Can work and life be friends?

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Today more than ever there is a strong link between the existence of a family-responsible culture and the efficient development of a company. Companies need to bear in mind that their staff's system of priorities has changed, and today the family occupies an important place in it. The magic word is "balance."
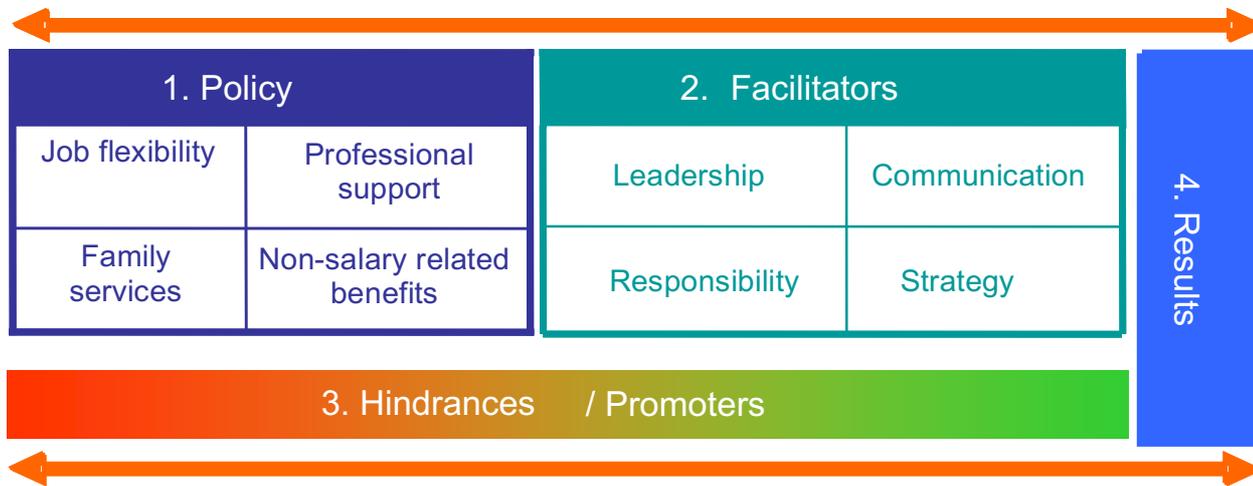
From our point of view family responsible companies are those in which the business strategies and intrategies (policies that pursue employee involvement and commitment) consider employees families' to be yet another stakeholder in the company. Generally speaking, the corporate culture of a company, that is, the series of corporate values that inspire it, is the determining factor to ensure true harmony between work and family for each employee.

It is clear that any company that intends to lead their sector in the 21st century as a profit-making organisation, providing society with a service and satisfying market demands, must consider a new factor: This factor is satisfying its employees, not only through payment policies but also through career plans and support to achieve a good work-life balance. If this is achieved then the company will benefit from it, through higher productivity, loyalty, retention of the best talent and the creation of branding in the job market. These initiatives complement many other measures taken by different social stakeholders, including public administrations.

The inability of the welfare state to absorb the cost of this "pollution" reveals the responsibility companies face in terms of the human ecology that has to bear this blow.

We must reconsider companies so that they become institutions that can continue to fulfil their specific mission of generating and sharing wealth, without losing sight of their overall mission: developing all its elements to achieve excellence. The business policies that help to harmonise work and family, social and personal life, are only the first step towards guaranteeing productivity, fairness and survival.

The Family Responsible Business Model© is a guideline for evaluating or diagnosing a company in order to know the stage it is at. Four elements are examined:

1. Policy		2. Facilitators		4. Results
Job flexibility	Professional support	Leadership	Communication	
Family services	Non-salary related benefits	Responsibility	Strategy	

3. Hindrances / Promoters

1. Family responsible policies: flexibility in terms of time and space, social benefits/salary perks, professional support, and "service policies" that include different types of support that reduce the employee's workload outside the company.

2. Family responsible facilitators must have the following qualities:
   - Leadership: Managers who openly recognise the importance of reconciling work and family life as a basis for the success of their business and incorporate this focus to build a supportive climate at work.
   - Communication: People who consistently and effectively promote a family responsible culture through communication, both internally and externally, are a prerequisite to ensure the success of formal policies.
   - Responsibility: Individuals who become responsible for both the implementation of formal policies and their implementation.
   - Strategy: People who recognise that the organisation's commitment to creating a culture that encourages and develops a good work-life balance is fundamental.

3. There are impediments and stimuli to family responsible policies in a business culture that somehow conditions the success and proper implementation of these policies.

4. The family responsible results that measure the true impact of the three previous elements on the organisation, such as the degree of employee awareness concerning the different policies introduced and the various elements of company culture.

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In order to define how to become a Family-Responsible Company the followings points have been differentiated:

- Information on employees' family needs (study of indicators, questionnaires, interviews)

- Preparation of an action plan and policies

- Commitment of top management

- Budget

- Work-family committee / coordinator
  Writing a manual to apply the policies and evaluate their use / policy adaptation

- Culture change (training and example set by top and middle management)

- Family values incorporated into the corporate mission

- Implementation of policies / actions adapted to different audiences
  (communication, working teams, …)

The top five challenges faced by business due to this trend

1. Considering the employee's family to be yet another stakeholder in the company

2. Satisfying employees but not only through payment policies

3. Responsibility in the face of human ecology

4. Providing the market (companies and customers) with a common tool for strategic innovation that is easily adaptable to the size and nature of the company.

5. Implementing policies / actions adapted to different audiences (communication, working teams)