerial positions are more likely to have access to these benefits than women in lower paid positions. This view is supported by a survey undertaken of 20,000 Australian workers and reported by ABC. The ABC reports that “Professionals, managers, administrators are much more likely than employees in other occupations to have control over a range of the family friendly work provisions. The other groups of employees that are less likely to have access are those with low levels of education.”

Human Resources professionals should be aware that future legislative changes could create trends toward a more equitable access to family friendly benefits. Andrews (2006) also states that family friendly benefits are not distributed evenly across industry or occupations, suggesting that the Australian Government will continue to implement legislative and welfare changes to promote flexibility to a greater range of employees.

The future of family friendly benefits

The concept of work life balance is not new, with the first work / life balance programme implemented as early as the 1930's and the term first coined in the 1980's (Lockwood, 2003). Thus, unlike many Human Resources trends, which are ultimately written off as fads, the implementation of family friendly benefits has survived both economic boom and recession. The continued survival of work life balance programmes will require increasing flexibility and the continuation of the move away from solely supporting working women to less gender specific support for a broader range of issues affecting employees outside of work.

Moving forward, organisations must adapt family friendly benefits to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the changing workforce, and the non-existence of a 'typical' family structure. As Generation Y enters the employment arena, organisations must focus on how benefits can be flexibility packaged to hold the attention of these 'high maintenance' employees. At the same time, family friendly benefits must meet the needs of an aging employee group who may be seeking flexible hours to accommodate elder care needs or to ease into retirement via part-time work. As example, St George

Bank recently became the first employer in Australia to introduce paid leave for grandparents - such a decision should prove invaluable in attracting and retaining knowledge rich, senior employees in a time when the population is rapidly aging (Christensen and Schneider, 2015).

Therefore, organisations must ensure that benefits are offered in a fashion that, as practically as possible, align with the needs of employee to ensure maximum benefit to all parties.

Conclusions

Thus, in conclusion, family friendly benefits can prove beneficial in improving organisational productivity provided that both Managers and Human Resources professionals actively ensure that benefits are effectively implemented so that they meet the needs of both the organisation and the wider employee group. Human Resources professionals must play an active role in ensuring that benefits are packaged in such a way that they are flexible enough to be applied equitably in a broad range of situations and in line with legislative requirements and demographic trends. Finally, to ensure maximum benefit, Managers and Human Resources professionals must ensure effective communication of benefits to both existing employees and the greater labour market.

References

- Azmat, G. (2015). *Gender gaps in the UK labour market: Jobs, pay and family-friendly policies*(CEP Election Analysis Papers 027, Rep.). London: Centre for Economic Performance, LSE.
- Baral, R., & Bhargava, S. (2010). Work-family enrichment as a mediator between organizational interventions for work-life balance and job outcomes. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 25(3), 274-300.
- Beauregard, T. A., & Henry, L. C. (2009). Making the link between work-life balance practices and organizational performance. *Human resource management review*, 19(1), 9-22.
- Berman, E. M., Bowman, J. S., West, J. P., & Van Wart, M. R. (2012). *Human resource management in public service: Paradoxes, processes, and problems*. Sage.
- Bloom, N., Kretschmer, T., & Van Reenen, J. (2011). Are family-friendly workplace practices a valuable firm resource?. *Strategic Management Journal*, 32(4), 343-367.
- Bourhis, A., & Mekkaoui, R. (2010). Beyond work-family balance: Are family-friendly organizations more attractive?. *Relations industrielles/industrial relations*, 65(1), 98-117.

- Budd, J. W., & Mumford, K. A. (2006). Family-friendly work practices in Britain: Availability and perceived accessibility. *Human Resource Management*, 45(1), 23-42.
- Buddhapriya, S. (2009). Work-family challenges and their impact on career decisions: A study of Indian women professionals. *Vikalpa*, 34(1), 31-46.
- Burgess, J., Campbell, I., & May, R. (2008). Pathways from casual employment to economic security: the Australian experience. *Social Indicators Research*, 88(1), 161-178.
- Butts, M. M., Casper, W. J., & Yang, T. S. (2013). How important are work–family support policies? A meta-analytic investigation of their effects on employee outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 98(1), 1.
- Christensen, K., & Schneider, B. (Eds.). (2010). *Workplace flexibility: Realigning 20th-century jobs for a 21st-century workforce*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Eby, L. T., Casper, W. J., Lockwood, A., Bordeaux, C., & Brinley, A. (2005). Work and family research in IO/OB: Content analysis and review of the literature (1980–2002). *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 66(1), 124-197.
- Glauber, R. (2011). Limited access: Gender, occupational composition, and flexible work scheduling. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 52(3), 472-494.
- Haar, J. M., Spell, C. S., & Odriscoll, M. P. (2005). Exploring work-family backlash in a public organisation. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 18(7), 604-614.
- Joyce, K., Pabayo, R., Critchley, J. A., & Bambra, C. (2009). Flexible working conditions and their effects on employee health and wellbeing. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*, 2.
- Kim, J., & Wiggins, M. E. (2011). Family-friendly human resource policy: Is it still working in the public sector?. *Public Administration Review*, 71(5), 728-739.
- Kirby, A. (2005). First Direct focuses on family and fun. *Human Resource Management International Digest*, 13(5), 25-27.
- Laughlin, L. (2011, October). Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers: 1961-2008. Retrieved April 18, 2016, from <https://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p70-128.pdf>
- Maume, D. J. (2015). Can Men Make Time for Family? Paid Work, Care Work, Work-family Reconciliation Policies, and Gender Equality. *Social Currents*, 3(1), 43-63.
- McShane, S. L., & Travaglione, A. (2005). *Organisational behaviour on the Pacific rim* (Enhanced ed.). Sydney: McGraw-Hill Irwin.

- Moen, P., & Yu, Y. (2000). Effective work/life strategies: Working couples, work conditions, gender, and life quality. *Social problems*, 47(3), 291-326.
- Pocock, B., Skinner, N. J., & Pisaniello, S. L. (2010). How much should we work?: working hours, holidays and working life: the participation challenge: the Australian work and life index (AWALI) 2010.
- Ryan, A. M., & Kossek, E. E. (2008). Work-life policy implementation: Breaking down or creating barriers to inclusiveness?. *Human Resource Management*, 47(2), 295-310.
- Sands, J., & Harper, T. (2007). Family-Friendly benefits and organizational performance. *Business Renaissance Quarterly*, 2(1), 107-126.
- Subramaniam, G., & Selvaratnam, D. P. (2010). Family friendly policies in Malaysia: where are we?. *Journal of International Business Research*, 9(1), 43.