



# *Children – Care – Career*

*Case Studies and Best Practices*



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# ***Children – Care – Career***

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Ana Isabel Martinez Garcia  
SYNDEX

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## Background and methodology

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One of the findings of the study “The impact of demographic change on the chemical industry in Europe”, commissioned as part of the joint EU-funded project between the ECEG, EMCEF and FECCIA in 2010, was that for nearly all the countries concerned by the project, an increase of the proportion of women employed in the chemical industry could help to partially offset the projected shortage of qualified workers and employees in the chemical sector.

As shown by a large number of studies and policy consultations, one of the essential prerequisites for getting women to decide to follow a professional career path is to improve the conditions for reconciling work life, childcare and, increasingly, the care for elderly family members and other dependents.

This research is the logical follow-up to the above-mentioned studies. This study has two objectives:

- Identify existing best practices in the chemical sector regarding work-life balance;
- Identify the conditions necessary for the implementation of these practices and determine whether and how they can be disseminated and transposed in other companies/countries

The research and investigation work carried out by the Syndex consultancy that enabled the writing of this report took place in 2013. It consisted in the following:

- Firstly, the identification of companies in the chemical industry known for their work-life balance best practices,
- Secondly, a survey for workers' representatives and management representatives in those companies, based on a questionnaire and telephone interviews.

The purpose of the questionnaire and the in-depth interviews was to shed more light on the following issues:

- existing best practices,
- the role of workers' representatives in the building up of the reconciliation of private and professional life policy,
- the process leading to the implementation, assessment and follow-up of best practices

The main difficulty throughout the study was obtaining the consent of companies to participate in the study. Indeed, although many companies have a good work-life balance policy, they are reluctant to participate in studies as this one (led to the initiative of IndustriAll Europe, ECEG and FECCIA).

The reasons for this reluctance remain unclear but they raise, nevertheless, the question of the transposition and dissemination of best practices. Today, companies implement policies that are more or less developed, more or less relevant or more or less effective. However, this is done on a case-by-case basis, which is a major obstacle to the implementation of a common policy at branch level.

Three companies finally agreed to share their best practice: L'Oréal, Arkema and Abbott.

Despite the limited number of case studies the three of them cover different activities in the chemical industry, different countries, different legal frameworks and different labour relations systems and can thus be considered as representative of a certain reality in the chemical industry.

Moreover, the analysis both of the questionnaires and the in-depth interviews shows a common trend on the issue of work-life balance with respect to measures and tools, social dialogue, prerequisites and impact.



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## Executive summary

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Work-life balance has been at the heart of European and national social policies for a number of years now (Community framework strategy on gender equality 2001-2005 and Road Map for equality between women and men 2006-2010). This concern of European and national legislators is reflected in the policies on this issue implemented by companies.

The results of this study underscore that work-life balance is widely present in the day-to-day life of companies, not only as a means to improve the quality of life of workers, but also as a way of increasing the company's attractiveness and performance. A good work-life balance brings benefits both for workers and the company (a win-win situation).

We analysed three case studies (L'Oréal, Arkema and Abbott) and our first conclusion is that there are many factors common to all three case studies, although they each have their own distinctive features.

This major conclusion highlights the global character of the existing needs and expectations regarding work-life balance but also the across-the-board nature of the prerequisites, conditions and

behaviours leading to the implementation of best practices and an effective social policy.

The best practices observed in the three companies covered by the project aim to achieve a work-life balance by setting up provisions concerning maternity/ paternity protection (provide extended maternal leave for women, encourage proactive re-entry management for women or men who have taken maternal and parental leave or sabbatical leave, provide day-care centres, etc.) and the organisation of work time (part-time work or home-working for a limited period to care for children, etc.).

Another conclusion drawn by the research is the crucial role to be played by workers' representatives. Indeed, although the company's willingness to set up a good work-life balance is obviously a primary and essential prerequisite, the cooperation of workers' representatives is a key factor of success.

The last, but not the least, conclusion of the study is that **work-life balance is a "living" issue**. That is also the reason why:

- existing measures must be closely assessed to check their relevance and effectiveness,
- careful attention must be paid to workers' expectations and changes in these expectations,
- a constructive social dialogue between workers' representatives and the company management must be built up.



## L'Oreal case study

### 1. ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE: MAIN FINDINGS

#### 1.1. Preliminary remark

The answers to the questionnaire given by the management's representatives and the workers' representatives are almost the same, which highlights a good level of cooperation and coordination between the social partners

- Whenever a different answer has been given the two points of view are stated in the report

#### 1.2. Answers to the questionnaire

##### *Work-life balance policy*

For several years now L'Oreal has carried out an active social policy on the issue of reconciliation of work and private life (work-life balance). The implementation of this policy calls for significant financial and material support from the company.

However, implementing out a specific work-life balance policy does not only have costs, but also involves benefits. In fact and according to both

management and workers' representatives, the financial and material support provided by L'Oreal for this purpose has had quite a lot of positive impacts:

- Improvement of the attractiveness of the enterprise
- Better performance of L'Oreal workers
- Increased loyalty of workers to the company

All the professional categories at L'Oreal professional category seem to benefit from these positive impacts.

The current work-life balance programmes at L'Oreal have not come out of the blue. They were driven, at least partially, by a previous demand arising from workers, both male and female (although demands from male workers were marginal)

The workers' main demands were focused on:

- Having a better organisation of working time,
- Obtaining material assistance from the company to take care of children or older family members,
- The implementation of adequate mechanisms in the company in order to avoid any negative impacts on the career development of workers on a part-time contract or child-care leave

The questionnaire raised the issue of consultation of workers on the issue of work-life balance (the question being whether a consultation process had been organised within the company to determine the best policy to implement).

The answers given by the management and the workers' representatives differed. Management representatives answered that an opinion survey was conducted on this issue in the company every 3-5 years, while the workers' representatives answered that no overall consultation had ever taken place:

- According to workers' representatives the demands on the reconciliation issues were not "formal" demands but individual ones and expressed during day-to-day life<sup>1</sup>

### ***Tools and measures implemented regarding the organisation of working time***

A wide range of tools have been implemented in L'Oreal to improve work-life balance:

- Part-time contracts,
- Homeworking/telework,
- Day-care nursery,
- Social assistants,
- Development of personal -welfare / relaxation / sport facilities, etc. in the workplace,
- Flexible working times for almost all workers,
- "Schueller time off": adding up to four weeks to the legal maternity leave<sup>2</sup>
- Part-time work via "Wednesday for fathers and mothers until the child is 12 years old"
- Paid leave for fathers
- Adjustment of working time when children go back to school after the summer holidays
- Family day

While most of the aforementioned measures seem to be well appreciated by workers, the most successful ones are:

- Part-time contracts,
- Homeworking/telework,
- Company day-care centre,
- "Schueller time off",
- Part-time work via "Wednesday for fathers and mothers until the child is 12 years old"

The reasons behind the success of the above measures are:

- One of the main principles of the company is "each person/worker is the main issue" and the adopted measures fit this principle,
- The measures have not been released "without thinking" but they have been implemented step by step, paying attention to the needs of workers and monitoring their implementation,
- The measures have been discussed between the management and the workers' representatives,
- A wide communication campaign has been carried out addressing both workers and management.

<sup>1</sup> In any case it seems that while no "legal" or "formal" information and consultation process involving workers' representatives (as such) has been organised, there is a continuous common work involving the management, the trade unions and the workers' representatives on the issue of work-life balance

<sup>2</sup> The duration of maternity leave is 16 weeks: 6 weeks before the due date and 10 weeks after delivery. But this duration is increased if the mother has already two or more children.

The questionnaire also raised the issue of the funding of the measures taken by L'Oreal and the views of the social partners differ on this specific point:

- The management considers that both the workers and the enterprise should pay for the implementation of the measures (but in different ways) while the workers' representatives consider that the cost of the social policy should be borne by the company alone.

### ***Financial support provided by L'Oreal for work-life balance***

A better organisation of working time, rhythms and shifts is not the only way of improving work-life balance. In fact all companies can also provide their workers with financial support in order to help them cope with the needs arising from their personal situations.

And as well as any other measure, this financial support can be positive and increase the attractiveness of the company and strengthen the workers' attachment to their firm

According to the L'Oreal management, this financial support may involve:

- financial assistance to cover expenses related to child-minding or care for older family members
- providing good health insurance

Workers' representatives agree on these two points but consider that further support can be envisaged:

- financial assistance related to pension contributions for part-time workers
- health insurance that includes assistance to older family members (when they lack resources)

### ***Some specific issues***

L'Oreal's social policy involves specific measures with regards to specific professional situations.

L'Oreal has implemented a range of measures in order to **facilitate the professional development and career of part-time workers**, the main ones of which are:

- The possibility of returning to full-time work whenever the worker asks for it,

- Taking into account the impact of a part-time work on the worker's pension benefits. To reduce the negative impact of part-time working, L'Oreal has set up the possibility, for part-time workers to pay social contributions as full-time workers after they are 55 years old

L'Oreal has also put into practice various measures to **facilitate the return of workers after maternity leave, child-care leave or sabbatical leave**. The main ones are:

- A personal interview before the worker's leave,
- A personal interview before the worker's return,
- Guaranteeing that once the worker returns to work he/she will keep the same job and the same job content

Regarding the issue of facilitating the return of workers after any leave, the management's representatives have also answered that:

- there are periodic contacts between the worker and the company during the leave,
- each worker receives training after the leave

But these two points are not corroborated by workers' representatives.

### ***Going further...***

Despite the good quality of measures already implemented at L'Oreal, both the management and the workers' representatives consider that:

- It is almost impossible to fulfil all workers' expectations as there are as many expectations as workers,
- It is impossible to give full satisfaction to each individual situation,
- New needs have emerged relating to work-life balance and workers are also asking also to go further with some existing measures some already tested tools:
  - ▶ Organisation of working hours
  - ▶ Material assistance provided by the company regarding children or older family members
  - ▶ Avoiding any negative impacts on the career of workers with part-time contracts or on child-care leave

### 1.3. Conclusions

The system already existing at L'Oreal is considered as satisfactory by both the management and the workers' representatives; nonetheless, social partners think it necessary and possible to do even more on the issue of work-life balance with child-minding and care for older family members since social developments make it necessary to constantly adjust L'Oreal's organisation and policies to the "real life" outside the company.

Two important issues for the company are to avoid a possible negative impact on the working teams and to avoid focusing solely on the situation of women (who are still mainly concerned by some existing measures)

## 2. THE POLICY ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE: THE PROCESS LEADING UP TO IT, IMPLEMENTATION AND BALANCE ASSESSMENT

Since L'Oreal is a French company, the national legal framework regarding professional equality between women and men<sup>3</sup> is fully applicable. While complying with the existing legal framework, the social partners at L'Oreal have gone a step further than the legal provisions well ahead of the setting up of specific obligations on the issue<sup>4</sup>.

One of the reasons for this is the fact because there are many women working in the company (67% of workers in 2012) and a great number of women holding managerial and professional positions (43% of women on management committees in 2012) the work-life balance issue was raised early and addressed earlier.

The L'Oreal culture on professional equality and the obligations set up by the French legislator have led social partners to negotiate and adopt the various agreements on the issue of professional equality and work-life balance.

**L'Oreal agreement on gender equality** signed in 2008 between L'Oreal and all the French trade unions. The main principles of the agreement were:

- Equality in every aspect of the worker's professional life (recruitment, promotion, access to P&M positions),
- Equal pay
  - ▶ Equal remuneration on the basis of equal competences
  - ▶ Protection of women in case of maternity leave:
  - ▶ "Schueller time off"
    - ▶ L'Oreal guarantees that all women returning to work after a maternity or adoption leave will have a wage increase equal to, at least, the wage increase of her colleagues (prorated according to the duration of the leave)
    - ▶ Bonuses are not prorated on the basis of the yearly presence of the worker.
- Increase overall global awareness to the parenthood issue.

**Company's agreement signed in December 2008** (applicable from 2009) between L'Oreal and all trade unions **regarding work-life balance**. The main provisions of this agreement were:

- Homeworking (see below),
- Planning of meetings:
  - ▶ A chart to be signed setting up the planning of meetings (start and end times) in order to reconcile private life and professional meetings
- Work organisation regarding part-time workers (see below).

<sup>3</sup> Law 83/635 (July 1093) states the obligation to set up a workplace-level gender equality plan.  
Law 2001/397 states the obligation to submit a report to the Labour Inspectorate on the comparison of the situation of women and men at the workplace.

Law 2006/340 on the elimination of wage gap between women and men, on work-life balance and on access of women to vocational training.  
Law 2011/103 on a balanced participation of women and men on company Boards.

<sup>4</sup> 60s: "Schueller time off".

1987: "Wednesday for mothers".

2000: the Chart on Ethics is signed.

2004: the Chart on Diversity is signed.

2006: first day-care nursery.

2008: Chart on Parenthood inside the company; Agreement on gender equality; Work-life balance agreement.

2009: L'Oreal is awarded the Diversity Label; 5th day-care nursery; agreement on the employment of seniors.

2010: 6th day-care nursery. 2010: L'Oreal co-creates the Arborus Fund aiming to encourage professional equality between women and men all through Europe; at European level L'Oreal contributes to the creation of the first European label on gender equality and at international level the company participates, with the Swiss foundation "The Gender Equality Project" and with the partnership of the Social Economic Forum, in the creation of the first international label on gender equality in politics.

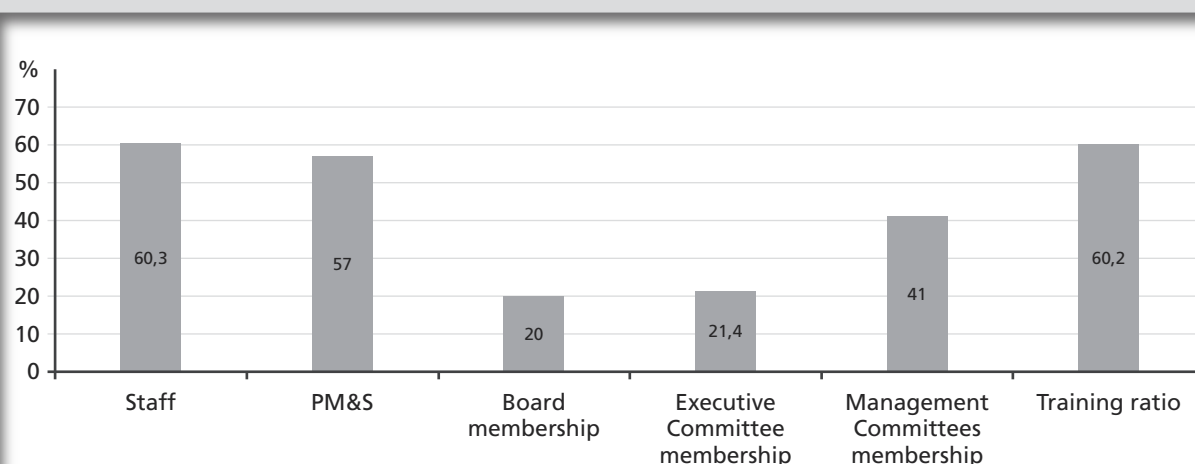
The implementation of every agreement at L’Oreal goes through several steps:

- **First step:** information addressed to all workers (practical counselling) in order to disseminate the agreement, to boost its understanding and implementation and to raise awareness  
Some examples:
  - ▶ Homeworking guide:
    - ▶ Sent to workers
    - ▶ Sent to managers
  - ▶ Guide on parenthood “For a better work-life balance” presenting all the tools and measures existing in the company on the topic
- **Second step:** reinforce the effective implementation by helping the HR managers in their day-to-day tasks when carrying out the measures
- **Third step:** organise monitoring and reporting to check the visibility of the process
- **Follow-up step:** guaranteed via collective bargaining so that social partners are effectively involved and they propose amendments to improve the already existing agreement.

One of the key points of the L’Oreal work-life balance policy is the **assessment of the different tools and measures** proposed and/or implemented to ascertain their effectiveness. This assessment is conducted systematically:

- **With regards to homeworking:**  
An interview between the worker and his/her manager is to be scheduled to monitor the impact of homeworking in each individual case and to decide whether to continue or not with it and/or to modify it.  
L’Oreal has carried out research amongst homeworking workers, managers and HR managers. The main results are as follows:
  - ▶ According to 90% of them, homeworking represents a “social advantage”,
  - ▶ 97% of homeworking workers and 80% of managers are happy with this measure which is considered as a real success in terms of social policy and work-life balance,
  - ▶ The mechanism has strengthened the relations between the teams
- **With regards to part-time work:**  
A follow-up procedure must be set up and a meeting must be organised between the worker and the manager in order to determine how the activity is to be organised according to the new time frame.
- **With regards to wage equality:**  
A wide range of research is carried out each year: the analysis of key positions at L’Oreal and the results are communicated to workers representatives<sup>5</sup>

CHART | Key indicators regarding women inside L’Oreal (2011)



<sup>5</sup> Wages and remunerations are negotiated on a yearly basis by social partners; to prepare the collective bargaining process, the management must provide workers’ representatives with all relevant information regarding the remuneration system, its implementation, its trend, etc.

Generally speaking, the results of a well-established policy on the issue of professional equality inside L'Oreal are easily corroborated by figures (see chart)

With regards to the assessment of the L'Oreal social policy the management's representatives recognize that they have not really put into place KPI (Key Performance Indicators) but, on the contrary, they believe that if they do not do what they are doing they are going to lose workers.

However the management's representatives have assessed and observed the performances of workers using the homeworking system and the major finding is that workers are much more committed to their work because:

- Commuting does not take place every day, which means that workers are less tired and they can keep their concentration levels all through the day
- The level of responsibility is higher as long as there is no a manager to instruct them all the time so workers feel that a relationship of trust has been set up between them and the company

A very similar assessment is done by the workers' representatives who consider that the homeworking system leads to:

- Less stress
- Better productivity
- Less air pollution
- Less work-related accidents (by reducing the commuting time)

The L'Oreal work-life balance policy is a whole with components such as pre-existing culture, negotiation, implementation and assessment and no single part of this policy can stand alone.

### 3. TOOLS AND MEASURES SET UP BY L'OREAL: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

#### 3.1. Measures and tools regarding the maternity

- From the 3rd month on, pregnant women can have 30 minutes of rest per day.
- **"Schueller time off"**  
Four additional weeks of maternity leave paid in full by the company. The leave can be used just after the legal maternity leave or it can be split up (maximum 5 days each time) until the child is 3 years old.  
This measure applies also in case of adoption.
- **Maternity leave<sup>6</sup>**  
An interview prior to the maternity leave is organised between the worker and her manager or HR manager.  
The issues to be discussed are:
  - ▶ Work adjustments needed, if any, related to the pregnancy,
  - ▶ Follow-up contacts between the worker and the company during the leave,
  - ▶ Expectations and wishes when coming back: career development, modalities (return date, Schueller time off?, part-time work ?, new working organisation , etc.).
- **Paternity leave<sup>7</sup>**

L'Oréal increases the Social Security allowances so that fathers can keep their entire remuneration all through the paternity leave.

#### 3.2. Measures and tools regarding work organisation

- **Part-time work**  
Part-time work cannot be imposed by the company but chosen by the worker who wishes to achieve a good work-life balance.

<sup>6</sup> According to the legal provisions: "workers returning to work after a maternity leave have the right to meet their employer to discuss their career development"

<sup>7</sup> Since January 2002, this leave, available to all fathers, amounts to 11 consecutive days (18 days in case of multiple births) to be used during the 4 months following the birth of the child

The management must guarantee the compatibility between the work organisation and the workload (i.e.: the targets set for part-time workers must be attainable for them according to their work schedule)

#### ■ Homeworking/teleworking

Homeworking was included in the company agreement on work-life balance (signed in 2008) and it was meant to be initially implemented on an experimental basis:

- applicable to some professions inside the company,
- applicable as a tool capable of meeting individual needs and expectations,
- applicable if:
  - ▶ homeworking is accepted by both the company and the worker,
  - ▶ homeworking is set up on a fixed-term basis (one year to begin with),
  - ▶ the work organisation allows it,
  - ▶ there is a balance between homeworking and "office-working" (in order to guarantee the link between the worker and the enterprise)

According to the management and the workers' representatives homeworking implies advantages for workers:

- Improve the work-life balance,
- Reduce commuting time,
- Have a "smoother" work organisation,
- Participate in an innovative project inside the company,

- Face difficult personal situations better

But also advantages for managers:

- Fosters a good work-life balance for workers,
- Take into account the individual needs of workers,
- Have a "smoother" work organisation,
- Have a better motivation of workers as long as they are happier in their professional lives,
- Improve the attractiveness of some professions

By April 2011 107 L'Oreal workers were using this tool<sup>8</sup> and giving a positive feedback to the system

so that the L'Oreal management has decided to enlarge the system to a greater number of workers. Today and since 2009 more than 209 workers have used the homeworking system (86% of women, 34% supervisors and 66% of professional and managerial positions)

#### ■ Children education leave<sup>9</sup>

Workers willing to have a children education leave can finance it, entirely or partially, with the days already "saved" through the "Time Savings Account". L'Oreal adds 25% to each saved day. Workers on children education leave rest inside the health insurance system of the company (i.e. all social benefits are maintained)

#### ■ "Wednesday for fathers or mothers"<sup>10</sup>:

All parents with a child under 12 years take 1, 2, 3 or 4 Wednesdays off per month (management agreement is needed). This measure can be extended till the child finishes his/her schooling (management agreement is needed). The measure can be stopped any time the worker asks for it.

#### Other measures/tools

##### ■ Day-care nursery

11 day-care nurseries have been created hosting children from 2 ½ months to four years. More than 100 children attend these day-care nurseries.

## 4. L'OREAL BEST PRACTICES: POSSIBLE DISSEMINATION, PREREQUISITES, LIMITATIONS

The issue of the dissemination of best practices, tools and measures is a real one not only at branch or global level but even inside L'Oreal France:

- there are 13,000 persons working for the various L'Oreal entities and subsidiaries and the practices and tools regarding the work- life balance vary from one to another

<sup>8</sup> 1,3 days of homeworking on average

<sup>9</sup> After a childbirth or an adoption (until the child is three), any worker (man or women) having worked for at least one year in the company can ask for (and have) a leave in order to raise his/her child. This leave can be: - a full time leave, - a part-time leave. The initial duration of the leave is one year; it can be renewed twice.

<sup>10</sup> In France, primary school children have no school on Wednesday

- a major expectation of workers' representatives is to have a homogenous implementation of the social policy of L'Oreal whatever the legal entity
- a common and homogenous implementation is actually quite difficult as every entity has its own culture, its own way of functioning, its own trade union culture, etc.

With regards to the possible dissemination of practices inside the L'Oreal group both the management and the workers' representatives seem to be a bit reluctant and consider that a good knowledge of the legal, cultural and social reality in each country is key so long as there are huge differences between the countries (Western European countries where L'Oreal has been present for many years now and Eastern European countries where the presence of L'Oreal is more recent) and as long as it is not a good thing to force workers, managers and workers' representatives to implement a policy against their possibilities, wills, cultures, etc.

Nevertheless the social partners believe that:

- The French experience and policy can be seen as an example of good practice to promote an active policy in other countries inside the group
- Trade unions must play a key role to make things go forward and to boost the implementation of the projects
- Most of the values and principles of the group are global and applicable everywhere in the world.

## 5. MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE L'OREAL CASE STUDY

Setting up a social policy cannot be done from one day to another but it takes time

- In L'Oreal, a lot of time has been spent on education: a lot of questions have been asked and answered but it was the sine qua none condition to achieve a sustainable organisation

The implementation of some tools and measures (part-time work, homeworking, etc.) involves changing mindsets and that cannot be done without following a whole process of dialogue, experimentation, communication, etc.

The need to set up a win-win policy: start from the beginning and not to try to implement things that are "too complicated" and don't fit within the company

The key role of a good social dialogue and a joint work between the management and the workers' representatives

- In L'Oreal, collective agreements have evolved and they are much more different than they used to be, since today they are co-built between the management and the workers representatives (who work jointly to create new tools and measures suited to workers' needs)

It is important to have good communication at company level addressed both to the workers and the managers to make behaviours evolve.

It is important to have a thorough assessment of the measures already implemented to ascertain the match between the aims and the results

- Policy can be modified/improved if needed

Work-life balance is a "living" issue as new needs may arise and new measures be tested

The key factors of a successful work-life balance policy are:

- commitment of the senior management to the company's values and principles,
- deep knowledge of the specific reality of the company,
- setting up of tools and measures that correspond with the workers' expectations and with the real life and situation of the company,
- listening to workers,
- building a fruitful social dialogue.



## Arkema case study

### 1. ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE: MAIN FINDINGS

#### 1.1. Preliminary remark

The answers to the questionnaire given by the management's representatives and the workers' representatives are mainly similar, which highlights a good level of cooperation and coordination between the social partners

- Whenever a different answer has been given, the two points of view are stated in the report

#### 1.2. Answers to the questionnaire

##### *Work-life balance policy*

For several years now, Arkema has been carrying out an active social policy on the issue of reconciliation of work and private life (work-life balance). The implementation of this policy calls for significant financial and material support from the company.

However, carrying out a specific work-life balance policy does not have only costs, but also involves benefits. In fact, according to both management and

workers' representatives, the financial and material support provided by Arkema for this purpose had had quite a lot of positive impacts:

- Improvement of the attractiveness of the enterprise
- Better performance of the Arkema workers
- Increased loyalty of workers to the company

All the professional categories at Arkema seem to benefit from these positive impacts.

According to the workers' representatives, the current work-life balance programmes inside the company have not come out of the blue. They were driven, at least partially, by a previous demand arising from workers, both women and as men. Their main demands were focused on:

- Having a better organisation of working time,
  - The implementation of adequate mechanisms in the company in order to avoid any negative impacts on the career development of workers on a part-time contract or child-care leave
- Conversely, according to the management, there was no clear or specific demand from workers on the issue of gender equality (which can be explained by the industrial characterisation of most of the company's plants)

The questionnaire raised the issue of consultation of workers on the issue of work-life balance (the question being whether a consultation process had been organised within the company to determine the best policy to implement).

Both the management and the workers' representatives agreed that no overall consultation has ever taken place since Arkema is not familiar with internal surveys. They also agreed that the rare demands on work-life balance issues were not "formal" demands but individual ones and expressed during day-to-day life

In any case, it is obvious that the issue of work-life balance has led to a continuous joint effort involving

the management, trade unions and workers' representatives (even if no "legal" or "formal" information and consultation process involving workers' representatives has been organised). A negotiation process has also been engaged between the social partners leading to the adoption of different agreements<sup>11</sup>

### ***Tools and measures implemented regarding the organisation of working time***

According to the workers' representatives, different measures have been set up within Arkema to improve work-life balance:

- Part-time contracts,
- Sabbatical leave on demand,
- Homeworking/telework,
- Development of personal welfare, relaxation and sports facilities in the workplace

According to the workers' representatives, while most of the above measures seem to be well appreciated by workers, the most successful ones (according to priority) are:

- Part-time contracts,
- Homeworking/telework,
- Sabbatical leave on demand,
- Development personal welfare, relaxation and sports facilities in the workplace

The questionnaire also raised the issue of the funding of the measures taken by Arkema and once again, the views of the social partners do not differ:

- The measures are free of charge for workers as long as they are funded by the company

### ***Financial support provided by Arkema for work-life balance***

A better organisation of working time, rhythms and shifts is not the only way of improving work-life balance. In fact, all companies can also provide their workers with financial support in order to help them cope with the needs arising from their personal situations.

<sup>11</sup> See chapter 2

And as well as any other measure, this financial support can be positive and increase the attractiveness of the company and strengthen the workers' attachment to the firm.

According to the Arkema workers' representatives, this financial support may involve the following:

- giving a bonus when a child is born
- providing financial assistance for child-minding or care for older family members
- providing financial assistance for school fees

### ***Some specific issues***

Arkema's social policy involves specific measures with regards to specific professional situations.

The company has set up some measures in order to **facilitate the professional development and career of part-time workers**. According to the workers' representatives, this only concerns the possibility of returning to full-time work whenever the worker asks for it. According to the management representatives, part-time workers do not suffer any discrimination or prejudice regarding remuneration, social protection or training and all these topics guarantee a good implementation of the part-time work system.

Arkema has also put into practice various measures to **facilitate the return of workers after maternity leave, adoption leave, child-care leave or sabbatical leave**. The main ones are:

- A personal interview before the worker's leave,
- A personal interview before the worker's return

### ***Going further...***

Despite the measures already in place at Arkema, the workers' representatives consider that:

- Some workers' expectations have not been fulfilled,
- New needs have emerged relating to work-life balance and workers are also asking to go further with some existing measures:
  - ▶ Organisation of working hours

- ▶ Avoiding the negative impacts on the career development of workers with a part-time contract or who have taken child-care leave
- ▶ Homeworking

### **1.3. Conclusions**

The system already existing at Arkema is considered as satisfactory by both the management and the workers' representatives; nonetheless, workers' representatives believe that:

- The issue of work-life balance is treated by the company on a legal basis (i.e. Arkema is strictly complying with legal obligations) and there are no innovative approaches
- They lack global tools to monitor the impact of measures, and workers' representatives are unable to assess or quantify the impact of measures already implemented that they feel are efficient and positive
- The issue has been somehow neglected by workers representatives who had focused on other priorities<sup>12</sup>
- Further actions are needed on the issue mainly regarding:
  - ▶ Company day-nursery
  - ▶ Financial assistance for child-minding or care for older family members
  - ▶ Financial assistance with regards to school fees

According to the management's representatives:

- a lot of work has already been done but there are still some issues to be finished (guide on parenthood, guide for managers on how to conduct interviews, etc.)
- workers have further questions and expectations with regards to part-time work
  - ▶ the management must answer these as soon as possible
- there is a good social dialogue at Arkema as the social partners share the same views regarding work-life balance
  - ▶ even if they do not always agree on the means required to implement the policy

<sup>12</sup> Quite a number of restructuring programs have been launched by the company since 2008 (the beginning of the crisis) and workers' representatives have been mainly involved in trying to reduce the impact of these programs on the workforce

## 2. WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICY: THE PROCESS LEADING TO IT, IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

Arkema being a French company, the national legal framework regarding professional equality between women and men is fully applicable<sup>13</sup> and the Arkema management complies with any legal obligation introduced by national lawmakers regarding professional equality<sup>14</sup>.

The obligations introduced by French legislation have led social partners at Arkema to negotiate and adopt various agreements on the issue of professional equality and work-life balance.

### ***Agreement of gender equality with respect to career development and remuneration (signed on 30 March 2012 by Arkema and the social partners -CFDT, CFE/CGC and CGT).***

Arkema commits itself to:

- strengthening its non-discrimination and feminisation policy with regards to access to employment (in spite of a still low feminine representation inside some professional categories),
- abiding by the principle of equal remuneration, taking into account the level of training, acquired experience, responsibilities, and without paying heed to the employee's gender,

- facilitating and favouring career development by guaranteeing equal access to vocational training to all workers without penalising the employees benefiting from a specific organization of their working hours,
- ▶ part-time work and a better organisation of working hours are also considered by the management as means to guarantee gender equality with regards to career development
- taking into account the issue of parenthood in the company and to eliminate any professional inconveniences related to parental leave.

The implementation of the above policy on the issue of professional equality has led to a higher number of women inside Arkema as well as to an increasing number of women in Professional and Managerial positions (as shown by the graphics)

### ***Agreement on part-time work (signed on 29 June 2012 by Arkema and the social partners -CFDT, CFE/CGC and CGT)***

The agreement defines the part-time work system at Arkema France, completes the already existing model and sets up new tools and measures. This global collective agreement is completed by local agreements on working hours defining the specific measures applicable to every plant.

The points-keys of the agreement are:

CHART | % women in Arkema's staff

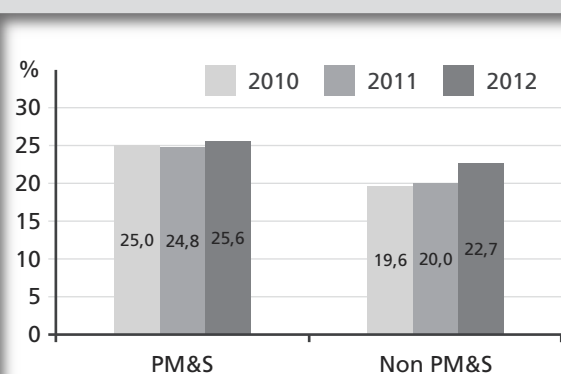
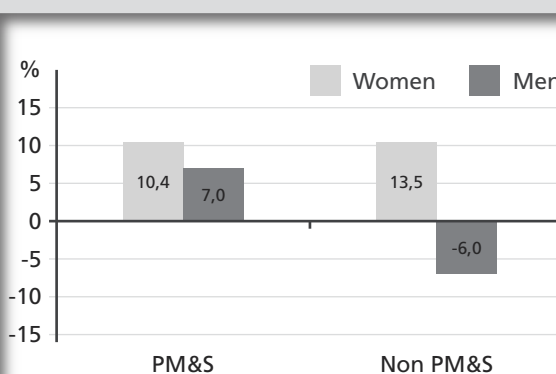


CHART | Arkema staff's evolution (2010-2012)



<sup>13</sup> See the L'Oreal case study

<sup>14</sup> Although both workers and management representatives agree on this specific issue, workers' representatives regret that Arkema's commitment to gender equality and work-life balance is mainly driven by the need to comply with a legal obligation, which means that tailored measures are adopted

- List the already existing tools and measures on the issue of part-time work within Arkema France,
- Clarify the status of the part-time employees and harmonise the existing practices,
- Set up new tools and measures to improve the part-time work system paying special attention to:
  - ▶ the non-discrimination of part-time employees,
  - ▶ the adaptation of workload,
  - ▶ the integration of part-time work in end-of-career management.
- Any Arkema worker can apply to the part-time work system

According to the management's representatives, 300 Arkema workers in France are using (or have already used) the part-time work system.

The issue of communication is one of the keys to a successful agreement. The communication process involves:

- A press release posted on the company's intranet
- An official communication addressed to HR managers and all plant managers
  - Who are in charge of disseminating the information afterwards

The assessment of the different collective agreements and of their implementation is considered by both the workers' representatives and the management as one of the key elements of a successful policy. According to this commitment (and to legal obligations<sup>15</sup>):

- The follow-up of the agreement of gender equality will be done on a regular basis by the "gender equality commission"<sup>16</sup>
- In order to get quantifiable results Arkema has organised:
  - ▶ A regular review of "job descriptions" to check whether they reflect real activities and responsibilities,

- ▶ An annual review in each department of every position and its professional profile to guarantee the implementation of the equality principle
- Some indicators have been set up to assess the implementation of the policy: absenteeism, training rate, gender wage gap, hiring rate of women, number and frequency of parental leaves, etc.
- The provisions of the collective agreement on part-time work state that:
  - ▶ By 2014 every part-time worker must have gone through an interview prior to the access to the new system and through an evaluation interview
  - ▶ The follow-up of the number of interviews will be done by the social partners
- No indicators are available as to the effectiveness of part-time work and its potential benefits; however the management believes that the system is appreciated by workers as long as:
  - ▶ an increasing number of workers shows interest
  - ▶ there are no complaints on the topic

According to its global policy on gender equality and work-life balance, Arkema signed "The Charter of Parenthood in the Company" in 2013<sup>17</sup> (36 2013)

### 3. TOOLS AND MEASURES SET UP BY ARKEMA: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

#### 3.1. Measures and tools regarding maternity/paternity

- **Maternity leave**
  - ▶ Ensure that maternity leave has no impact on career development,
  - ▶ Schedule an interview between the worker and her immediate superior during the month following the announcement of the pregnancy to the employer in order to adapt working

<sup>15</sup> French legislation on collective bargaining makes it necessary to set up "follow-up commissions" to regularly assess the implementation of all collective agreements

<sup>16</sup> The commission is set up by the "Central Works Council" and its members are part of this organism

<sup>17</sup> "La Charte de la Parentalité dans l'entreprise" was set up in 2008 by the "Observatoire de la parentalité en entreprise" (Corporate Parenthood Observatory) in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Social relations, Family and Solidarity. Since its creation, more than 500 companies (representing 10% of French workers) have signed the Charter.

The aim of the Charter is to foster a work environment that helps the parents to have a better quality of professional and private life.

In signing the charter, each company commits itself to implement practices to promote work-life balance. This commitment involves:

- Acting on the image of parents (make managers more sensitive to the issue of parents inside the company "a worker may also be a father or a mother")
- Creating a parent-friendly work environment (facilitating work-family balance; adapting working conditions in case of pregnancy)
- Complying with the non-discrimination principle with regards to the career development of parents (avoiding any discriminatory practice and guaranteeing the same career development for all workers in the company)

hours, if necessary (according to the legal and contractual requirements),

- ▶ Schedule an interview between the worker and her immediate superior within one month after she returns from maternity leave.

#### ■ Parental leave

- ▶ Recognize as actual working time (limited to 3 years) the duration of the parental leave with regards to the calculation of the seniority,
- ▶ Schedule an interview with the hierarchy when leaving for parental leave and within one month after returning to the company,
- ▶ Continue with existing actions in favour of the employees on parental leave:
  - ✓ absence of pro rata of the holiday bonus for part-time workers on parental leave,
  - ✓ no decrease of the profit sharing bonus in case of working time higher than or equal to 50 %,
  - ✓ possibility of paying security social contributions on the basis of full-time work (financial contribution of the employer in case of part-time workers on parental leave for 18 months),
  - ✓ maintain subscription to the supplementary health scheme (financial contribution of the employer for 12 months),
  - ✓ possibility of maintaining social protection in case of death (financial contribution of the employer in case of part-time work)

#### ■ Paternity leave

- ▶ Maintain the same remuneration during paternity leave for the employees with at least one year of service,
- ▶ For employees under open-ended contracts with at least one year of service, the duration of the paternity leave is not taken into account in calculating holidays and profit-sharing bonus and of the 13th month of salary<sup>18</sup>.

#### ■ Leave of absence for family events

- ▶ Maintain the applicable measures within each establishment regarding absences for family events.

- ▶ Grant a one-hour credit to parents accompanying their children on the first day of the school year (unless there are better conditions in the plant)

#### ■ Other measures

- ▶ For workers attending training courses far away from their home, Arkema grants an allowance to organise child-minding (children under 14 years): €40 (up to 2 children) and €60 (from 3 children) per night outside home (limited to three times/year)

### 3.2. Measures and tools regarding the work organisation

#### ■ Part-time work

*How to get into the part-time work system*

- ▶ A request addressed simultaneously to the worker's immediate superior and to plant Management,
- ▶ An interview to be organised with the worker's manager to check the feasibility of the change in work pace (in terms of workload, scope of the post and team organisation),
- ▶ If the request is accepted, a deadline will be applied to adapt the department's organisation and to specify how the new time schedules and work modalities will be implemented,
- ▶ An amendment to the employment contract for a one-year duration basis (tacit renewal in principle).

*Impact of part-time work on career development*

- ▶ Allow equal access to vacant positions in the Group.
- ▶ Give the priority to part-time employees who wish to occupy or to take back a full-time job in the same department (or, failing that, on the same site).
- ▶ Allow equal access to training by scheduling training courses according to working hours
- ▶ The development of part-time at the end of every professional career
  - ✓ Within the framework of the collective agreement on the prevention of strenuous work (January 2012) Arkema commits itself to accept any request of 80 % or more part-time work coming from a worker retiring within 18 months.

<sup>18</sup> The remuneration system in a number of French companies includes the payment of an additional month (13th month)

*Impact of part-time work on working conditions*

► Remuneration

- ✓ Principle of equal remuneration between part-time and full-time workers during recruitment throughout the worker's career.
- ✓ The allocation of individual wage increases to part-time employees is carefully monitored.
- ✓ The profit sharing bonus is not on a pro rata basis when the worker's rate of activity is upper or equal to 50 %.
- ✓ The part-time has no impact on the "holiday bonus" or the length of service bonus.

► Holidays

- ✓ Part-time workers have 30 days off for a full working year just as every full-time worker.
- ✓ All workers benefit from the same leave regarding family events regardless of status.

► Social protection

- ✓ Part-time workers and full-time workers have the same rights regarding pensions
- ✓ The part-time work system has no impact whatsoever on the complementary health insurance system

*Communication campaign and assessment*

- An assessment of the part-time work system on every plant will be done at least once a year, to guarantee the follow-up of the collective agreement,
- A specific communication campaign will be addressed to every plant manager, to HR managers and to PM&S to increase their awareness of the non-discrimination policy regarding the increase of remunerations, professional promotion and work organisation,
- A guide on part-time is available to every worker.

■ **Homeworking/teleworking**

Homeworking has recently been set up in Arkema on an experimental basis and involves only headquarters.

The homeworking is applicable if:

- The worker asking for it fulfils the following criteria:

- ✓ Full time worker or at least 80% part time worker,
- ✓ Has at least one year of service in the company,
- ✓ Has work compatible with homeworking,
- ✓ Has a private environment compatible with homeworking,
- It is accepted both by the company and the worker
- Priority is given to some individuals:
  - ✓ Pregnant women
  - ✓ Disabled workers
  - ✓ Workers suffering from health troubles
  - ✓ Workers with a long commuting time

Implementation:

- One day/week of homeworking
- Homeworking limited to one year
- A three-month "adaptation" period
- An assessment after the "adaptation" period in order to validate whether the system is to be continued
- An assessment after the end of homeworking (one year maximum)

#### 4. ARKEMA BEST PRACTICES: POSSIBILITY OF BEING DISSEMINATED

The tools, measures and best practices described in chapter 3 are those implemented in Arkema France but some of them exist also in the French subsidiaries of the company<sup>19</sup> or abroad<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, Arkema has already taken some global initiatives to guarantee a good dissemination of best practices:

- A global recruitment charter stating two main principles
  - Equality
  - No discrimination during the hiring process
- A single internet tool (shared by all Arkema entities worldwide) regarding the job application process aimed at harmonising the recruitment process worldwide.

<sup>19</sup> Agreement on gender equality signed in 2011 by the CECA social partners. Agreement on parental leave to look after ill children signed in 2010 by the Alphacan social partners

<sup>20</sup> In the USA, Arkema Inc. has set up a one-year action program (renewable each year) based on the respect of the professional equality and of the equal remuneration principle applicable to every worker.

On the other hand workers' representatives believe that there is no European-level policy on the issue of gender equality or work-life balance despite the fact that Arkema has set up European Works Councils. There are local initiatives on the topic in some European countries but they are just local initiatives and they are not being encouraged by a global or corporate policy.

On a global basis, the social partners consider that while every best practice is transposable in every company from a theoretical point of view, the pre-existing national framework plays a crucial role either in a positive or a negative way.

On the other hand some pre-requisites are needed:

- A good level of awareness inside the company
- A fruitful social dialogue
- Practices and tools must answer to the workers' expectations (a good practice in a country or plant can be considered as useless or non-priority in another company or country)

## 5. MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE ARKEMA CASE STUDY

Work-life balance is a legal issue in France, so social partners need to negotiate on the topic. Once the French social system guarantees a good degree of protection, social partners must strive to do better.

- Nevertheless, nothing can be done without the previous commitment of the company on the subject

A regular assessment of the measures and tools is crucial to ascertaining their effectiveness and to go further.

Social partners must share the same interest, points of view and commitments. It is also essential that they have a high level of coordination and cooperation.

The social policy must match the workers' expectations.

Building up an effective policy is not a one-off event but "work in progress"



## Abbott case study

### 1. ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE: MAIN FINDINGS

#### 1.1. Preliminary remark

Due to time constraints, this analysis includes only the answers to the questionnaire given by management representatives.

Moreover, it reflects only the reality of the Abbott policy regarding work-life balance in two Abbott plants in Germany.

#### 1.2. Answers to the questionnaire

##### *Work-life balance policy*

The Abbott plants that participated in the project entered the Abbott consolidation scope less than four years ago. Prior to that, both plants were part of Solvay and they had already a policy and a "history" on the issue of work-life balance.

However, carrying out a specific work-life balance policy does not involve only costs but also benefits. In fact, according to the management representatives, the financial and material support provided by

Abbott on the issue is having quite a lot of positive impacts:

- Improvement of the attractiveness of the enterprise
- Better performance of Abbott workers
- Increased loyalty of workers to the company

Abbott workers regardless of their professional category seem to benefit from these positive impacts.

The current work-life balance programmes at Abbott have not come out of the blue. They were driven, at least partially, by a previous demand arising from workers, both male and female (although demands from male workers were marginal)

According to the answers given by the management representatives, the main demands of workers focused on:

- The reduction of working time,
- Obtaining material assistance from the company to take care of children or older family members,
- Homeworking,
- Healthcare,
- Having a better organisation of working time

The questionnaire raised the issue of consultation of workers on the issue of work-life balance (the question being whether a consultation process had been organised within the company to determine the best policy to implement).

According to the management, the work-life balance issue was been addressed in a two different ways:

- Via a questionnaire regarding some issues
- Taking into account the individual expressions of workers whenever they were identified

From a more formal and legal point of view, the management confirms that the topic has been discussed and worked over jointly by the management, trade unions and workers' representatives.

### ***Tools and measures implemented regarding the organisation of working time***

A wide range of tools have been implemented in Abbott to improve work-life balance:

- Annual holidays at workers' convenience,
- Part-time contracts,
- Homeworking/telework,
- Day-care nursery,
- Social workers,
- Development of personal welfare/relaxation/sports facilities, etc. in the workplace,
- Networking regarding training and activities for older children,
- Employee Assistant Program,
- Employee homecare consulting,
- Flexible part-time agreements,
- Financial support for dental prostheses

While most of the aforementioned measures seem to be well appreciated by workers, the most successful ones are:

- Day-care nursery,
- Part-time contracts,
- Development of personal welfare/relaxation/sport facilities, etc. in the workplace,
- Homeworking/telework,
- Employee Assistant Program,
- Employee home care consultancy,
- Flexible part-time agreements,
- Financial support for dental prostheses
- Social workers,
- Annual holidays at workers' convenience,
- Networking regarding training and activities for elder children.

The reasons for the success of the above-mentioned measures are as follows:

- day-care nurseries gives young parents more flexibility to fulfil their business requirements,
- short-time contracts also make it possible to combine family needs with job requirements,
- company fitness centres are highly appreciated because they allow a health break without long distances

However not every tool has been as successful as expected:

- Networking regarding activities for elder children is not requested frequently because the need for external support is not as strong as expected.

The issue of the funding of the measures taken by Abbott has also been raised by the questionnaire and the management states that only the day-care centre requires co-funding (workers and company) while the costs involved by the implementation of any other measure are paid by the company

### ***Financial support provided by Abbott to promote work-life balance***

Whereas all the measures mentioned above contribute to the improvement work-life balance, there are also a number of additional tools or mechanisms. In fact, all companies can also provide their workers with financial support to help them cope with the needs arising from their personal situations.

And as well as any other measure, this financial support can be positive and increase the attractiveness of the company and strengthen the workers' attachment to their firm

According to the Abbott management, this financial support may involve:

- Bonuses to help workers pay for their holidays,
- Financial assistance related to pension contributions for part-time workers,
- Provision of a good health insurance,
- Setting up of a dedicated fund to support healthcare expenses not covered by insurance

### ***Some specific issues***

Abbott's social policy involves specific measures with regards to specific professional situations.

- Flexible part-time agreements (whenever possible without severe business disruption) aiming to **facilitate the professional development and career of part-time workers**
- Different measures to facilitate the **return of workers after maternity leave, child-care leave or sabbatical leave**. The main ones are:
  - ▶ Keeping periodical contacts between the worker and the enterprise during the leave,
  - ▶ A personal interview before the worker's return.

### ***Going further...***

Despite the good quality of measures already implemented at Abbott, the management's

representatives consider recognise that:

- It is almost impossible to fulfil all workers' expectations as there are as many expectations as there are workers,
- The issue of "home offices" arises regularly as not every demand can be satisfied
- New needs relating to work-life balance have emerged:
  - ▶ The creation of age-based working places

### **1.3. Conclusions**

The system already existing at Abbott is considered as satisfactory by the management's representatives; nonetheless, they think it necessary and possible to go further regarding:

- The improvement of the quality of healthcare
  - ▶ However, this is closely linked to the financial resources available
- The reduction of working hours,
- The organisation of the work to adapt to the needs of an ageing population.

## **2. THE POLICY ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE: THE PROCESS LEADING UP TO IT, IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT**

In Germany, as in many other countries, there is a legal framework on the issue of work-life balance that is mandatory for companies.

On the other hand there are some issues and topics that are discussed not at company level but at a higher level (between national social partners) or at branch level: work life, retirement and pre-retirement. In Germany, the chemical industry is one of the leaders on the issue of work-life balance.

The process leading to the implementation of the work-life balance policy has been initiated for a while now in the Abbott plants as well as research divisions and the role of workers' representatives is quite important. Although they work hand-in-hand with the management, on the whole, it has been stated that the existing tools and measures are mostly the result of joint initiatives by the Works council and management-)

The role of employees and of the workforce as a whole needs to be highlighted:

- the Works Council organises internal surveys on a regular basis to check whether their ideas or proposal match the expectations of employees: survey on day nurseries<sup>21</sup>, survey on care modules<sup>22</sup>, in-house home-office survey<sup>23</sup>,
- general surveys organised by the company<sup>24</sup>,
- general meetings held twice a year,
- There is a good communication between the employees and the Works Council: individual feedback given to workers' representatives

The characterisation of the Abbott work-life policy is twofold:

- The Works Council and the management have signed collective agreements (under the co-determination principle) various issues:
  - ▶ Health insurance
  - ▶ Kindergartens
  - ▶ Flexitime
- Individual agreements or contracts motivated by individual needs; the best example is the home-office policy:
- the Works Council has not asked for a collective agreement and both the company and the workers' representatives believe that there is no need to regulate the issue of home-office in a collective form. Since situations may be very different, there can be no blanket agreement<sup>25</sup>

No **assessment criteria** have been set up either by workers' representatives or by the management to check the effectiveness of the tools or the measures already implemented; however there is a wide consensus inside the company on the following statements:

- any policy on reconciliation of private and professional life leads to a "win-win situation": the workers want to have good working conditions and the managers want to keep their employees

- the absenteeism ratio and the turn-over at Abbott are not very high which means that the working environment is a good one that incites workers to stay with the company

Any social policy must be considered as a "living entity" and the social partners must adapt their actions to the new realities and these new realities are sometimes not only related to "internal" events (i.e. events directly linked to the situation of the company) but also to "external or global" events. With this respect one of the main worries inside Abbott is the issue of demographic changes in the population:

- There are not enough "young" workers and the national pension system is under pressure; these two facts lead to an unavoidable longer professional life in the future.
- As a result the social partners will need to work on new topics that go beyond work-life balance:
  - ▶ Health issues: how to deal with an ageing population at work?
  - ▶ New measures to promote a better and balanced life throughout a longer career

### 3. TOOLS AND MEASURES SET UP BY ABBOTT: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

#### 3.1. Measures and tools regarding maternity

##### *Day-care centres*

They are either paid by Abbott (agreements signed between Abbott and the day-care centre so that Abbott workers can have access to these institutions) or set up directly on Abbott premises

##### *Maternity leave, child-care leave or sabbatical leave:*

Keeping periodical contacts between the worker and the company during the leave,

<sup>21</sup> 15 years ago, the Works Council initiated a survey amongst workers to evaluate the need of setting up day care centres inside the company. The results of the survey showed that the workers had no needs or expectations on that issue and nothing was done then. Some years later the Works Council launched a new survey on the same issue but the results were quite different and they led to the actual system of day-care centres set up (or financed) by Abbott.

<sup>22</sup> At the initiative of the Abbot Works Council a survey was launched on the issue of care; the survey aimed to determine which were the needs of the Abbott working population regarding the care of relatives at home; the survey showed that a real need existed on the issue and after a negotiation between the workers' representatives and the management they agreed to implement "care modules" (see chapter 3)

<sup>23</sup> See chapter 3

<sup>24</sup> Employee survey that used to be done every two years (Solvay era) to measure worker satisfaction.

<sup>25</sup> Between 30 and 100 workers are asking for home-based works on occasional times and according to specific needs

A personal interview before the worker returns.

### 3.2. Measures and tools regarding the work organisation

#### *Home-office*

The process to get into the home-office system is carried out as follows:

- Workers express the need to their managers
- Managers contact the Human Resources department so that an assessment can be done on the following topics:
  - ▶ Can the work be done at home?
  - ▶ Can the worker “be trusted”?
- If the answers are positive then a home-office agreement is signed between Abbott and the worker; the agreement is signed on a temporary and individual basis

#### *Flexitime/floating days*

The workers can have two days off per month in order to compensate overtime and to adapt professional and private needs.

### 3.3. Measures and tools regarding child care and care for older family members

#### *Care modules*

A contract has been signed between Abbott and an external service provider who provides consulting, assessment and assistance to Abbott workers on the issue of care for older family members (mostly preventive care). The appraisal is done by phone and anonymously if wanted by the worker.

## 4. ABBOTT BEST PRACTICES: POSSIBLE DISSEMINATION, PREREQUISITES, LIMITATIONS

The best practices mentioned above are the ones existing in Hanover. Some other Abbott plants or subsidiaries have implemented their own practices<sup>26</sup>.

However, and at global level, Abbott has not set up a corporate work-life balance policy, although the company offers different kinds of support and help<sup>27</sup>

With regards to the possibility of disseminating practices observed inside Abbott:

- Theoretically any best practice is transferable, however there are cultural and legal obligations, issues, requirements, etc. that need to be taken into account,
- Every global initiative must be examined carefully in order to guarantee that national/local requirements are met,
- The implementation of best practices needs a good level of cooperation as well as mutual trust between social partners

## 5. MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE ABBOTT CASE STUDY

Nothing can be done without the involvement of the workforce since their needs and expectations are the starting point of any policy to be implemented.

Any social measure must lead to a “win-win” situation.

There is a good level of cooperation between the Works Council and the management of work-life balance although their positions may differ regarding the funding of the measures or their magnitude.

<sup>26</sup> In September 2013 Abbott was named among the Top 10 companies in Working Mother magazine's 100 Best Companies List. This is the thirteenth consecutive year that Abbott has been included in this ranking, which recognizes companies for providing a family-friendly workplace. Abbott was selected based on an extensive application with more than 600 questions on workforce, compensation, child care, flexibility programs, leave policies and more. It also surveys the usage, availability and tracking of programs, as well as the accountability of managers who oversee them. Eight areas were measured and scored: company profile, benefits, paid time off and leaves, workplace profile, women's issues and advancement, child care, flexible work, and unique best practices

<sup>27</sup> The Abbott foundation whose aim is to provide financial help to Abbott families in order to promote educational careers (any Abbott worker can apply for help as long as the foundation operates at global level)

Building up an effective policy is not a one-off event but “work in progress” and whenever new realities arise they must be taken into account.



## Shared experiences and common features

The three companies that answered the survey are similar in some respects, but also different from the point of view of their characterisation. They have in common the branch (the chemical industry), their multinational setup, the existence of social dialogue structured around active workers' representatives, a long-established social policy and the existence of work-life balance best practices.

The major distinctive elements are:

- The country of the headquarters (France for L'Oréal and Arkema and Germany for the Abbott establishments included in the scope of the survey) which is a major element with regards to the legal framework on the issue work-life balance;
- The activity within the entities: mainly manufacturing for Arkema and mostly focused on laboratory activity for L'Oréal and Abbott;
- The structuring of social policy (via collective agreements for the two French companies and via individual agreements and collective agreements for the German company).

With regards to the issue of work-life balance, the survey reveals the existence of a variety of common

factors in all the three case studies (however, with characteristics specific to each case)

These common factors are:

- The need to have a reference framework and a corporate culture that favours the emergence of proposals, ideas and mechanisms. There can be no headway if there no "prior fertile ground"
- An understanding of the work-life balance policy as a means to:
  - ▶ Improve the company's attractiveness
  - ▶ Obtain a better performance of workers
  - ▶ Increase workers' loyalty to the company
- The important role of workers' representatives both in the role of social promoter of social protection measures and in the role of social partner when bargaining
- The need to establish a constructive social dialogue and a good level of cooperation between workers' representatives and the company's management
- The measures and tools implemented essentially involve the protection of maternity (via the improvement of the legal mechanisms existing in every country) and the organization of working time (mainly chosen part-time and home-working)
- The importance of setting up the tools, mechanisms and policies that match workers expectations
- The important role of a good assessment of existing measures to check their relevance and effectiveness (even if identifying and setting up objective and quantifiable follow-up indicators of follow-up seems somehow difficult)
- The importance given to communication within the company concerning the policies and the available tools: Abbott organizes biannual general assemblies while L'Oréal and Arkema have drafted information guides sent to all workers
- A possible and theoretical transposition of existing best practices but which is not as easy and as practical to implement in actual fact
  - ▶ The national legal, trade union and cultural frameworks sometimes make it difficult to simply transpose a specific measures to another context or country
- Work-life balance is a "living" issue as new needs may arise and new measures be tested

This homogeneity on a number of appreciations and facts is completed by some differences between the study cases; the main differences are:

- The applicable legal framework in every country which fixes the minimum work-life balance rules to be set up in companies, the carrying out of collective bargaining, the implementation of policies and even how to proceed with the follow-up
  - ▶ In fact the existence of a wide protective legal framework leads inevitably to the setting up at company level of best practices that more favourable than the legal framework. Conversely, in countries having limited legislation (if any) on the issue, the possibilities afforded to social partners are greater and involve a strong will to go forward.
  - ▶ Consequently, a tool or measures considered as good practice in a system with little protection will not be similarly considered in a better system
  - ▶ In both French case studies, national legislation imposes on social partners a mandatory collective bargaining on the issues of gender equality and work-life balance
  - ▶ Moreover the French legal framework requires the creation of follow-up committees whose members include workers' representatives and management (after the collective agreements have been signed)
- The attitude of the intermediate management with respect to some social measures (part-time work, home-working)
  - ▶ In the French cases, an important awareness-raising campaign seems necessary for managers to convince them that the proposed measures are well-founded (guides drafted specially for managers). On the other hand, in the German case this awareness campaign does not seem relevant since managers are already persuaded by the need to set up work-life balance measures
- The way in which the needs and the expectations of workers are taken into account:
  - ▶ The field survey seems to be widely spread at Abbott whereas this solution is not used by Arkema and it seems to be a tool among others in the case of L'Oréal

- The role dedicated to each social partner (workers' representatives/management) in the promotion of the work-life balance measures and tools
  - ▶ At Abbott, it is the works council that initiated surveys aimed at clarifying the expectations of the workers, and making the appropriate proposals
  - ▶ At Arkema, the initiative comes from the binding legal framework that lays down the compulsory rules and principles regarding collective bargaining
  - ▶ At L'Oréal, the proactiveness of the management is followed by an important role of the unions

On a global basis, we realise that common features widely override the differences (moreover these differences are closely linked to legal realities or to practices at company level and they are not related to philosophies or a different positioning on work-life balance).

This conclusion highlights the global nature of the existing needs regarding work-life balance, as well as the global nature of the requirements, conditions and behaviours leading to the implementation of best practices and an effective social policy.





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## Conclusions

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"The promotion of gender equality results in a better work-life balance since women are the ones who are most affected by the lack of balance between these two aspects of life. The difficulty in reconciling these two aspects is an obstacle to the full use of the productive potential of the European working population and dissuades or discourages individuals from entering or staying in the labour market. That is why the Road Map for Equality between Women and Men 2006-2010, which is a follow-up to the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality 2001-2005, makes the improvement of work-life balance its number one priority"

Work-life balance has been at the heart of European social and national policies for a number of years now (see the L'Oréal chapter as regards France). This concern of European and national legislators is reflected in the policies on this issue implemented by companies.

The results of this study underscore that work-life balance is widely present in the day-to-day life of companies. It does not just represent an additional cost for them, but also involves benefits both for

workers and the company (a win-win situation). The three companies included in the scope of the project showed that the implementation of mechanisms and measures to increase work-life balance in companies is considered as a means to:

- Improve the company's attractiveness
- Increase worker performance
- Increase workers' loyalty to the company

The second major conclusion of the study is the similarity of the measures set up by different companies to promote work-life balance. These measures are related mainly to two topics: the protection of maternity and paternity and the organisation of work time.

#### With regards to **maternity**

- Provisions aiming to provide extended maternity leave for women with children (L'Oréal and Arkema case studies)
- Possibility to provide not only models for maternity leave, but also for periods of extended leave for men to take care of children as a means of sharing parental responsibilities and to improve the professional development of women (Arkema case study)
- Provisions for proactive re-entry management for women who have taken maternity and parental leave, or sabbaticals for the care of children or the care of an older family member (L'Oréal, Arkema and Abbott case studies)
- Setting-up day-care centres/kindergartens (L'Oréal, Arkema and Abbott case studies)
- Provision of a clear career path for women in part-time employment who have children (L'Oréal and Arkema case study)

#### With regards to the **organisation of work time**:

- Possibility of part-time work for a limited period to take care of one's children (L'Oréal, Arkema and Abbott case studies)
- Possibility of sabbaticals to take care of children (L'Oréal and Arkema case studies)
- Possibility of home-working for a limited period to take on care for children (L'Oréal, Arkema and Abbott case studies)

Another conclusion drawn by the research is the **crucial role to be played the workers' representatives**. Although the company's willingness to set up a good work-life balance framework is obviously a prerequisite, the cooperation of workers' representatives is also a key factor of success.

Workers' representatives can play different roles of equal importance: enquire about workers' needs, promote social measures, participate in the awareness campaigns, cooperate with the management in the dissemination of information, take an active part in the follow-up of the measures already implemented, etc. In any case, no work-life balance policy can be successful without close cooperation between the social partners.

The last, but not the least, conclusion of the study is that work-life balance is not a one-off event but "work in progress", **work-life balance is a "living" issue** as new needs may arise and new measures be tested and that is why:

- existing measures must be closely assessed to check their relevance and effectiveness
- careful attention must be paid to workers' expectations and demands
- a constructive social dialogue between workers' representatives and the company management must be built up



