

work! live! play!

The Scandinavian And Singaporean Experiences On Enhancing Productivity With Work-Life

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**The Scandinavian  
And Singaporean  
Experiences  
On Enhancing  
Productivity  
With Work-Life  
Innovations**

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Innovations

women's  
development  
secretariat



an NTUC initiative

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# foreword



***Halimah Yacob  
NTUC Deputy Secretary-General  
and Director, Women's Development  
Secretariat***

Singapore's relatively recent journey in work-life integration has become more relevant than ever as the separation between work and home life increasingly diminishes.

Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's mention of drawing on lessons on work-life integration from Scandinavian models helped to give greater focus on work-life integration in Singapore. He sparked a debate when he suggested at the Nomura Asia Equity Forum in July 2008 that Singapore could look at how Sweden managed to improve its birth rate.

Many welcomed the suggestion hoping that we too could introduce the very generous financial incentives that the Swedes enjoy. Others pointed out that the cost would be prohibitive as the Swedes pay very high taxes. In June 2008, National Trades Union Congress Secretary-General Lim Swee Say led a delegation to Denmark, another Scandinavian country with a high birth rate, to understand their experience.

We learnt many important lessons from these two countries. The next step was to identify the elements that make it, seemingly, possible for women to have the cake and eat it. In other words, how is it possible that the Swedes and the Danes are able to help women avoid making the painful choice of either working or having babies, a Hobson's choice that many women in Singapore face?

It is true that there are now more women working but the fact remains that many leave the workforce when they become mothers. And unlike Japan, most women here do not return to work after their children are grown up.

At the beginning of 2008, NTUC started the Back-to-Work programme, which is now known as Back2Work With U programme, to address this problem. We have since placed about 4,000 women on jobs.

But our focus cannot be on housewives alone. We need a two-pronged strategy. Even as we work hard to attract more housewives back to work, we need to deal with the problem of women dropping out of the workforce. We have to make it possible for women to continue to work, even as they start families. If we fail to address this issue, then women who want to pursue a career, would choose not to get married or not to have children. And those who have children would continue to remain at home, which is a loss to our economy and society.

This year, the NTUC Women's Development Secretariat committed to work with unions and our other partners to bring the Back2Work With U programme to another level. We will focus not just on job placements but also on skills acquisition so that our women can enjoy greater job and income stability.

In the current economic downturn, even as companies are faced with pressure to cut costs and worry about how to turn around their businesses, we hope that they will not lose sight of the long term and also continue to give work-life integration priority so that our families will remain strong and can cope better with the crisis. This year, we are targeting for 100 companies to come onboard the Flexi-Works! Programme which helps promote flexible work options. The Labour Movement has been working

conscientiously with our tripartite partners to promote work-life integration. What we need now is a real paradigm shift and not just cosmetic changes. But there is hope yet. Fifteen years ago, a similar conversation would have ended with the conclusion: Let women make their own choices.

Today, we are making progress. We say: Let's help women make the kind of choices that will benefit them and our society.

With these objectives, NTUC Women's Development Secretariat has commissioned this publication to encourage more employers in Singapore to start seriously thinking about work-life practices.

The aspects of work, live and play colours and completes our lives and therefore, titled, "Work! Live! Play! – The Scandinavian And Singaporean Experiences On Enhancing Productivity With Work-Life Innovations," this book provides insights into lessons from home and abroad on creating spaces for work and life.

The stories in this publication reflect the various ways through which companies in Singapore adopt family-friendly practices. These success stories also highlight the various platforms by the tripartite partners that facilitate businesses in employing family-friendly initiatives. We hope that these fine examples will inspire more companies, big and small, to explore more ways to make the work environment family friendly. Because at the end of the day, benefits of work-life strategies are spread across a spectrum, adding colours to the lives of both employees and employers.

# recall



## **Pär Ahlberger Ambassador Embassy of Sweden**

His Excellency, Mr Pär Ahlberger, delivered the opening address at the seminar, "Achieving Balance Between Career And Family – The Scandinavia And Singapore Experience", organised by NTUC Women's Development Secretariat in collaboration with the embassies of Sweden, Denmark and Norway on 27 April 2009.

It is a challenge for most of us to achieve a balance between career and family. I was inspired on today's seminar by an article that was published in The Straits Times in July 2008 with the headline, "Singapore To Go The Swedish Way?" And the answer was partly yes, as the model cannot be exported in full but it can inspire.

Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Singapore are all facing the same challenges in a globalised world.

We are trying to find ways to meet these challenges. We are sharing experiences with each other; family policy being one of them.

No one has claimed to have found the perfect solution, if there is a perfect solution at all. But we can all learn from each other and this is the ultimate purpose of this event.

Hence, I would like, on behalf of the three Scandinavian embassies, stress how much we appreciate the support from National Trades Union Congress, Singapore National Employers Federation, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports and Ministry of Manpower. It has been such a great pleasure to cooperate with you on planning for this event.

From our Scandinavian side, we are certainly not looking at this as a one-time event. We have had a delegation from Singapore visit the Scandinavian countries.

We hope we will have more opportunities in the coming future.

The three representatives of Denmark, Sweden and Norway shared experiences and lessons from the various policies and practices from their countries at the seminar, “Achieving Balance Between Career And Family – The Scandinavia And Singapore Experience”, on 27 April 2009.



Representatives from Ministries of Denmark, Sweden and Norway respectively. (From left) Ms Vibeke Abel, Ms Pia Engström Lindgren and Ms Arni Hole.

“The government seeks to create equal opportunities for women and men. The goal is for women and men to be considered equal and that they are granted the same opportunities to choose the life they want. Gender equality is not only seen as a matter of fairness in Denmark, it is also a business strategy for private companies and for society due to the positive correlation between performance and gender diversity management.”

**Vibeke Abel, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Employment and Gender Equality, Denmark**

“Assumptions about traditional gender roles still result in women getting lower salaries, since employers fear that they will be absent more than men to take care of their children, and they are also discriminated against in the hiring process. This then contributes to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where women actually do take more parental leave. Also, there have been cases of men wanting to stay home with their children being discriminated against. This is where the Equality Ombudsman steps in. The Ombudsman is a government agency in Sweden with the mission to combat discrimination and to promote equality.”



**Pia Engström Lindgren, Director (Legal Department), The Equality Ombudsman, Sweden**

“There is time for new alliances between the sexes. A modern nation cannot afford to lose out on demography or under-consuming educated workforce due to gender bias or by not making use of talented women in top management. Talents are evenly divided among the genders, also when it comes to child-caring and child-rearing. Gender equality is about human rights and democracy. Most nations are party to the several Human Rights Conventions or Covenants of the United Nations, two of them designed to promote women’s rights and children’s rights. Let us exchange experiences and lessons learned, to make these human rights come true. It is smart economy, too.”

**Arni Hole, Director General, Ministry of Children and Equality, Department of Family Affairs and Equality, Norway**



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 The separation between home and work is often an artificial one. What happens at work impacts on our home life and similarly, what happens at home affects performance at work. 

**Halimah Yacob**  
NTUC Deputy Secretary-General, and  
Director, NTUC Women's Development Secretariat

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## Chapter 1

striking  
that  
balance

**Snapshot** Companies in Singapore have already started exploring into various ways of implementing work-life strategies. From finance to retail, education, healthcare, security and many other sectors, companies have adopted some form of work-life strategies. Employees support schemes, flexible work arrangements, family-friendly facilities and leave benefits at the workplace and family-oriented activities, are some examples.

## Steel Fit And Healthy

*NatSteel Holdings Pte Ltd has a happier and more productive workforce because it cares for its employees' health and family life*

Home, Health and Happiness. These form the 3H mantra of NatSteel Holdings Pte Ltd towards work-life policies in its organisation. The company believes that happy and healthy employees are motivated and more productive; they will stay with the company longer and help ensure the continued success of the company.



*An In-house clinic at NatSteel provides free consultation and treatment for staff.*

NatSteel has bagged several awards which bear testimony to its strong advocacy towards work-life harmony. The organisation was recognised with the Singapore Family Friendly Employer Award in 2004, Work-Life Excellence Award in 2006 and 2008, the HEALTH Award (Gold) in 2004, 2005 and 2006 and HEALTH Award (Platinum) in 2008.

The organisation continues to sharpen its focus on several key areas – work-life infrastructure, workplace health, leave benefits, employee support programmes and flexible work arrangements.

Madam Liu Fang Joo<sup>1</sup>, Senior Vice-President for Group Human Resource and Corporate Communications, shares that understanding employees' needs is important in getting them engaged in activities. There is no one programme that suits all and hence, the key is to focus on a few good practices at any one time and aim to be inclusive. This way, the organisation is able to offer distinctive programmes that respond to different employees' needs to balance their work with their personal lives and family obligations, as well as address business needs.

"We have put in lots of effort in integrating various wellness and work-life programmes, and these are well supported by the NatSteel Employees' Union," said Madam Liu.

<sup>1</sup> Liu Fang Joo presented "A Great Place To Work – NatSteel's Journey Towards Work-Life Excellence" at the Work-Life Seminar organised by NTUC Women's Development Secretariat on 27 April 2009.

“We adopt a holistic approach towards work-life excellence, through having the right organisational policies, providing a supportive environment, educating the staff on health and work-life matters, and running physical activities to keep staff and their families healthy and happy.

“The key to success is having strong management and union support and driving strong and continuing promotional efforts to get employees involved. To put employees at ease, especially on health matters, special attention is paid to confidentiality and privacy. Medical professionals are roped in to help on these through the on-site clinic which provides free consultation, treatment and counseling for all NatSteel staff.”

The company also set up “NatCafe” – an employees canteen which offers healthy food and rest and recreation facilities such as reading areas, table tennis corner and counseling room.

Mr Lur Boon Kwee, Senior Vice-President for InfoTech Services added: “NatSteel believes that work-life balance to an employee is like a balanced scorecard to an enterprise – it will benefit in the long run. What’s in it for me? A healthy employee with a happy family life will have the highest productivity at work.”



As a first-time mother, I found the programmes at NatSteel really useful. Post-delivery, I took part in the Healthy Weight Campaign run by our in-house clinic. I lost 3 kilograms in just over a month. My participation in the subsidised lunchtime exercises like yoga and aerobics also helped me to maintain overall health and well-being. I am happy to be here. ”

**Tan Sock Lan**  
**Assistant Manager,**  
**Quality Excellence**  
**NatSteel Holdings Pte Ltd**

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NatSteel employees’ absenteeism rate and medical expenditure have decreased, while retention rate has increased. The average number of days of Sick Leave has dropped almost 50 per cent in the last 7 years, from 7.8 days to 3.9 days. NatSteel’s average attrition is 9 per cent as compared to the industry norm of 14 per cent. There is also a capped increase in average medical costs over the last 4 years.

NatSteel has shown that by putting in effort and resources to help staff achieve work-life harmony, there are many benefits to be reaped by both the company and the employees.

*There is no lack of lifestyle programmes for NatSteel employees. The comprehensive health programme gives free annual health screening and individual report on health status and workshops on weight management, cholesterol and hypertension. Family Life Programme targets talks on parenting, family life and marriage counseling. The Mental Wellness Programme arranges for stress management talks and smoking cessation programmes which aids with behavioral modification for smokers and a support group. There is also a weekly lunchtime exercise routine. A "Family Day" for employees and family and "Eat With Your Family" day are some of the treats thrown into the package.*



*Employees get easy access to nutritious meals at NatCafe, the company canteen that serves healthy food.*

## **Developers Of Good Work-Life**

*Low turnover rates and high employee satisfaction indicators spell the success of City Developments Limited's family-friendly and health-related programmes*

There is a dedicated team comprising of employee representatives across all departments that plans and carries out family-friendly and health-related programmes at City Developments Limited.

This committee works out its plans in three dimensions, mainly towards workplace health, pro-family culture and employee-management relationship. The goals are to create a work environment that supports a corporate culture of work-life harmony and to improve employees' health.

Madam Angelene Tan, a first-time mother, experienced this culture in June 2009. Returning from Maternity Leave, Madam Tan was delighted to make use of the lactation room, known as "Mummy's Room".

"It was very convenient for me to pump breast milk and store it in the fridge, which had nothing else but breastmilk," she said.

The company also has childcare facilities within its office premises where staff can send their children to for a fee. And if they miss their young ones during the day, all they have to do is make a visit to the childcare centre.

Under the flexible start-and-end work hours arrangement at City Developments Limited, staff can choose to start and end their work hours within management-set limits. This flexi-arrangement enables employees to juggle their work and family commitments as they can choose a work-hour option that best suits their needs. More than 30 per cent of its staff are on this flexible start-and-end work hours arrangement.

In 2008, City Developments Limited initiated the "Healthy Mind, Happy Life" programme, which includes initiatives such as annual health screening, monthly health talk, monthly fruity and healthy snack day distributions, weekly exercise classes, fitness measurements such as step test and Body Mass Index reading, and annual Hong Leong Olympics. Other initiatives such as "Tree of Thanks" through which employees



*City Developments Limited's employees went on a tree-top walk as part of the company's work-life programme.*

express their appreciation in writing and, provision of counseling services such as Employee Assistance Programme were also launched in support of the programme.

The managing director and senior management team hold staff dialogue sessions with new employees regularly to help them to familiarise with City Developments Limited's corporate culture and ethics. Other internal platforms for communication includes conducting Annual Employee Opinion Surveys such as employee climate survey, a staff health wellness survey to gather feedback on personal and work issues as well as an e-VoiceBox, a dedicated e-suggestion box, whereby suggestions and comments can be sent electronically.

Even with the economic downturn, City Developments Limited has not discontinued its programmes. In fact, it has been quick to rope in its in-house talents and experts to plan and carry out family-friendly and health-related activities. Employees also co-shared the cost of some of activities such as family outings.

City Developments Limited tapped on government assistance such as the Work-life Works! (WoW!) fund to create a lactation room.





Work-life strategy is important to City Developments Limited as we recognise the business benefits of helping our employees strike a good balance between work and personal commitments. This also helps to support the changing needs and demands of the new generation that views work flexibility as an important factor influencing their choice of employer.”

**Sherine Toh<sup>2</sup>**  
**Assistant General Manager and**  
**Head (Human Resource),**  
**City Developments Limited**

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Other avenues of assistance include sourcing for free services from health-related vendors for complimentary snack bars, talks, online e-articles and riding on the public events organised or supported by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports.

Other welfare and pro-family policies at City Developments Limited include dental care subsidy, insurance coverage and various leave types beyond the required obligation such as Compassionate Leave. Work-life activities cover family-focused programmes such as “Eat-With-Your-Family Day”, family trips and talks on family wellness.

With various measures such as workplace health, work-life initiatives and employee-management relationship, City Developments Limited has achieved its Key Performance Indicators: Improvement in its employees’ Body Mass Index and fitness level, containing the average Medical Leave per employee per year at 4 days, having an annual staff turnover below 20 per cent and achieving over 90 per cent employee satisfaction rate.

*City Developments Limited has successfully attained the Work-Life Excellence 2008 conferred by the Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy and has progressed from a HEALTH (Helping Employees Achieve Life-Time Health) Gold Award winner since 2005 to a Platinum Award winner in 2008, the highest honour given to an employer.*

<sup>2</sup> Sherine Toh presented “Work-life Harmony in City Developments Limited” at the Work-Life Seminar organised by NTUC Women’s Development Secretariat on 27 April 2009.

## A Second Home

*A buffet of wellness and family-oriented facilities keep employees at Housing and Development Board happy and active*

The Housing and Development Board takes equal pride in providing quality homes for Singaporeans as it does building a second home at the workplace for its employees; it goes the extra mile to create a family-friendly environment with a package of family and health-oriented benefits for them.

Be it caring for a newborn child, keeping a check on employees' health or creating space for choices to make time for the family, HDB has them all. And many of these benefits have played a part in welcoming more women into its workforce.

Club HDB Infant Care Centre popped up as one of the most popular choices that staff returned in a survey. HDB responded with such a facility in March 2007. The infant care centre consists of a play area and sleeping area. It is also staffed with trained infant caregivers.

Madam Joanne Ng, 31, was a Club HDB Infant Care Centre user. Her bundle of joy arrived in March 2007. As a first-time mother, she wished to spend more time with her newborn. The timely opening of the new infant care centre at HDB Hub made her wish come true.



*Madam Joanne Ng with her husband and son.*

"I had the opportunity to see my son whenever I wished as he was at the infant care centre just a few minutes' walk from my work area.

"The staff at the centre maintained a detailed record of his activities like feeding and sleep times. I was able to work with greater peace of mind," said the estates officer who has been with HDB for close to 10 years.

The centre ensures that there is a ratio of one teacher giving attention to three infants at all times.



Staff are our most important assets. We have been doing our best to enhance work-life balance for our employees. Even at the work place, we try to create work space where they can find various avenues that promote this balance.”

**Chang Siew Peng**  
**Head, Compensation and Benefits Administration Unit, Corporate Development Department, HDB**

*Family-friendly programmes at HDB, though angled towards enhancing work-life balance for all employees regardless of gender, offers a family-friendly environment for female employees. There is an infant care centre, childcare centre and a nursing room within the premises of the workplace. HDB has 56 per cent of female staff, many of whom have made use of the pro-family facilities and benefited from them.*

“At the beginning, my son would only sleep in a traditional sarong cot. He did not like the usual baby cot. But after two days at the infant care centre, he could sleep comfortably in a baby cot,” said Madam Ng.

As Madam Ng’s mother-in-law wished to take care of her grandson, Madam Ng withdrew him from the centre after three months.

Such a helpful service right smack in the workplace has warmed the hearts of many working mothers at HDB. Such services also indirectly encourage working women to have more children.

In-house facilities to look after the welfare of its employees is another work-life strategy. In September 2005, HDB implemented a scheme to give staff an hour off each week to exercise. Staff can use this hour to take part in exercise classes organised by Aerogym, use Club HDB’s sports facilities including the gym, or take part in sports activities organised by their departments.

Since its introduction, 39 per cent of HDB’s staff have signed up for the scheme. And they have had an array of healthy options to choose from such as a well-equipped gym with full-time trainers to guide them towards better fitness. If pounding the treadmill or working the weights is not their cup of tea, there is also a comprehensive menu of fitness classes organised by Club HDB that offers options such as aerobics, yoga, and pilates.

## The Sporty Deal

*Flexible work options and fitness activities click well with NTUC Club's staff*

NTUC Club is one of the Labour Movement's Social Enterprises that strongly advocates work-life strategies for its workforce. With a package of flexible work arrangements, leave benefits and employee support schemes, there is a good deal lined up for its employees. Part-time work options, staggered working hours, five-day work weeks are just some of these schemes.

NTUC Club also participated in the "Little Ones @ Work" programme organised by NTUC Women's Development Secretariat. This is a project that brings management and union partners together to help employees strike a better balance between work and family. This is achieved by encouraging companies to designate at least one day in a year to allow their employees to bring their children to work.

Employees are also encouraged to take care of their health through sports and fitness activities that are fully paid for by the organisation. They are given time off to exercise and participate in health-related programmes. Activities such as "Eat With Family Day" and "Fruits Day", when bundled with corporate membership to other attractions and country clubs, add spark to the lives after work for employees.



*Children of NTUC Club's staff had a taste of their parents' workplace through Little Ones @ Work.*

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“As parents, we often tell our children that we are ‘going to work’ or we are ‘busy at work’, and they may not appreciate the work we do and many will not understand why work is so important. At NTUC Club, we are delighted to open our doors to our employees’ children and allow them to take a look at their parents’ workplace and the great things their parents do at work. Through this initiative, we hope to enhance the bond between our employees and their children, so that we can have happier families and happier employees. Implementing work-life initiatives not only attract and retain talent but also motivate staff and improve productivity. Work-life integration is important for the physical, emotional and mental well-being of staff.”

**Yeo Khee Leng**  
**Chief Executive Officer,**  
**NTUC Club**

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We are a dynamic and fast-growing business that is committed not only to our consumers, but also our employees. Programmes like these offer our employees an opportunity to interact with each other and also give our family members a chance know more about Kraft Foods. We believe that these programmes help instill stronger connections with each other and with the company, as well as boost morale, a critical part of being a successful, high performing organisation.”

**Varun Bhatia**  
**Vice-President of**  
**Human Resources,**  
**Kraft Foods Asia Pacific**

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### **‘Make Today Delicious’**

*Kraft Foods Asia Pacific wows its employees with a good spread of employee support programmes*

As an employer of choice, Kraft Foods Asia Pacific lives up to its corporate promise – “Make Today Delicious” – not just for its customers but also for its employees. It takes great care in making the workplace engaging for all employees, with events planned throughout the year.

One unique aspect of its employee engagement programme is the WOW (Work Office Wellness) Team. The WOW team was formed in October 2008 to add fun to its work environment, promote employee wellness and build employee connections. Members of the WOW Team come from the various functions within Kraft Foods.

Some events organised include the Amcham Community Event at the Singapore Zoological Gardens where employees of Kraft Foods collaborated with “Amcham” and “Food From The Heart” to help the underprivileged, and were encouraged to bring their families along to take part in this community initiative together.

Currently, the company distributes fruit baskets every Monday and Wednesday and gives each employee a Sky Fitness Club Membership to promote health and wellness. It also holds a “Lunch & Learn” programme, during which health talks and fitness workshops are held. The company is in the midst of incorporating a “Work From Home” programme, a “Running Club” and community engagement programmes.

## Scoring Well On All Fronts

*Greater flexibility in deploying staff augurs well for Seacare Manpower Services Private Limited*

An hour before the afternoon bell rings in Telok Kurau Primary School, Madam Julie Chan will already be at the school library. This is where she reads aloud to lower primary pupils to help them with their reading and listening skills. This is one of the many tasks that Madam Chan, 39, takes on as a Teacher Assistant.

Her help frees up time for teachers like Madam Linda Kwek. Madam Chan also prepares teaching aids such as flash cards for Madam Kwek's English lessons.

"It is a great help when Madam Chan prepares these materials for me. She takes care of most of the administrative work like photocopying worksheets, and also helps to facilitate the reading programme for weaker pupils. On days when I am busy with marking, she takes charge. With her around, I have more time to attend to other work," said Madam Kwek.

Madam Chan is one of the employees assigned to work at the school by Seacare Manpower Services Private Limited. The recruitment company helps educational institutions with staffing needs for positions such as administrative assistants, laboratory assistants, teacher assistants and librarians.

Mr Lee Van Chong, the company's managing director, said that housewives willing to make a comeback to the workforce are the right fit for these positions.

"Many schools require part-time staff. During school holidays, or lull periods as we call it, the employees get some time to spend with their school-going children. Many women who approach us like this arrangement," said Mr Lee.



*Madam Julie Chan at work at Telok Kurau Primary School.*

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“ There is a big pool of women out there who can help to meet manpower needs in companies. We can help women to contribute some income to their families, and at the same time, value-add to our businesses. The government, from time to time, encourages employers to explore these options. We will continue to heed this call.”

**Lee Van Chong**  
**Managing Director,**  
**Seacare Manpower Services**

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Madam Chan is one of them – she works just four hours each day.

“It is this kind of flexibility that most mothers with young children, like me, look for when we want to return to work. Short working hours at a school near my home was an ideal start for me,” she said.

NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and Women’s Development Secretariat Director Halimah Jacob said: “Companies have found this partnership with us useful as we help them to fulfill some of their manpower requirements through our Back2Work With U Programme. Even in the current economic downturn, companies stand to gain not only from the Flexi-Works! funding which is part of this programme, but more importantly from the greater flexibility in deploying staff according to their business needs.”

This initiative by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency and NTUC supports companies in hiring new workers on part-time or flexible work arrangements. With the funding, Seacare Manpower Services plans to conduct more regular recruitment drives.

*Seacare Manpower Services has 910 employees. There are 647 women, and of these, 197 work part-time. Seacare Manpower Services decided to tap more proactively on this pool when it was approached by the NTUC Women’s Development Secretariat to access the Flexi-Works! Fund.*

## Search For Talent

*PeopleSearch Pte Ltd helps clients open minds and gain from flexible work arrangements*

They are in the talent search business. They value their candidates for their competencies and value-add. So, business leaders in PeopleSearch Pte Ltd well know the impact on their clients when they lose talented employees who slip out of the workforce.

A good number of those who leave the workforce are women. Some leave because they cannot choose work over family. Some emigrate with their husbands on career postings. There are also some who want to further their studies to enhance their careers.

As a regional executive search firm, PeopleSearch believes it can be a strong advocate of promoting flexible work arrangements in its business of matching suitable candidates with the appropriate organisations.

Said Madam Jaime Lim, Consulting Director of PeopleSearch Pte Ltd: "PeopleSearch is constantly identifying talents for our clients and sometimes the talent exists as an inactive talent. When employers evaluate candidate profiles, the preference tends to be for candidates who are in the active workforce as their experience and skill-sets are considered to be current.

"Where the nature of job operations allows, when employers open their minds to flexibility and are willing to explore some form of job redesign, they can retain their skilled manpower or attract the inactive workforce."

NTUC Women's Development Secretariat has made getting companies to offer flexible work options a priority. PeopleSearch is one such company and it is actively promoting the Flexi-Works! initiative to help businesses to attract more women into the workforce.

Well before adopting flexibility at the workplace became the talk of the town, PeopleSearch had already been advocating such work

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“ There will be firms that need more resources when closing books or research companies that have special projects on hand, and they may not need full-time people, yet require skilled people. This is when they can make use of inactive talent that comes with a lot of value-add and life skills from their years of experience from the industries that they have worked in. Working mothers with children younger than 7 years old may prefer to work on flexi-hours. Some candidates have expressed interest to go back to the workforce when their children grow older, and therefore, prefer to stay current with the market trends by taking on jobs with flexible work arrangements.”

**Jaime Lim**  
**Consulting Director,**  
**PeopleSearch Pte Ltd**

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arrangements. With the enhancement of the Flexi-Works! funding, which provides a new tranche of funding to help companies introduce flexible work arrangements, PeopleSearch will also be reviewing additional ways of attracting economically inactive workers.

“We have formalised our plans to enable staff to telecommute and the enhancement of this Flexi-Works! initiative in March 2009 is timely for us to carry out our plans. As an executive search firm, our clients and candidates trust us with sensitive information. Therefore, our IT infrastructure is designed to allow secure and remote access to support telecommuting without compromising client and candidate information,” said Madam Irene Low, Business Human Resource Manager, PeopleSearch Pte Ltd.

## Living Life To Its Fullest

### *Working mothers at American Express enjoy baby bonding time*

American Express encourages flexibility in work arrangements, including supporting women employees who are mothers to return to work, offering a range of flexible options including project work, part-time or other flexible arrangements.

“At American Express, flexible work arrangements are a critical and integral part of the Employee Value Proposition. We have been working for many years on adopting more flexible working patterns that can support our employees’ needs for work-life balance. Our approach to a flexible working culture supported by flexible work arrangements applies equally to male and female employees. We offer a variety of flexible work options to meet the needs of those who are working parents, those pursuing further education or those who need to work varying work patterns,” said Mrs Julia Wolage, Vice-President, Human Resource.

Madam Meri Rosich is one such beneficiary of this arrangement, who was able to hold on to her job while she still enjoyed her beginning days of motherhood with peace of mind.



*Madam Meri Rosich and her son, Daniel.*

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“ I wanted to slow down and enjoy maternity when I had my baby but at the same time to develop my career at American Express. I am very lucky because my company has great policies to support mums. I worked on a part-time schedule that allowed me to spend time with my baby in the afternoons for playgroups and walks in the park. I could enjoy my maternity and I am grateful to my company for making it possible.”

**Meri Rosich**  
**Director, Business**  
**Development,**  
**Project Resource Team,**  
**American Express**

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## Flexi-Works A Pull Factor

*Flexible work arrangements at Premier Security Co-operative Limited attract more women into the security industry*

Madam Sahaya Mary Stella Grace, 47, was once a childcare teacher. She was also once an assistant radiographer. Recently, she became a Senior Security Officer with Premier Security Co-operative Limited. She found this new job at NTUC Women's Development Secretariat's job fair in 2008.

"I wanted to try out a new field and pick up new skills. Security is an industry that promises an attractive career upgrade and so, I took it on. It's not about the job but how dedicated you are in carrying out your duties."

Once dubbed the "jaga" industry, the security industry is now steadily shedding that image and getting more professionalised. It was once also a male-oriented industry. This image, too, is peeling away with the increase in the number of females adorning security uniforms.



*Madam Sahaya Mary Stella Grace has found her calling.*

Of 32,000 employees in the private security industry, some 13 per cent are females. This is a hike from the 10.5 per cent that women security officers accounted for in January 2008. The change in mindset of security service buyers and that of female jobseekers play a big role in this transition.

Said NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and Women's Development Secretariat Director Halimah Yacob: "Women who are looking for flexible job options have started considering security positions, especially with employers who are willing to offer six-hour shifts. These shifts give them the flexibility to look after the needs of the family as well as generate income for the family. With more women entering the

security industry, I hope that old stereotypes, that such jobs are not suitable for women, will disappear.”

Women have also proven their vigilance in this job, said Premier Security Managing Director Saraj Din.

“In the past, security service buyers had a strong preference for male officers. Our challenge was to change their mindset as female officers can also be trained to perform duties that their male counterparts do, such as manning the security counters, checking visitor passes and doing day patrols.”

“We are willing to promote flexible-work arrangements to cater to female employees. We want to tap on the pool of women who would like to re-enter the workforce to meet our industry’s growing manpower needs,” said Mr Saraj.

*Premier Security has about 500 security officers under its employment, of which 8 per cent are females. Three years ago, the company had a female staff strength of only about 3 per cent out of its 350 security officers. By 2011, the company hopes to add 200 employees and targets to have 20 per cent of females in its workforce. Evtec Management Services Private Limited is another company in the industry has taken the lead in designing flexible work arrangements with reasonable pay for its security staff. It splits its traditional 12-hour shifts into two time slots.*



This is a good attempt at bringing more women to the workforce. They will be able to juggle both work and family needs. With such split shift arrangements, they can return home and attend to their families, do some housework and prepare meals. They will also have some income. I hope more employers in other industries will also explore more flexible work options.”

**Nakalingam Silva**  
**President,**  
**Union of Security Employees**

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## Bank That Balances Well

### *Part-time work shows care and compassion for staff at DBS Bank*

The ability to look after the needs of the family is one key consideration that sways women to stay at home or join the workforce. When there is space for family time in a job opportunity, many women will readily go to work. DBS Bank has been creating such a space for women who wish to get back into the job market. For more than 10 years now, it has provided options for part-time work; 70 per cent of the bank's staff are women.

The bank now employs 100 part-timers; of which 98 are women. Said DBS Bank's Managing Director of Business Human Resource Samantha Mark: "As a bank rooted in Asia, DBS firmly believes that strong family ties are at the heart of society. Hence, we have in place policies and programmes such as our part-time scheme that is supportive of staff and their families. Through our part-time scheme, we have not only been able to retain valuable employees, but also help them meet their personal needs.

Madam Usharani Krishnan, 53, appreciates the bank's family-friendly ways. She has good reasons for such sentiments. She was a full-time staff for 14 years until she encountered health problems in 2005. She had to undergo a surgery and later returned to full-time work after her Medical

Leave expired. She wanted to quit when her health continued to deteriorate.

"It was a bit painful to quit a job that I loved doing for so many years, especially since I had grown very emotionally attached to my job," said Madam Usharani. She decided to approach her union.

DBS Staff Union President Nora Kang lent her a listening ear and they explored the idea of part-time employment, which Madam Usharani readily took up. Working from 12 pm to 5 pm has reduced



*Madam Usharani Krishnan (seated) with NTUC Vice-President and DBSSU President Nora Kang.*

the strain on her health and made time for her to prepare meals for her family, which includes two sons, aged 23 and 27.

Madam Usharani suffered from high blood pressure in January 2008 and had to visit the hospital for frequent check-ups. The part-time arrangement made things easier for her.

“The fact that DBS cares for its staff with such flexible options is so comforting,” she said.

*The younger ones opt for part-time work because of part-time studies, while most married staff with children choose it to fulfill family commitments. Such flexible work arrangements are made based on the operational needs of the bank. Permanent part-time staff enjoy similar benefits as full-time staff, with a full suite of benefits that range from banking privileges, share ownership schemes, staff loans and special holiday booking rates. Their salary packages are pro-rated according to the hours worked. Employees at DBS including part-timers are also entitled to two days of Family Leave every year which applies to all regardless of their marital status.*

“ The part-time scheme has been on-going for more than 10 years. We are glad that the management regards the union as a partner and has been involving us in discussions to enhance the scheme so as to best serve the needs of the staff and business. The management understands staff needs and has made a conscious effort to retain valuable staff in the bank. With such flexible arrangements, employees will also be contented and will be able to perform with increased efficiency and deliver quality service to customers. So, it's a win-win strategy that has worked very well for us.”

**Nora Kang**  
**President of DBS Staff Union**

## Females Rule In The Mail Rooms

### *Part-time options lead the way in Singapore Post Limited's Operations*

Female employees play a key role in Singapore Post Limited's operations. They make up 55 per cent of its over 4,000 staff strength. And 80 per cent of the organisation's 1,249 contract staff are women.

About 12 years ago, the Neighbourhood Postmen Scheme was implemented to ease the labour crunch in SingPost. It offered housewives and retirees part-time job opportunities in the various neighbourhoods. Today, 80 per cent of its 454 Neighbourhood Postmen are women. The job offers flexibility as the women collect mail from the Mail Transit Room near their home and deliver them in their neighbourhoods.

SingPost also offers many part-time options for its contract staff which include positions such as mail sorters and mail coders at the Mail Processing Centre and delivery bases, post office counter staff and sales promotion staff.

NTUC Women's Development Secretariat has been partnering supportive employers, including SingPost, to get women back to work. As of September 2009, about 4,000 women have found jobs through various NTUC Women's Development Secretariat initiatives. Madam Tan Lee Lee, 51, and Madam Farsidah Aman, 42, are among those who returned to the workforce.



Madam Farsidah Aman.

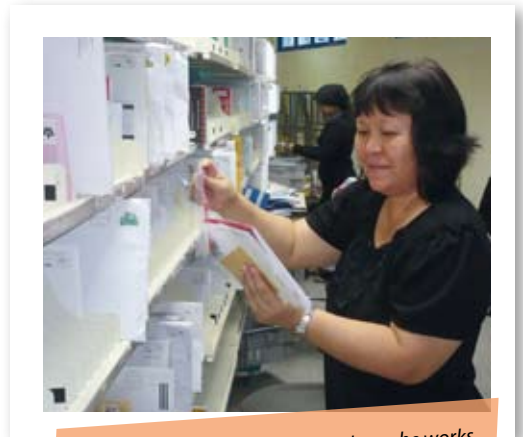
Madam Tan, a part-time mail sorter, appreciates the flexible hours that SingPost offers. As she lives in Tampines, Madam Tan does not spend too much time commuting between her home and the Marine Parade Delivery Base where she works.

"Working for four hours each day allows me to return home by noon to do household chores and cook for my family. Besides, I am happy in this job because my colleagues are all very friendly and helpful," she said.

Like Madam Tan, Madam Farsidah joined SingPost in February 2009 through NTUC Women's Development Secretariat recruitment drive. Madam Farsidah was previously a homemaker for 17 years. She is now a part-time postal officer at Kallang Delivery Base. Her job revolves around sorting and scanning Registered Articles.

"I was looking for a part-time job to come back to work. Through the NTUC Women's Development Secretariat job fair, I managed to find a job to keep me active while at the same time earn supplementary income for my family."

*Besides junior rank-and-file staff, such flexi-work arrangements are extended to senior officers with young children. Through teleworking and lateral job transfers, SingPost has been able to retain and help its female senior officers have a part-time job, while looking after their young families.*



*Madam Tan Lee Lee lives near where she works.*





It's interesting that the Danish flexible labour market framework was reached through tripartite consensus. The framework which is a combination of legislation and the Collective Agreement means that companies and unions can, on top of the legal provisions, adapt it to local circumstances that meet the competitive conditions of the business and the needs of workers. ”

Stephen Lee  
President  
Singapore National Employers Federation

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## Chapter 2

# lessons from scandinavia

## Snapshot

Following Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's remarks in July 2008 on Sweden's work-life harmony success, NTUC Women's Development Secretariat created a platform for tripartite partners to learn from Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

It organised a seminar on 27 April 2009 to discuss various pro-family infrastructure and flexible work arrangements that are adopted by the three Scandinavian countries and several local companies in Singapore.

The NTUC Women's Development Secretariat creates and implements programmes and initiatives to assist women enter or return to the job market, and promotes work-life harmony with the hope of encouraging women to remain in or return to the workforce.

### The Nordic Overview

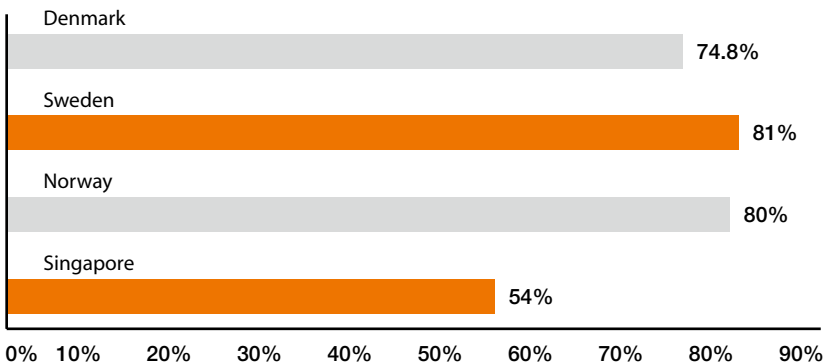
Work-life harmony has been high on the Scandinavian countries' agenda for many years. This is a key reason why these countries' fertility rates are significantly higher than Singapore's, which is at 1.29 per woman.

Denmark, Norway and Sweden have respectively recorded fertility rates of 1.89, 1.9 and 1.96. These countries have also scored well with high female labour force participation rates in 2007.



NTUC WDS partnered Scandinavian countries for a work-life seminar in April 2009.

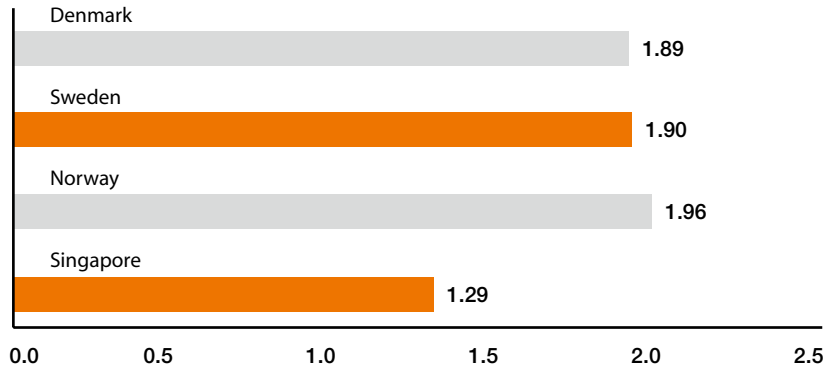
### Comparison 1 - Female Labour Force Participation Rate<sup>1</sup>



(Source: Ministry of Manpower, Singapore)

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Manpower, Singapore

## Comparison 2 - Fertility Rate<sup>2</sup>



(Source: Ministry of Manpower, Singapore)

What are the policies that have enabled these Scandinavian countries to design effective pro-family policies that have in turn, helped them to achieve a high female labour force participation rate along with a high fertility rate?

With a deep interest to explore more breakthroughs in implementing work-life practices in Singapore, NTUC Women's Development Secretariat embarked on a learning journey on the Scandinavian policies.

Collaborating with the embassies of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, this seminar was also strongly supported by the tripartite partners – the Singapore National Employers Federation, Ministry of Manpower and Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports.

The seminar was also held as part of the celebrations to commemorate the International Labour Organization's 90th anniversary this year. Themed, "Achieving Balance Between Career And Family – The Scandinavia And Singapore Experience", the seminar with the embassies of Denmark, Norway and Sweden was attended by 500 people.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Manpower, Singapore

### Denmark At A Glance

Denmark's policy approaches have supported women's and men's participation in the labour force through measures that look into the needs of its people. These measures accommodate parents' need to care for their children, employees' desire to take leave from work to pursue educational goals and other interests<sup>3</sup>.

A study conducted by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development in 2002 pointed out that as Danish women entered the labour force and faced increasing demands on their time, they also demanded support.

In response to their needs, universal childcare coverage, extensive leave rights and generous individual benefits were implemented<sup>4</sup>. This is one reason why there is a high degree of equity in employment today – Denmark ranks third of all European Union countries, with almost equal participation rates between men and women<sup>5</sup>.

The recent implementation of longer maternity leave, legislation to make it easier to work part-time, the development of flexible work arrangements and discussions about reconciling work and family life are some of the main ways through which the Danish government supports work-life harmony. Longer and more flexible paid maternity and parental leave are major components of the work-life balance package in Denmark. In 2002, paid maternity and parental leave following childbirth was extended from 32



<sup>3</sup> Adapted from [www.labour.gc.ca](http://www.labour.gc.ca).

<sup>4</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Babies and Bosses*, Page 23

<sup>5</sup> In 2002, Denmark's employment rate for men between the ages of 15 and 64 years was 80.2 per cent, and the rate for women was 72.6 per cent. Only Sweden and Finland have a smaller gender gap in employment participation (3 per cent difference in Sweden, and 4 per cent difference in Finland).  
European Commission, *European Social Statistics: Labour Force Survey Results 2002*.

weeks to a total of 52 weeks. Four weeks of leave before childbirth and 14 weeks of leave after childbirth are available to the mother. Two weeks of paternity leave after the birth are available to the father. In addition, 32 weeks of parental leave are available to either parent<sup>6</sup>.

The aim of this leave is to allow families to combine a working life with a well-functioning family life. The flexible structure of the leave gives fathers the opportunity to take a more active role in caregiving and allows parents to stay connected to the labour market by working part-time.

*The flexibility of this leave makes it a unique means through which parents' work-life balance can be improved. The 32 weeks may be divided between the mother and father and may be taken at the same time, as alternating periods or as consecutive periods. A parent may work part-time and prolong the leave from 32 to 64 weeks. The benefits are pro-rated during this entire period of leave.*

Recent amendments made to the Act on Part-time Work also contributed to work-life harmony. In June 2002, legislation was enacted to make access to part-time work easier. The new provisions abolished restrictions on the use of part-time work in collective agreements. The right to part-time work now applies irrespective of any provisions to the contrary laid out in collective agreements, custom or practices unless the collective agreement includes a clause to the effect that the employee is allowed to work for 15 hours or less per week.

Employees are also protected against dismissal for refusing to agree to work part-time or for making a request to work part-time. The Danish government amended this legislation in order to promote a more family-friendly and inclusive labour market<sup>7</sup>.

The reconciliation of work and family life has been on the agenda for the Ministry of Gender Equality in the past decade. In 2001, the Ministry of Gender Equality invited organisations to discuss how they can promote a

<sup>6</sup> This leave is paid by the Danish government at a maximum rate of approximately \$680 per week. This is often topped up to the full wage of the employee by the employer.

<sup>7</sup> European Industrial Relations Observatory On-line, "New Act on Part-time Work Adopted after Lengthy Debate," June 11, 2002, and "NAP 2003: The Government: Denmark's National Action Plan for Employment 2003."

culture where fathers can spend as much time as mothers caring for their children, and how working time can be adapted to different life phases. Participants pointed out that “family-friendliness” should not be restricted to parents with younger children<sup>8</sup>. Older employees and employees with no children or with older children may also need flexibility. The discussion also raised the question of how to address the potential negative effects of implementing family-friendly measures, including ways to avoid possible consequences for women when flexible working arrangements are introduced<sup>9</sup>.



Historically, gender equality in Denmark has been a driving force behind the development of its economy and studies show that 40 per cent of the economic growth in Denmark between 1979 and 1990 was effected by women entering its labour market.

Deputy Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Employment and Gender Equality Vibeke Abel who spoke on “The Danish Experience with Gender Equality as a Driving Force Behind Economic Development”, said: “Research from the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development shows that gender equality, more specifically, equal access to jobs and guaranteed affordable and good quality daycare is a major advantage for the economies in the Nordic countries. Having both women and men in the labour force has thereby become a prerequisite in the Danish economy and this explains why men and women almost have the same employment rate.”

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from [www.labour.gc.ca](http://www.labour.gc.ca).

<sup>9</sup> “NAP 2002: The Government: Denmark’s National Action Plan for Employment 2002.”

<sup>10</sup> Refers to the term used to describe the special Danish mix of flexibility in the labour market, social security and active labour market policy.



Gender equality and ‘flexicurity’<sup>10</sup> are two fundamental values in Danish society. Denmark is one of the Nordic welfare states with a flexible labour market and a fairly tightly knitted social security net. Labour market policies are negotiated with the Danish social partners and supplemented by legislation. ‘Flexicurity’ and the close cooperation between the government and the social partners is called ‘the Danish model’, which concurrently makes room for an innovative society.”

**Vibeke Abel**  
Deputy Permanent Secretary,  
Ministry of Employment and  
Gender Equality, Denmark





Figures shared by Ms Abel also reflected that men in Denmark work, on the average, 5 hours more than women per week, while women spend approximately 7-and-a-half hours more on household work. Nearly 24 per cent of all women work part-time as compared to 17 per cent

male part-time workers. The part-time work scheme is frequently used by both students and parents as 94 per cent of all children aged 1 to 5 are in kindergarten or in a daycare facility.

“All Danish parents are guaranteed a daycare facility after 6 months. Denmark has a generous maternity leave scheme ranging from 4 weeks before birth to 14 weeks after birth. The father has the right to stay at home 2 weeks in the 14 week maternity leave period and the parents can extendedly take 32 weeks parental leave which can be prolonged to 46 weeks,” she said. She added that this flexible parental leave scheme comes with some challenges in mothers taking 275 days, in contrast to the 24 days taken by fathers.



To retain women in the workforce, the Danes have a holistic and seamless system with its affordable childcare facilities, long and flexible maternity and paternity leave and flexible working arrangements. Retention is the key factor accounting for its high employment rate of women. We need to do likewise with a supportive infrastructure such as affordable childcare facilities and flexible working arrangements.”

**John De Payva**  
NTUC President

The consequences can be seen in the business sphere where the Danish government promotes a binding agreement, also known as a “charter”, between the partners involved when pursuing to promote women in top management and private enterprises. The charter for more women in management seeks to assist the committed companies that sign the charter to set ambitious, yet realistic, goals. Therefore, the aims for gender equality in Denmark are the same as those in the Scandinavian counterparts, but the means to reach the goals are different.

Ms Abel said: “The government seeks to create equal opportunities for women and men. The goal is for women and men to be granted the same opportunities to choose the life they want. Gender equality is not only seen as a matter of fairness in Denmark – it is also a business strategy for private companies and for society due to the positive correlation between performance and gender diversity management.”

## The Swedish Scene

The Swedish government has developed proposals and legislation that may help to reduce work-life conflict, especially for women<sup>11</sup>. Swedish research indicates that women experience conflict to a greater degree than men, and the government is trying to correct the problem through a number of initiatives to increase men's participation in housework and in the health and social care of children<sup>12</sup>. Sweden has a highly developed and flexible parental leave scheme, which has been extended so parents can have more time to care for their children. In addition, measures to reduce the high incidence of sick leave, proposals to provide employees with more annual leave and more flexible use of leave, and a trial measure to allow employees to take sabbatical leave, have been introduced.

The universality and flexibility of Sweden's parental leave benefits promote fathers' participation in caregiving and mothers' labour market attachment. Over 90 per cent of mothers return to employment once their parental leave has expired. Parental leave for fathers, in effect since 1974, is used today by about 70 per cent of fathers<sup>13</sup>. Swedish family policy has developed these benefits based on the principle of encouraging work and making work possible even when workers choose to have children. Parental leave includes pregnancy benefits, parental benefits in connection to childbirth and temporary parental benefits.

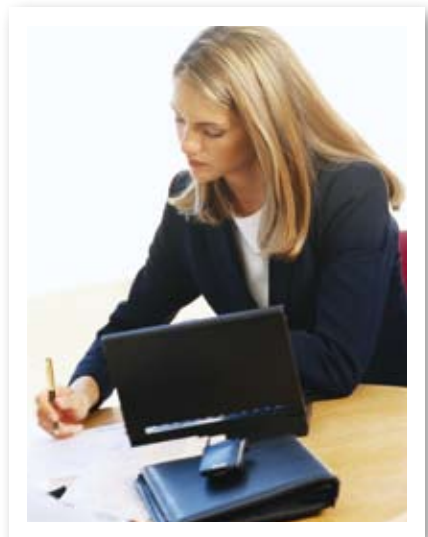
Pregnancy benefits are payable to expectant mothers who are unable to work because of the physically demanding nature of their jobs. These benefits are paid



Denmark and Singapore have a lot in common.

We both have strong tripartite partnerships, flexible labour market, high employment rates. Yet, we both face manpower shortage and the challenge of increasing the participation rate of women and older workers in the workforce. Singapore could learn from the Danish experience to raise the labour force participation rate while maintaining work-life balance for our workers.”

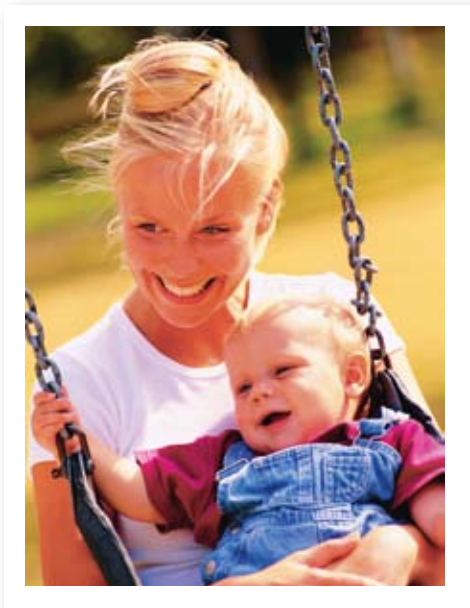
**Gan Kim Yong**  
Minister for Manpower



<sup>11</sup> Adapted from [www.labour.gc.ca](http://www.labour.gc.ca).

<sup>12</sup> "Sweden's Action Plan for Employment 2003" Pages 30, 31 and 37.

<sup>13</sup> Elina Pylkkanen and Nina Smith, "Career Interruptions Due to Parental Leave: A Comparative Study of Denmark and Sweden" (Paris, France: OECD, March 2003), Page 9



for a maximum of 50 days at 80 per cent of the mother's qualifying income<sup>14</sup>.

In 2002, parental leave was extended by 30 days to a total of 480 days. A majority of 390 days are paid at 80 per cent of the parent's qualifying income, and the other 90 days are paid at a universally applicable flat rate. Parents are entitled to 240 days of leave each, which encourages both parents to be active in caregiving.

A parent may transfer up to 180 days of leave to the other parent. In addition, the father of a newborn is entitled to 10 days of temporary parental benefit upon the birth of the child. Parents with low income or no income are guaranteed a minimum benefit per day. All potential parents are invited to information

meetings about parental leave before having children.

Parental leave can be taken flexibly. The leave can be used until children reach 8 years old or complete their first year of school. However, job protection expires when the child is 18 months. Parental leave can also be used part-time if a parent wishes to work while caring for the child.

Parental benefits are also paid to parents who are caring for a sick child up to the age of 12, and in some cases up to 16 years old. Each eligible employee is entitled to 120 benefit days per year, and on average 7 days per child are taken every year. This benefit is used widely by both parents. In 2001, fathers accounted for around 41 per cent of all days claimed, enabling both parents to combine family commitments with work outside the home.

<sup>14</sup> The social partners emphasise that the achievement of work-life balance is very important. Some collective bargaining sectors seeking to improve work-life balance extend the pregnancy benefit to include men as well. "Sweden's Action Plan For Employment 2003", Page 36.

*Sweden's family policy actively promotes the positive impact of fathers' involvement in caring for their children. Over the years, special advertising and information campaigns have emphasised the importance of both parents claiming the parental benefit. Written materials are distributed to all fathers highlighting the importance of early and close contact between father and child<sup>15</sup>.*

Sweden was a forerunner with a parental leave of 1 year as early as 1980, extended to 15 months in 1989. The Swedish programme has also been more flexible with possibilities to take leave on a part-time basis or in several spells before the child is 8 years old. Further, the Swedish leave programme has a unique feature that encourages a closer spacing of births nicknamed the "speed premium". This is a regulation whereby mothers may maintain the same benefit level as with the previous child if she has another child within 30 months (before 1986: 24 months), even if she does not return to work between the births<sup>16</sup>.

The Swedish government recognises that work-life conflict, in addition to the quality of the working environment, is contributing to the rise in ill-health. In 2002, the number of people on sick leave was more than twice that of 5 years earlier. Findings show that a considerably higher proportion of female than male employees are on long-term sick leave<sup>17</sup>.

Swedish research indicates that women, more than men, are employed in occupations with inferior working environments, bear double workloads combining paid employment with unpaid housework, and are less able to participate in leisure and recreational activities.

In response to these findings, the Swedish government presented a comprehensive action plan for promoting better health in working life in its Budget Bill for 2002. The primary objective of the Bill was to reduce the

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, "Swedish Family Policy Fact Sheet," No. 14, September 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Demographic Research, Volume 10, Article 10. Pages 265-286, published on 8 June 2004. [www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol10/10/Fertility and family policy in Norway](http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol10/10/Fertility%20and%20family%20policy%20in%20Norway) - A reflection on trends and possible connections by Marit Rønsen

<sup>17</sup> Research from 2001 shows that 65,000 women and 36,000 men were on sick leave for a period exceeding one year. About one-third of them (24,000 women and 13,000 men) have been on sick leave for more than two years. "The Government's 11-Point Programme for Better Health in Working Life.

dramatic rise in costs for sick leave. The cost of sickness benefits more than doubled between 1998 and 2002, from \$3.6 billion to \$9 billion<sup>18</sup>.

The action plan also sought to reduce the impact poor health has on work-life balance. Given women's high levels of sick leave, the focus of the action plan was on women's workplaces, working environment and working conditions.

The action plan called for cutting sick leave by 50 per cent between 2002 and 2008, decreasing the number of cases and reducing the amount spent on sickness allowances. The measures are aimed at improving working conditions and good health in working life. The focus was on the individual and on the employer's responsibility for employee good health.

*Measures that were developed to improve health in the workplace included:*

- *Stronger economic incentives<sup>19</sup> for preventive action by employers*
- *Compulsory reporting of sickness absence rates in annual reports*
- *Partial sick leave to reduce an employee's risk of losing contact with working life*
- *Compulsory reporting of workers' rehabilitation by the employer*
- *Stronger supervisory function for the Swedish Work Environment Authority to prevent ill health in working life, particularly regarding the workplaces that represent the greatest risks<sup>20</sup>*

Flexible working time arrangements have been considered by the Swedish government over the past few years. In 2000, a committee was set up to examine the entire system of legislation on working time and make proposals for reform. In 2002, the committee issued its report, which included proposals to strengthen employees' influence over their own working time by scheduling hours to suit their individual needs. For example, one of the proposals recommended that workers could use 1 week of the current

<sup>18</sup> Government of Sweden, "The Government's Programme for Better Health in Working Life: Background."

<sup>19</sup> For example, one proposal that has been publicly discussed is a special "work environment fee" for employers. The fee could be returned to the employer as a bonus for successful improvements in the work environment. European Industrial Relations Observatory On-line, "Tripartite Talks Launched on Improving Health at Work," November 21, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> "Budget Bill 2003: A Continuing Strategy for Better Health in Working Life."

statutory 5 weeks of annual leave flexibly, in units of one or more hours or days. The committee also recommended that workers receive an additional 5 days of leave per year. This leave plus the 5 days of flexible leave would be taken as time off rather than be converted into cash, strengthening employees' influence over their working time and unpaid time.

Sabbatical leave was introduced by the government on a trial basis from 2002 to 2004. Although not a proposal to help workers balance working time with other responsibilities on an ongoing basis, sabbatical leave allows workers to take a period of time off work to pursue other interests. An employee is entitled to take up to a year off work to study or look after children. Compensation is a state benefit equivalent to 85 per cent of the unemployment benefit. In order to grant sabbatical leave, the employer must be able to find an unemployed person who can fill the employee's position while he or she is on leave. The labour market effects and the health effects of this trial will be evaluated during this period<sup>21</sup>.

Director (Legal Department) of The Equality Ombudsman Pia Engström Lindgren shed more light on work-life balance in the Swedish scene through her paper, "Getting The Balance Right: The Difficult Art Of Juggling Both Family And Career" at the seminar. She highlighted the active role of the governments in advocating work-life balance in Sweden.

The Equality Ombudsman is a government agency in Sweden with the mission to combat discrimination and to promote equality. It receives and investigates complaints from individuals on discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, religion and other beliefs, sexual orientation, age and transgender identity or expression and has the right to take legal action. It also arranges information and opinion forming activities to spread knowledge and raise awareness on the issues of equality.

Just 2 per cent of women between 16 and 64 years are regular housewives. This is very much due to the gender equality debate in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when women's right to an income of their own was very much an issue of the heart. It resulted in the 1971 tax reform that put an end to the joint taxation of spouses. Until that year, the tax system in many cases made it unprofitable for married women to get a paid job, since their income would be added to their husbands'.

<sup>21</sup> "Sweden's Action Plan for Employment 2003", Page 20, and European Industrial Relations Observatory On-line, "Experimental Sabbatical Leave Scheme Launched", 5 February 2002.

In 1974, the government decided on a rapid large scale expansion of public childcare, which has been ongoing ever since and today, 84 per cent of children between 1 and 6 years are registered in public childcare. In that same year, the former mother's benefit was replaced by a national parental benefit. Apart from being more generous than the old system, allowing for 6 months of paid leave after the child's birth, it also recognised the fact that fathers are also caretakers of their children, giving equal rights to parental leave and benefits to both women and men. The parental benefit have been successively extended and covers today a total of 390 days with a benefit equaling 77 per cent of the parents ordinary salary, and another 90 days with a smaller benefit of 180 Swedish Krona (SEK). When parents have joint custody of the child, the mother and the father are entitled to one half each.



In the Scandinavian countries, and especially in Sweden, there is a pattern of relatively high fertility rates combined with a high rate of women in gainful employment. Compared with many other countries, women are actually able to have both children and career. A very strong two-children norm has been prevalent since the 1970s. During this period, the share of women participating in the labour force has increased from 60 to 80 per cent. It has become clear that having children is not an obstacle to having a job, and vice versa.”

**Pia Engström Lindgren**  
Director (Legal Department)  
of The Equality Ombudsman,  
Sweden

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Contradictions have still risen despite these policies. On one hand, the generous system for parental benefit and parental leave makes it possible for women to combine work with having children. On the other hand, there is still a huge difference in absence from work, giving women and men totally different conditions in working life.

Said Ms Lindgren: “Assumptions about traditional gender roles still result in women getting lower salaries, since employers fear that they will be absent more than men to take care of their children, and they are also discriminated against in the hiring process. This then contributes to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where women actually do take more parental leave. Also, there have been cases of men wanting to stay home with their children being discriminated against.”

The Ombudsman steps in at these instances to take legal action and also continuously work with information and opinion building to promote equality and further progress of the legal system.

### The Norwegian Setting

Legislation plays a key role also in shaping pro-family policies in Norway. The Nordic welfare states have a long tradition of extensive social policies directed at the family. These policies have, however, not primarily been motivated by pro-natalist objectives, but rather by gender equality ideologies and concern for the general well-being of children and their families<sup>22</sup>. Today, Norway has a fertility rate of 1.96 and a female labour force participation rate of 80 per cent.

In Norway, a universal right to paid leave in connection with birth is granted by the National Insurance Act and dates back as far as 1956. In order to be entitled to national insurance benefit, the mother must have been employed for at least 6 of the last 10 months prior to birth. Women who did not qualify for this benefit was entitled to receive a lump sum grant, amounting to 32,138 Norwegian Krone (NOK) in 2002, which is about about 3,900 Euros. Initially, the benefit period for entitled mothers was only 12 weeks and income compensation was low<sup>23</sup>.

There was no expansion until 1977, when the benefit period was extended to 18 weeks and fathers became entitled to share most of the leave. At the same time, the job guarantee that had always accompanied the paid leave was extended to 1 full year, that is, parents could then also take extra, unpaid leave, without losing their job. One year later, the benefits were raised substantially to cover 100 per cent of former income for most working mothers. Almost another decade passed before there were further extensions in the benefit period, but since 1987 it has been prolonged several times, resulting in a maximum leave of 52 weeks with 80 per cent wage compensation or 42 weeks with full pay in 1993.



<sup>22,23</sup> Demographic Research, Volume 10, Article 10. Pages 265-286, published on 8 June 2004. [www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol10/10/Fertility and family policy in Norway](http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol10/10/Fertility%20and%20family%20policy%20in%20Norway) - A reflection on trends and possible connections by Marit Rønsen.



*To encourage the involvement of both parents in childcare, the 1993 amendment reserved 4 weeks of the extended leave for the father – the “Daddy Quota”<sup>24</sup>. These weeks are generally not transferable to the mother, and are lost if the father does not make use of them. Hence, there is a strong incentive for fathers to take leave, and judging by experience, the reform has been a success. In 1996, 3 years after introduction, almost 80 per cent of entitled fathers used the “Daddy Quota”, and furthermore, the proportion of fathers who shared some of the common parental leave period had risen from 4 per cent to 12 per cent (Brandth and Jensberg, 1998).*

By 2004, fathers could share all of the leave except for 3 weeks before and 6 weeks after birth that are reserved for the mother. In addition, fathers were entitled to 2 weeks of unpaid paternity leave immediately after birth. Traditionally, most fathers have taken the 2 weeks of paternity leave, but very few have used the opportunity to share parts of the common parental leave period.

In August 1998, a cash benefit to parents who do not use publicly subsidised childcare was introduced, and since January 1999 all children aged 1 to 2 years have been included in the programme. The benefit is a monthly, tax-free flat rate payment that, at introduction, was roughly equivalent to the state subsidy for a place in a daycare centre. In 2004, the monthly amount was 3,657 Norwegian Krone (NOK), which was approximately 450 Euros. To be eligible for the full benefit, the child must not attend a publicly funded daycare centre on a full-time basis, that is, more than 32 hours per week. Parents of children that attended part-time jobs could receive a reduced benefit.

This scheme became very popular as a large majority of parents with children in the eligible age group could claim the benefit. In 1999, about 4 months after the scheme was fully established, parents of 75 per cent of 1 to 2 year olds received the benefit and this proportion has remained more or less constant since. However, only 5 per cent of the recipients were fathers<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23,24</sup> Demographic Research, Volume 10, Article 10. Pages 265–286, published on 8 June 2004. [www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol10/10/Fertility and family policy in Norway - A reflection on trends and possible connections by Marit Rønsen](http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol10/10/Fertility%20and%20family%20policy%20in%20Norway%20-%20A%20reflection%20on%20trends%20and%20possible%20connections%20by%20Marit%20R%26466n%20sen).

<sup>25</sup> Reppen and Rønning, 1999.

Subsidised daycare expanded quickly in the 1980s and the 1990s, reaching a coverage rate among preschool children of 56 per cent in 2002<sup>26</sup>. Leaving out children who are usually cared for by parents on parental leave (0-12 month old), the coverage rate was 66 per cent. Since daycare attendance increases with children's age, the coverage rate for 3 to 5 year olds was much higher than among 1 to 2 year old, 83 per cent as compared to 41 per cent in 2002.

Daycare centres could be owned and run either as public or private enterprises. However, both forms of ownership receive state subsidies as long as the centre is publicly approved. The subsidy is a contribution to the daycare centre per enrolled child. The amount increases with hours of attendance and is higher for 0-2 year olds than for other preschool children. A large part of the private daycare centres also receives subsidies from the local municipality.



The main principle of the financing of daycare centres is that the running costs should be shared between the state, the municipalities and the parents<sup>27</sup>. The intentions were for the state to pay 40 per cent of the cost, while the remaining 60 per cent should be divided equally between parents and municipalities. Because of a fast expansion of private centres, the average municipality share has, however, been lower and the average parental share higher.

In 1994, for example, parents paid 44.5 per cent of the cost in private daycare centres and 28.8 per cent in public centres<sup>28</sup>. There is no central regulation of the parental fee. The local owner, that is, either the municipality or the private enterprise, is free to set its own price. In about half the public centres there is a scale of fees dependent on parents' income, while in private centres there is usually a fixed fee, independent of income. However, both public and private centres normally offer a siblings discount. Hence, there is substantial variation in the parental price.

In 1998, the average parental payment for full-time attendance in large cities

<sup>26</sup> Statistics Norway, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 1988.

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 1996.



and suburbs was about 3,500 Norwegian Krone (NOK), which is about 430 Euros per month, in private centres and slightly less in public centres<sup>29</sup>. Prior to the 1990s, Norwegian parental leave and childcare policies lagged behind the policies of most other Nordic countries.

In 2009, Norway celebrates the 30th anniversary of the Gender Equality Act. This Act forbids any discrimination on the basis of gender in all sectors of society, and promotes women's interests. Since 1981, this Act has demanded that all state appointed committees,

councils, working groups or delegations have at least 40 per cent of the under-represented gender. If ministries do not comply, they will not be allowed to appoint the intended committee or council. The Discrimination and Equality Ombudsman handles this law and the other anti-discrimination laws in Norway. The Municipal Act, on another note, demands 40 per cent of the under-represented gender in all politically appointed committees or groups.

More insights were shared on leave benefits in the Norwegian system by Ms Arni Hole, Director General, Ministry of Children and Equality, Department of Family Affairs and Equality in Norway. Her paper presented at the seminar was themed, "Gender Equality Gives A Competitive Edge: Why Norway Does Well On The World Economic Forum's Ranking On Gender Equality".

By 2009, parental leave in Norway was expanded to 56 weeks with 80 per cent pay for working parents. Mothers are obliged to take 9 weeks leave of absence; 3 weeks before birth. From 1 July 2009, 10 weeks were made obligatory for fathers. Six weeks into this inception, 90 per cent of qualifying fathers enjoyed this leave benefit. The rest of the parental leave period can be shared on a voluntarily basis between spouses.

<sup>29</sup> Statistics Norway, 1998.

“Only 18 per cent of the fathers take out more than their quota. The Cabinet wants the fathers to take more care-responsibilities, to ‘come home’ and therefore, it launches campaigns,” said Ms Hole.

Each parent also has 10 days per year of paid leave when the child is below 12 years old. There is also the Work Environment Act which gives the right to negotiate for flexible hours, home-office arrangements, shorter hours per week and 1 year leave of absence without pay, to care for children as necessary, and be secured of a job when he gets back to work.

Said Ms Hole: “The largest companies of Norway (the public limited, stock-exchange noted ones with a broad spread of shares) have 40 per cent women on their boards, due to an affirmative action (gender balance required by law) decided upon in Parliament in 2003, as the first nation in the world to do this. The state-owned companies (and some other company categories) have 43 per cent women on their boards, on an average, due to the same law-regulation as above.

“Recently, the Cabinet decided to regulate the requirement for gender balance on the boards of all companies owned by a two-thirds majority of a municipality. Several thousand small- and medium-sized companies within water supply, energy supply, care-sector, garbage-handling and so forth which are very important to the public and should ‘mirror’ both gender to represent the public.”

Norway’s family policies are also bundled with their own set of challenges when discussing pay differences. Conclusions from The Equal Pay Commission said that differences in length of education and age explained very little of the pay gap today. Women and men are paid approximately the same for doing the same job in the same enterprise. The pay gap reflects the gender-segregated labour market. In all, Norway’s high female labour market participation is supported by state policies which includes the “Daddy Month” leave and reflects attention to issues of work-life harmony. There is also a strong focus on role of fathers.





Reaching a balanced participation is a question of democracy. It is an important step towards equality between the sexes, a fairer society and a more even distribution of power. We deem it as an important factor in the creation of wealth in society. This will secure women’s influence in decision making processes and is of great importance for the economy in the society. It is important to make use of all the human resources in our country, not just half of it.”

**Arni Hole**  
Director General, Ministry of  
Children and Equality,  
Department of Family Affairs  
and Equality, Norway

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 We must have flexible work arrangements so that it's easier for women to both work and have children. And you must have family-friendly employers who will make this happen. If they are supportive and understanding, it will make a big difference to their female staff. 

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong,  
National Day Rally 2008

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## Chapter 3

# the tripartite drive in singapore

## Snapshot

The work-life policies practised in the Scandinavian countries have been successful in achieving high fertility rates as well as high female labour force participation rates.

The tripartite partnership in Singapore has also been championing a slew of initiatives on work-life harmony in recent years. A fairly new concept it may be, yet the buzz on work-life harmony is gradually gaining momentum among employers in Singapore. The concerted effort in promoting work-life practices indeed has its roots from the government's push on procreation policies for Singaporeans.

### **Tripartite Committee On Work-Life Strategy**

The Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy<sup>1</sup> was set up in September 2004 to promote work-life harmony in Singapore.

The Ministry of Manpower, Singapore National Employers Federation and National Trades Union Congress, together with the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports and Singapore Workforce Development Agency, formed the original five-organisation member group. The group has since grown to 10 members, with additions from the government, unions, employer, employee and business association representatives.



*Companies which implemented good work-life practices were recognised with Work-Life Excellence Awards in 2008.*

Work-life conferences and Work-life Excellence Awards are some initiatives that this tripartite body champions. The Work-Life Conference on 27 August 2009 showcased good practices for employers and human resource practitioners to adopt and emulate. The committee also helps employees to be more aware of their own responsibilities in managing career and family.

Employers with effective family-friendly strategies are highlighted through the Work-Life Excellence Awards every two years; in August 2008, 60 employers were recognised with these awards. This initiative serves as a tribute to employers who are committed to helping their employees harmonise work and personal commitments.

<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/workplace\\_standards/work-life\\_harmony/Tricom\\_WL.html](http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/workplace_standards/work-life_harmony/Tricom_WL.html)



### Baby Bonus

The Child Development Co-Savings Scheme<sup>2</sup>, more commonly known as “Baby Bonus”, was introduced in April 2001, with enhancements made in August 2004 and August 2008.

This cash incentives scheme was introduced to encourage women to have more children, and at a younger age, and help them cope financially. She gets \$4,000 for each of her first and second children, and \$6,000 for each of her third and fourth children.

Under this scheme, the Singapore government also contributes a dollar-for-dollar match of the savings that parents contribute to their child’s bank account in the Children Development Account. Savings in this account may be used for educational or medical-related expenses for the child up to the age of 6 years. It is capped at \$6,000 each for the first and second children, \$12,000 each for the third and fourth children, and \$18,000 each for the fifth and subsequent children.



<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.babybonus.gov.sg/bbss/html/index.html>

## Enhanced Marriage And Parenthood Package 2008

The government has been advocating family-friendly practices at the workplace, which will help in boosting fertility rates among Singaporean women.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced some pro-family initiatives in August 2008.

The enhanced Marriage and Parenthood Package 2008<sup>3</sup> was designed to address the key challenges that Singaporeans face: Getting married, starting and raising families. The Marriage and Parenthood Package facilitates better work-life harmony for working couples, through quality, affordable and accessible centre-based childcare options and financial support for parents to raise and care for their children. Tax benefits have been substantially enhanced to provide greater financial support to parents in raising children. The Qualifying Child Relief was increased from \$2,000 to \$4,000 per child and the Handicapped Child Relief was raised from \$3,500 to \$5,500 per child.

Working mothers with qualifying Singaporean children can also enjoy higher Working Mother's Child Relief. Before the enhancement, the Working Mother's Child Relief for the first, second, third and fourth children were 5, 15, 20 and 25 per cent of the mother's earned income. With the changes, the Working Mother's Child Relief is now 15 per cent of the mother's earned income for her first child, 20 per cent for her second child and 25 per cent per child, for her third and subsequent children. The Working Mother's Child Relief is subject to an overall cap of 100 per cent of the mother's earned income for all her qualifying children.



*Get married, have children, enjoy family life - thats what government is encouraging.*



We must treat the problem of low fertility seriously, and try to raise our total fertility rate. Although getting married and having children is a personal choice, the government is committed to fostering an overall family-friendly environment so that Singaporeans can have more support in getting married and having and raising children.”

**Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng, Minister-In-Charge of Population Issues and Chairman of the National Population Committee, in Parliament 2008**

<sup>3</sup> Source: <http://fcd.ecitizen.gov.sg/MarriageNParenthoodPackage>.

The Parenthood Tax Rebate has also been enhanced. Parenthood Tax Rebate, which was only available for the second to fourth qualifying Singaporean children in a family, has been extended to the first child and beyond the fourth child. Parenthood Tax Rebate is now \$5,000 for the first child, \$10,000 for the second, and \$20,000 for each subsequent child. Both father and mother may use the Parenthood Tax Rebate to offset their income tax payable.

Both elements of the Baby Bonus, that is, cash gift and dollar-for-dollar government matching contribution for the Children Development Account are also enhanced. With the improvements, Baby Bonus now offers \$10,000 for each of the first two children and up to \$18,000 for each lower-birth child. The cash gift for the first and second children was raised from \$3,000 to \$4,000. The cash gift for the third and fourth children remain at \$6,000.

The government's matching contribution for the Children Development Account was extended to the first child at up to \$6,000. For the fifth child and beyond, a dollar-for-dollar matching for the Children Development Account of up to \$18,000 per child was introduced.

The quality, affordability and accessibility of centre-based care have also been enhanced to provide more viable childcare options for working parents. The quality of childcare services was raised through higher educational and qualification requirements for preschool teachers by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, including providing scholarships and bursaries for the professional upgrading of deserving teachers in childcare centres.

Childcare centres have adopted an integrated curriculum framework and introduced a teacher-child ratio to ensure that there are adequately trained teachers in childcare centres. The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports provide recurrent grants for eligible not-for-profit childcare centre operators to set the benchmark for quality and affordability. The total recurrent grant to be provided is expected to reach up to \$21 million per year in five years' time.

The subsidy for working mothers sending their Singaporean children to centre-based childcare has been increased from \$150 to a maximum of \$300 per month per child and the subsidy for centre-based infant care will increase from \$400 to a maximum of \$600 per month per child. The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports is also facilitating the development of 200 new childcare centres over the next five years to increase the number of childcare places.

So as to further improve teacher quality and enhance teacher-pupil interactions in kindergarten, the Ministry of Education increased recurrent funding for eligible kindergarten operators. The total recurrent grant to be provided is expected to reach up to \$62.5 million per year in five years' time, compared to the \$17 million a year before the enhancements were introduced. The additional grant will allow operators to recruit better qualified teachers and principals, engage more teachers to improve teacher-pupil interaction and provide more support to children who are weak in the English language. The Ministry of Education also provides bursaries and scholarships for existing kindergarten teachers to upgrade their professional qualifications in approved institutions.

Leave measures for working fathers and mothers have been enhanced to give parents more time to spend with their children. Government-paid maternity leave has been extended from 12 weeks to 16 weeks for mothers with Singaporean children. The last 8 weeks can be taken flexibly over 12 months from the birth of the child, subject to mutual agreement between the employer and employee. For the first two lie-in confinement periods, the first 8 weeks of maternity leave will continue to be employer-paid, while the last 8 weeks to be funded by the government (capped at \$20,000 per confinement, inclusive of CPF contributions). For the third and subsequent confinements, the full 16 weeks will be funded by the government, capped at \$40,000 per confinement, inclusive of CPF contributions.

*"It is true that women do have a better touch with children. But the situation today is different. And the men can make the effort. If husbands leave everything to the wives, or if women are forced to choose between working and having a baby, the women will go on baby strike."*

*PM Lee recounted his own experiences of changing his children's nappies. Before disposable diapers, there was only cloth nappies, which had to be folded and held in place with safety pins. He said that he had not once pricked any of his four children, all of who are now young adults.*

*"If I can do it, that means, anybody can do it."*

*Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at National Day Rally 2008, where he announced the Enhanced Marriage and Parenthood Package.*

Paid childcare leave also saw an increase from 2 days to 6 days per year per parent if one has a Singaporean child below the age of 7. The first 3 days will be employer-paid, while the last 3 days will be government-paid, capped at \$500 per day, inclusive of Central Provident Fund contributions.

An unpaid infant care leave of 6 days per year per parent if one has a Singaporean child below the age of 2 was introduced to give parents additional time to spend with their young child.

Parents with a child under the age of 2 are entitled to both paid childcare leave and unpaid infantcare leave. The qualifying period for maternity leave was halved. Pregnant women will have to work for at least 90 days before confinement to qualify for maternity leave. In order to further enhance the protection of pregnant employees, employers are required to pay employees their maternity leave benefits if the employees are dismissed without sufficient cause within the last 6 months of pregnancy or retrenched within the last 3 months.

Couples with difficulties bearing children will also be assisted by the government. The government stepped in to co-fund Assisted Reproduction Technology treatments received at the public hospitals. Singaporean couples can receive 50 per cent co-funding up to \$3,000 for each Assisted Reproduction Technology treatment cycle for a maximum of three cycles.



I hope fathers use the Childcare and Infantcare Leave.

Sharing of responsibilities is very important. Once the woman's leave is over, she still has more responsibility in child-rearing. Difficulties in balancing work and family duties can put her off having more children."

**Halimah Yacob**  
**NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and Director, Women's Development Secretariat**

### **Flexi-Works! Fund**

There are two major funding programmes to help companies improve their work-life policies to better suit the needs of their employees.

The Flexi-Works!<sup>4</sup> is an initiative by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency and NTUC for companies to hire new workers on part-time or flexible work arrangements. The scheme offers a grant of up to \$100,000 to support a company's efforts in the recruitment of workers on part-time or flexible work arrangements.

<sup>4</sup> Source: [http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/workplace\\_standards/work-life\\_harmony/WoW\\_\\_Fund/Common\\_Tranche.html](http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/workplace_standards/work-life_harmony/WoW__Fund/Common_Tranche.html)

This programme has been enhanced and extended to run for another year from 1 March 2009. The age criterion for recruited workers has been lowered from 35 years and above, to 30 years and above. There is also a new tranche of funding to help companies introduce flexible work arrangements in addition to current funding for the hiring of economically inactive workers.



*Businesses in the hospitality industry like Royal Plaza on Scotts have tapped on the Flexi-Works! Fund.*

The grant can be used for costs incurred for job redesign, consultancy, recruitment, training, absentee payroll and equipment, or to put in place part time or flexible working arrangements. However, the grant cannot be used for any form of retention bonus or salary support.

The Flexi-Works! Fund, administered by NTUC Women's Development Secretariat and Singapore National Employers Federation, provides good support to companies willing to venture into work-life integration practices. As of April 2009, close to 90 companies have committed to hiring 3,224 workers on flexible work arrangements.

### **WoW! Fund**

The Work-Life Works! Fund<sup>5</sup> is the other major scheme. Introduced in 2004 and administered by the Ministry of Manpower, the WoW! Fund, is a grant given to businesses to encourage employers to introduce work-life measures at the workplace. The WoW! Fund helps to defray costs incurred by companies while introducing work-life measures.

An approved project can be co-funded up to a maximum of \$20,000. The grant consists of two components: A common tranche of up to a maximum \$10,000 and an enhanced tier of up to a maximum of \$10,000. This portion of funding is subject to successful provision of flexible work arrangements

<sup>5</sup> Source: [http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/workplace\\_standards/work-life\\_harmony/WoW\\_\\_Fund.html](http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/workplace_standards/work-life_harmony/WoW__Fund.html)



*Companies setting up fitness and health facilities to promote work-life balance can use the WoW! Fund.*

to appropriate staff while the funding from the enhanced tier facilitates the development of work-life and flexible work arrangement processes in applicant companies. This portion of funding will be subject to outcomes of work-life development in the company, including the number of employees benefiting from better work-life harmony as a result of the programmes.

Companies in Singapore showed favourable response towards adopting work-life initiatives as the first \$10 million was fully committed by April 2007. The government then decided

to introduce an enhanced tier of \$10,000 in March 2009 to provide more support for applicant companies that provided supporting evidence to show that they are able to achieve more in terms of better work-life processes, and have more employees benefiting from work-life integration as a result of the programmes in place.

The WoW! Fund can kick in to provide funding support for companies in several ways. The fund can be channeled to investment on training of human resource managers and line supervisors to facilitate or implement work-life strategies, engaging a qualified work-life consultant or on cost on physical or information technology infrastructure that facilitates the development of flexible work arrangements. The fund can also be used on infrastructure and programmes that support selected employee support schemes such as lactation or family rooms.

### **Little Ones @ Work**

The Little Ones @ Work programme is one of the key initiatives that the NTUC Women's Development Secretariat has designed to promote work-life harmony and encourage employers to offer more family-friendly programmes to their employees.

The launch of this initiative in the middle of the world's worst economic downturn in 60 years marked the Singapore Labour Movement's commitment in standing by workers to cope with the stress and strains of challenges at work.

Through this programme, the NTUC Women's Development Secretariat works with management and union partners to help employees strike a better balance between work and family. Companies are able to see their employees not just as workers but also understand that they have different roles, in particular as parents, and have the opportunity to show their strong support.

Employers also benefit when the children have a greater understanding of their parents' work thus allowing employees to adjust better to work demands.



*NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and NTUC WDS Director Halimah Jacob joins little charges on their excursions to parents' workplace.*

The pilot run of the programme saw three companies hosting more than 230 school-going children of their employees at their workplace in December 2008. Impressed by what CapitalLand Group, HSL Constructor Private Limited and Transit Link Private Limited had done, 24 companies have participated in this programme since the pilot run. Another 10 companies have committed to participate in December 2009.

#### **NTUC WISE – Women Interactive Series**

With an increasing number of women returning to the workforce, there is a greater need for more engagement with women affiliates such as union leaders and members, professionals, back-to-work women, and women associations.

Therefore, the NTUC Women's Development Secretariat initiated NTUC WISE – Women Interactive Series – a series of events aimed at deepening the engagement

“ Work-life integration is more relevant today than before the recession. It achieves a broad range of bottom-line impacts that are critical not only to surviving but thriving during the current economic downturn and beyond. Employees still need to feel engaged despite the downturn and adopting work- life initiatives is one way of engaging employees.”

**Grace Quek**  
**Head of Human Resources**  
**and Administration,**  
**HSL Contractor Pte Ltd**





*A family that plays together, stays together.*



Working women face a great challenge to balance the

competing priorities of work and family. The employment rate for women begins to decline soon after hitting the peak at the age group of 25 to 29, suggesting that some women may have chosen to withdraw from the workforce, possibly to take care of the family. Some of those who subsequently want to return to the workforce may lack the relevant skills. With NTUC WISE, the Women's Development Secretariat hopes to bridge the communication and social gaps."

**Halimah Jacob**  
**NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and Director, Women's Development Secretariat**

and increasing networking and interaction with women on various topics that are close to their hearts. This platform will provide a voice for the aspirations and concerns of working women, and the NTUC Women's Development Secretariat monitors trends and makes recommendations to improve women's welfare and employment.

NTUC WISE was launched by Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Minister of State, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports,

who was Guest-of-Honour at the inaugural series on 20 February 2008. The theme of the session was "Celebrating Women – Challenges, Opportunities and Responsibilities."

Another session held on 28 August 2008 provided the platform to engage female unionists on the government's announcement of the Marriage and Parenthood Package. Ministry of Manpower's Divisional Director (Labour Relations and Workplaces) Ong Yen Her and Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports Division Director (Family Services) Lee Kim Hua were members of the discussion panel. Beyond financial initiatives, many female unionists called for greater support from employers in the form of flexible work options and work-life harmony initiatives.

One such session that was held on 5 August 2009 discussed work-life harmony for women in depth. Attended by Senior Minister of State (National Development and Education) Grace Fu, NTUC Vice-President Nora Kang, NTUC Women's Committee Vice-Chairperson and Healthcare Services Employees' Union General Secretary Diana Chia, the dialogue engaged more than 100 women.

These unionists voiced out the need for greater support for women beyond providing for childcare needs and urged employers to allow for flexibility in this aspect. They also called on the men to help out with household duties and share child-rearing responsibilities with their spouses.

On 27 June 2009, another session themed, "The Global Economic Crisis And Singapore's Response Strategy," was organised by the NTUC Women's Development Secretariat. Mrs Lim Hwee Hua, Minister, Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister For Finance and Transport, was Guest-of-Honour at this session. More than 100 women unionists had an opportunity to discuss flexible work options, back-to-work schemes and fair employment practices.

Guests and unionists were joined by NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and Women's Development Secretariat Director Halimah Jacob and leaders of NTUC Women's Committee in all the sessions. The NTUC Women's Development will organise more such sessions for national leaders and women unionists.

### **Employer Alliance**

In 2001, Singapore National Employers Federation and Ministry of Community Development and Sports, as the ministry was called then, jointly set up the Employer Alliance on Work and Family to spearhead the adoption of work-life practices in companies. The name of the organisation has since been changed to the Employer Alliance On Work-Life to reflect the holistic and inclusive dimensions of work-life.

The Employer Alliance On Work-Life is a network of corporations committed to create an enabling work environment to enhance work-life integration. Its objective is for corporations to be aware of the contribution of work-life strategies to their business outcomes<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://www.employeralliance.sg/ea.html>



Companies need committed and competent workers to grow their businesses. Studies show that work-life strategies help workers to be more focused and committed at work. Staff commitment can in turn contribute to increased productivity and customer satisfaction. These improvements impact both companies' top line – in terms of more return customers, more referrals – and bottom line – because you also get better employee performance and lower staff turnover. ”

Manpower Minister Gan Kim Yong,  
Work-Life Conference 2009

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## Chapter 4

# facts and figures

## Snapshot

Employees across the globe are overwhelmed with a substantial increase in work which can be largely attributed to the rise of information technology and by an intense, competitive work environment. A performance culture that expects more and more from employees has set in over these years.

With these changes, both male and female employees are increasingly challenged with the tasks of juggling their personal and work lives; this challenge is larger for women.

Singapore's workforce is largely affected by these impacts. For this reason, the concept of work-life strategies have taken root in the workplace and is gradually evolving among employers. Studies conducted on work-life practices in Singapore show companies' increasing interest in adopting these measures.

### **An Effective Business Strategy**

One of the first extensive studies examining the impact of work-life practices on employee turnover and bottom-line performance in Singapore was published in October 2005<sup>1</sup>.

The results were based on data collected from the Conditions of Employment surveys conducted by the Ministry of Manpower from 1996 to 2003, financial data from the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority of Singapore and stock market data from Datastream and Worldscope.

The study revealed that employee turnover is highly costly for Singapore companies. Voluntary turnover of both management and rank-and-file employees negatively affects company profitability, employee labour productivity and stock returns.

The study also showed that implementing work-life initiatives for both management and rank-and-file employees can be an effective business strategy for Singapore companies to reduce voluntary employee turnover. It further revealed a few key findings. Companies that offer more work-life benefits to their employees enjoy lower levels of voluntary employee turnover. Those that have a higher proportion of employees with more generous annual leave entitlement, that is 15 days of annual leave and above, have lower voluntary employee turnover, and companies that have a higher



<sup>1</sup> These studies were conducted by the project team from the Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University, in collaboration with the Ministry of Manpower. Funding for these studies was provided by the Ministry of Manpower.

proportion of employees on a shorter work-week have lower voluntary employee turnover.

While work-life initiatives may be costly for companies to implement, the direct costs are offset by the indirect positive benefits that these work-life policies have on company performance through reduced employee turnover. Moreover, work-life initiatives also have a slew of long-term benefits. It was also apparent from this study that only a small percentage of Singapore's employees in the private sector are on flexible work arrangements such as flexi-time and work-from-home arrangements. The study also showed that companies that have part-time rank-and-file employees directly benefit through higher profitability, employee labour productivity and stock returns. They also have higher voluntary employee turnover.

While part-time employees have higher turnover costs, they can give companies greater flexibility to schedule employees to meet business needs and they are generally less costly to hire. This, for a good start, gives employers an impetus to explore on implementing work-life integration measures within their organisations.

Generally, this study emphasises that work-life harmony is a critical business strategy that Singapore companies can adopt to reduce their employee turnover and in turn, improve overall performance. Given that work-life benefits can be expensive to implement, companies should assess the needs of their employees and offer work-life benefits that are valued by their employees and that also serve the needs of the business.

Companies that lack in work-life benefits tend to be smaller-sized companies that are privately-held and locally owned, and tend to operate in the manufacturing and construction industries as well as in highly competitive environments with low levels of concentration. More attention therefore can be channeled on improving work-life balance for these small-and medium-sized companies.

### Employing The Right Technique

There are more pockets of research to reflect on in the work-life scene in Singapore. One of these is the “Work-Life Harmony Report: Findings And Recommendations For Employers On How To Use Work-Life Strategies To Optimise Business Performance” published by the Ministry of Manpower in July 2005.

The report highlighted that major studies have shown that work-life strategies are an effective recruitment tool. In a 1999 survey of 2,510 graduating students from 11 countries that included Japan and South Korea, PricewaterhouseCoopers, one of the world’s largest professional services companies, found that these students rated work-life harmony as their most important career goal<sup>2</sup>.

In another survey<sup>3</sup> by Towers Perrin, a professional services company specialising in human resource and financial services consulting, work-life balance came up as a key factor in attracting workers in the United Kingdom. It ranked above the concepts of “challenging work” and “recognition for work”, and just below “competitive pay”.

This report was compiled by The Champions Group<sup>4</sup> which was set up in October 2004 to promote work-life harmony in Singapore through a sector-based approach for a period of one year. More specifically, it aimed to document and recommend a list of suitable work-life programmes for companies operating in Singapore and develop sector-specific work-life programmes. It also targeted to identify other sectors or occupational groups that would benefit from work-life programmes.

The report highlighted that work-life strategy is crucial for employers in Singapore for three core reasons.



<sup>2</sup> “PricewaterhouseCoopers International Student Survey,” PricewaterhouseCoopers, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> “Reconnecting With Employees: Quantifying The Value Of Engaging Your Workforce”, Powers Perrin HR Services, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> The Champions Group comprises the chairpersons of the four sector workgroups identified to spearhead this effort. The workgroups comprised best practice companies in the banking, chemical, healthcare and infocomm technology sectors.



Firstly, a growing proportion of the workforce is from Generation X and Generation Y, part of the population born after 1965. Studies have shown that family commitments and personal aspirations are as important to these employees as work responsibilities<sup>5</sup>.

Secondly, the number of dual-career couples that have to care for their children and elderly parents is also growing. The report acknowledged that forward-thinking employers recognise that employees have different priorities at different stages of their lives. Through work-life strategies, they enable employees with different priorities to give their best and contribute value-add at work. Thus, this reflects that employers without work-life strategies will be at a disadvantage when it comes to operating at peak performance.

Thirdly, human asset has emerged as a key asset that can distinguish an organisation from its competitors. Valued talents like a creative programmer or a highly competent manager can be as decisive to a company's fortunes as any marketing or financing strategy. To ensure that they attract and develop talent, human resource departments in these organisations now take on strategic recruitment and training roles in addition to their activities of traditional compensation and benefits.

These discussions reflect the increasing importance and impact of work-life harmony on the workforce in Singapore. This enhanced focus that employees place on work-life practices calls for a pro-active approach from companies to discover the business advantages that such measures can bring about.

<sup>5</sup> "The National study of the Changing workforce,' Families and Work Institute, 2002;' Generation & Gender in the Workplace,' Families and Work Institute, 2002

### A Deeper Review

NTUC Women's Development Secretariat has been a strong advocate of work-life balance in Singapore's employment scene. It recognises that an organisation's performance is highly intertwined with the well-being of its employees.

Some employers have shared that employees with well-balanced work-life tend to be happier and more committed at the workplace, therefore enhancing the company's performance. NTUC

Women's Development Secretariat believes that implementing work-life harmony programmes at the workplace is the key to achieving such win-win situations for both the employers and employees.

In view of this, NTUC Women's Development Secretariat embarked on a survey among top organisations in Singapore during the first quarter of 2008, to find out their adoption level of work-life harmony programmes, the benefits reaped through the programmes, as well as the challenges while implementing such programmes.

The results of the survey provided good insights into the common benefits and challenges faced by organisations in implementing work-life harmony programmes. A total of 200 companies – 100 from Singapore 1,000<sup>6</sup> and 100 from SME 500<sup>7</sup> – took part in the survey.

It was gathered from the survey that 46 per cent of these companies hired more than 100 employees; 65 per cent had about three-quarters of their employees who are Singaporeans or Singapore Permanent Residents.



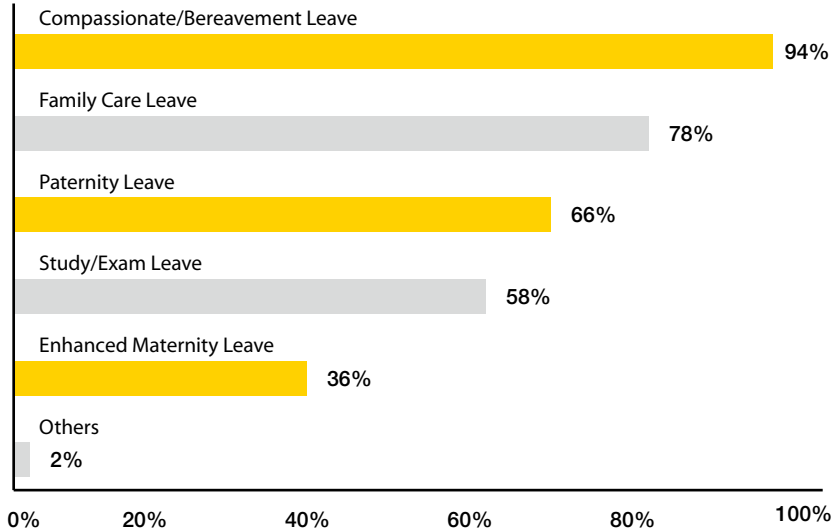
*Intergenerational bonding strengthens families and supports working couples.*

<sup>6</sup> Singapore's Top 1,000 corporations ranked by financial performance, 20<sup>th</sup> Edition (2007).

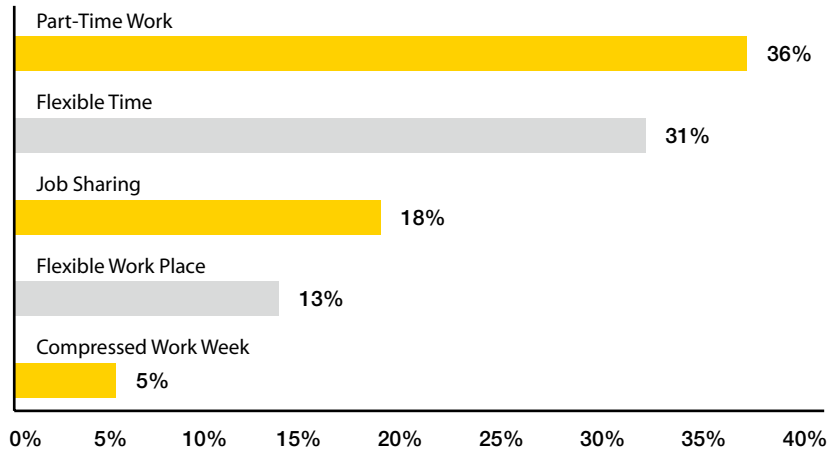
<sup>7</sup> Singapore's Top 500 Small- and Medium-Enterprises ranked by financial performance, 9<sup>th</sup> edition (2007).

The most common leave benefits implemented are compassionate or bereavement leave, family care leave and paternity leave. The most common flexible work arrangements that organisations have implemented are part-time work, flexible time and job sharing.

### Leave Benefits Implemented

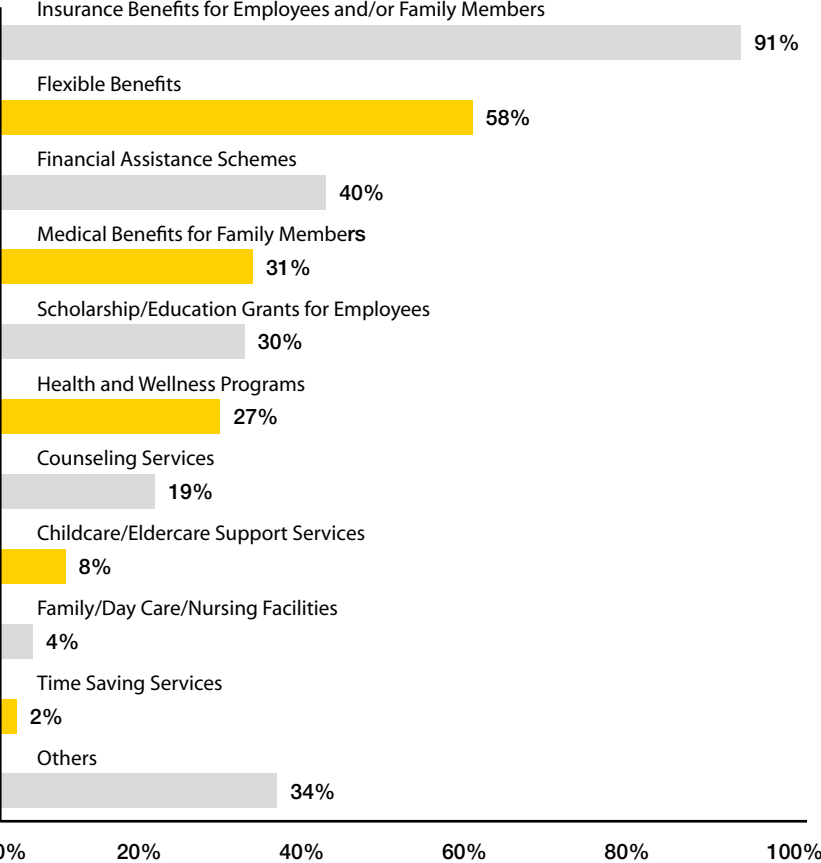


### Flexible Work Arrangements Implemented



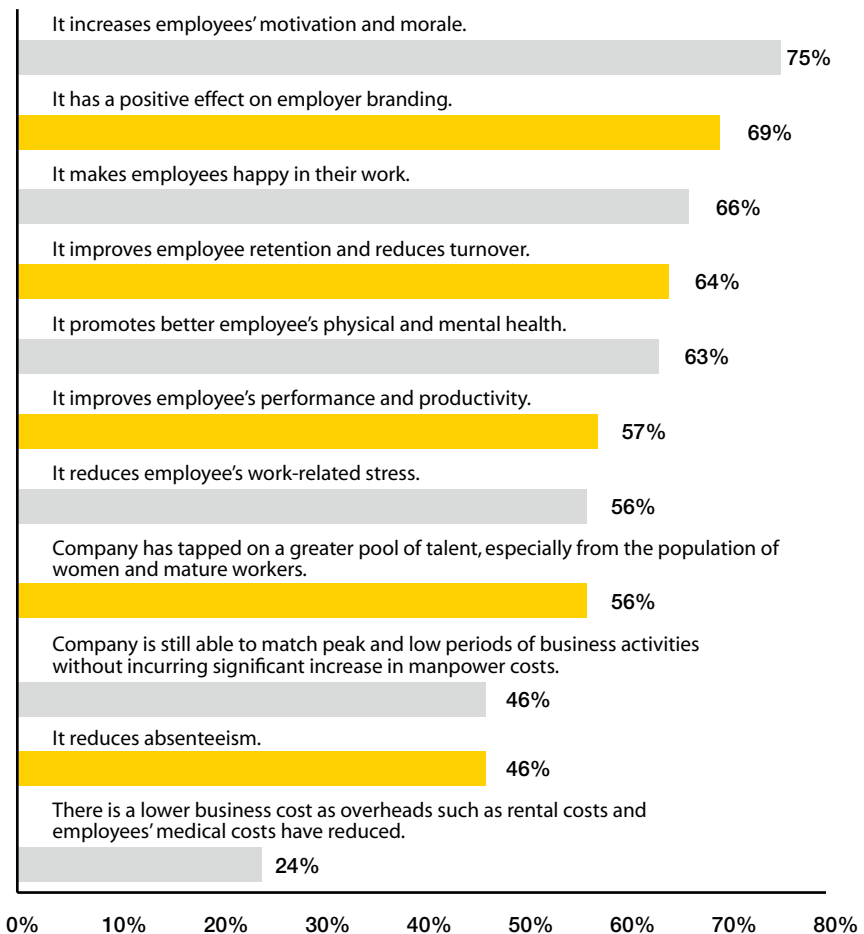
The most common employee support schemes that organisations have are insurance benefits for employees and/or family members, flexible benefits and financial assistance schemes.

### Employee Support Schemes Implemented



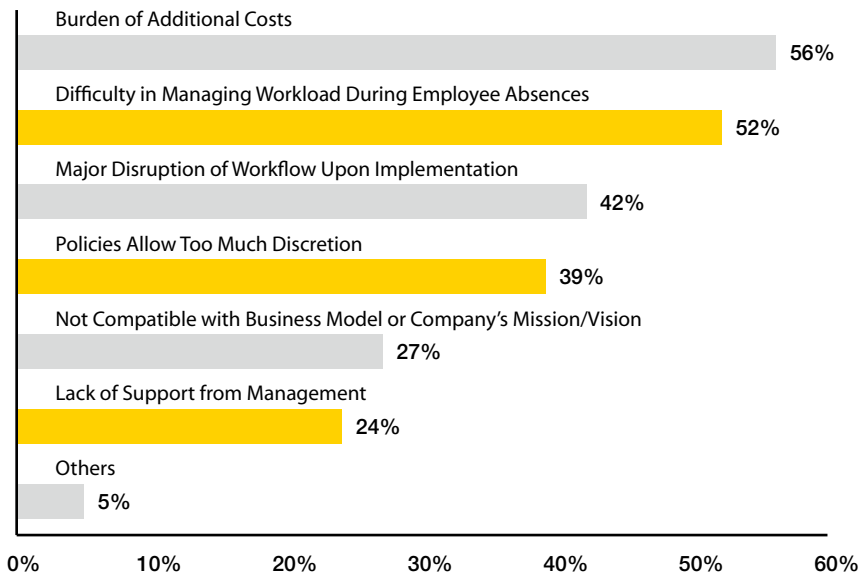
The key benefits that organisations reap through implementing work-life harmony initiatives are increased employees' motivation and morale, having a positive effect on employer branding and a happy workforce.

### Benefits of Work-Life Harmony Initiatives



The key obstacles that hinder organisations from implementing work-life harmony initiatives are burden of additional costs, difficulty in managing workload during employee absences and major disruption of workflow upon implementation.

### Obstacles In Implementing Work-Life Harmony Initiatives



Generally, one out of two companies surveyed was able to tap on a greater pool of talent, especially women and mature workers. 75 per cent of the companies surveyed found that work-life initiatives helped boost employees' motivation and morale. 69 per cent of companies said they had a positive effect on company branding. 66 per cent of companies reported having produced happy employees. Two out of three companies adopted leave benefits such as Family Care Leave and Paternity Leave. More than 90 per cent of employers offer insurance benefits for their employees with some extending to employees' families.

It is evident from the survey findings that there is still much room for companies to embrace the potential pool of female employees. Only one out of three companies has introduced flexible working arrangements. When asked about their hesitation in making that first step, more than half of employers cited higher costs for not offering. Dealing with manpower constraints during employee absences and disruption of workflow are the top in the list of apprehensions by employers.

Said NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and Women's Development Secretariat Director Halimah Jacob: "The survey findings have unveiled encouraging results that will be good guidelines in shaping and refining effective strategies and outreach efforts when partnering with companies to implement part-time flexi-work options."

This survey commissioned by NTUC Women's Development Secretariat marked the start of its learning journey in uncovering best practices and strategies in implementing work-life initiatives in Singapore.

Learning from the Scandinavian countries which offer a wide buffet of key take-aways on promoting work-life balance through enhanced initiatives is one way of promoting the culture here.

There is already some form of improvement. According to a report<sup>8</sup> released by the Ministry of Manpower in late 2008, employers in Singapore, especially those in the private sector, are making significant progress in the area of work-life integration. In 2008, 7.4 per cent of companies in the private sector offered flexible work arrangements to their employees, as compared to only 5.1 per cent in 2006.

This report showed that many employers are also offering benefits above the statutory requirements. About 8 out of 10 employers provided for Compassionate Leave, while 7 out of 10 provided for Marriage Leave. 50 per cent of companies also allow fathers to take time off their jobs to spend time with their newborns.

<sup>8</sup> "Conditions Of Employment" report, published by Ministry of Manpower, 2008.

Another recent survey<sup>9</sup> by NTUC Women's Development Secretariat carried out from July to August 2009 also flagged some promising results on employers' support for work-life practices.


A significant 95 per cent of the female employees surveyed indicated that their companies are supportive of female employees applying for maternity and childcare leave, while 2 per cent admitted that leave applications were discouraged by their employers. With regards to fair appraisal, 77 per cent said they were appraised purely on their work performance and using up enhanced maternity and childcare benefits did not put them at a disadvantage. However, 13 per cent faced implications on their performance appraisals even with consistent good work and 4 per cent missed opportunities for career progression.


The findings show that employers are gradually embracing family-friendly policies. More and more, they are exploring various forms of flexible work-arrangements and employee support schemes. These efforts must be strengthened and implemented in sustainable ways that will benefit the employees and businesses in the long-term.

<sup>9</sup> The survey was conducted to find out the opinions of married female employees on the government's Enhanced Marriage & Parenthood Package introduced in 2008, as well as the impact it has on them. The results are based on 230 respondents, collated over three weeks.



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The fact that we have one of the fastest ageing populations and one of the lowest birth rates in the world did not come about out of thin air. When you put the two factors together what we really have to do is, on the one hand, create an environment so that Singaporeans, male and female, young or old, can work longer in good jobs and, on the other hand, create an environment that is pro-family so that Singaporeans can get married, have children and happy families. When we talk of children, we talk of mothers, we talk of parents, we talk of the larger community. 

Lim Swee Say  
NTUC Secretary-General, and  
Minister in the Prime Minister's Office

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## Chapter 5

# the momentum forward

## Snapshot

The business cases that we have seen in this book have highlighted that work-life harmony can serve as a critical business strategy that can boost the morale of an organisation's workforce and improve the overall performance.

With insights and reflections into work-life practices in Singapore and in the Scandinavian countries, these lessons give us an impetus to explore how we can improve further in these aspects.

There are already some programmes in place to encourage employers to make their work environment more pro-family. These initiatives can be revisited and further fine-tuned with the needs and culture of Singapore's working class.

### Winning Formulae

The three countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have a common vision, that is, to provide access for men and women to the labour market and there is a high degree of consensus with clear and strong public policies in place to support the pro-family work environment.

There is also a high level of state intervention in these Nordic countries and at the same time, employers practise good corporate culture by creating flexible work options for their employees. This Scandinavian example highlights the importance of adequate and effective support provided by the state to help women stay in work.



*The launch of TAFEP further affirmed the tripartite partners' commitment towards fair employment practices.*

Singapore has not taken on the route of legislation in urging companies to implement family-friendly policies. Hence, in this regard, there is room for more coordination within the various agencies that implement work-life policies.

In some of the Nordic countries, there is even a Ministry of Gender Equality. In Singapore, however, this idea seems to be too far fetched. Furthermore, it may not be necessary to take a legislative approach; adopting a persuasive approach can also be effective. While legislation can help to achieve short-term effectiveness, the wider need to adopt a pro-family culture may not completely be rooted in employers. It is through constant persuasion, engagement and consultation with the various agencies and unions that companies can be duly educated and appreciate the advantages that work-life initiatives can trigger for their businesses.

While there may be some differences in how Singapore and the Scandinavian nations deal with the concept of work-life policies, there are also similar approaches in both the systems. While there may be a lack of laws on work-life harmony, there is the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices, promoted by the Tripartite Alliance on Fair Employment Practices. Jointly funded by Ministry of Manpower, Singapore National Employers Federation and National Trades Union Congress, the

TAFEP centre provides assistance and advice to employers and workers of fair employment practices. This tripartite structure keeps a watch on employers who discriminate against female employees.

Creating enhanced awareness through constant engagement with tripartite partner is another possible step; this reach should extend beyond the corporate offices and stretch into education institutions. This is one way by which a pro-family culture can be weaved into the mindsets of Singaporeans.

While there must be a greater push on companies that have not embarked on promoting work-life harmony, others that are already providing pro-family work environment should be recognised; more importantly, there should be platforms for these forerunners to share their best practices with others, serving as a form of encouragement to other employers.

There are some companies which have implemented some form of work-life initiatives but are not able to sustain them in the long run. Many women seemingly dropped out of employment because the flexible-work arrangements were inadequate. These companies can leverage on technological advancements to support flexible work arrangements that will be more manageable in the long term.



*Companies can leverage on technological advancements to support flexible work arrangements.*

### **All On Board**

Work-life strategies are important to all businesses, be it a Multi-National Corporation or Small- and Medium-sized Enterprise, as these practices impact employee performance and business growth. Therefore, there can also be more guidance and assistance for small- and medium-sized companies which may find it more challenging to manage the costs of implementing

work-life strategies. These companies should not be left behind in this journey.

Industry associations, unions, and human resource practitioners should come forward to share their challenges and discuss best practices on regular sessions. Employers should be exposed to best practices from a wide spread of sectors and be able to pick up learning points that best fit their organisation's culture.

### Childcare And Beyond

Generous childcare leave and sufficient quality childcare centres have also proven to make a difference in the Scandinavian countries, although there is a trade off on a higher income tax for the people. Similarly in Singapore, it may be useful to improve on the standards and accessibility of childcare facilities.

Childcare centres in Norway are all accredited based on mandatory standards and parents receive 80 per cent subsidies for both public and private centres. The country recognises that quality childcare includes having both gender models within the childcare centres and therefore, even push for more males to take on roles to be childcare teachers in order to shape the mindset of children on gender equality at a young age.

In Singapore, there is still a stereotype on childcare teachers' positions and there is a long way ahead in transforming this scene. The Ministry of Education is also investing resources and efforts in changing this perception. Also, in the Nordic countries, both men and women enjoy equal parental benefits, but the take-up rate for men is still low. In Singapore, males are increasingly sharing parenting roles and household duties with the



*Male childcare teachers will help shape the mindset of the children on gender equality at a young age.*

partners. But this effort by men must be on-going, and pick up pace, so that working women will have sufficient support to strike a balance between work and family.

Beyond a slew of benefits, incentives and leave provisions, a more holistic approach is fundamental to improve fertility rates. With efforts to improve childcare needs aside and while government measures focus on the issues of procreation and better benefits to promote procreation, there is also a large number of women who are saddled with the responsibility of taking care of elderly parents.

Thus, work-life measures must also ideally address ways to help people take care of their elderly family members. This is where Family Care Leave can come into place, a broader concept of Childcare Leave which Singaporeans are familiar with.

### **A Stronger Pro-Family Future**

Ensuring that there are work-life policies put in place is critical in retaining women in the workforce. Once these women drop out of the workforce to attend to family needs, it is a lot more difficult to get them back in and one way to help them is through enhanced family-friendly measures. Many women do not have children because they are forced to choose between starting a family and building a career. When they cannot cope with both, they are driven to make difficult decisions. Good work-life practices make a great difference here.



*If everyone helps around the house, the woman can return to the workforce and help supplement the family income.*

NTUC Women's Development Secretariat has conscientiously built up its efforts to promote work-life harmony in Singapore. Even with one of the world's worst economic crisis, there has been no let up in pursuing work-life programmes as the country strives to inculcate more gender equality in parenting responsibilities and to encourage mothers to remain in the workforce. Tripartite partners should continue to work

in tandem for more concerted synergies in promoting work-life harmony amongst unionised and non-unionised, multi-national and small- and medium-sized companies. These efforts will also create a more conducive environment for more babies.

### Discovering Breakthroughs

There is no one size that fits all, hence, while Singapore learns from the success models of Scandinavia, it should leverage on its unique strength of tripartism here to bring its standards on work-life practices to a greater level. Companies should be encouraged to take bold steps to implement creative work-life measures to suit their business needs.

As we keep trying new possibilities and new innovations in exploring and introducing work-life strategies, this journey in creating spaces for work and life will keep unwinding in various shades of colours. And at each of these stages, there will be hopes for happier employees, happier bosses, happier families and happier lives.



*Work-life balance means there is time for work, time for self and time for family.*



# Acknowledgments

**NTUC Women's Development Secretariat thanks...**

## **Embassies**

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Embassy of Sweden

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PeopleSearch Pte Ltd  
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Seacare Manpower Services Private Limited  
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