

Do companies in Spain value Diversity and work/life practices?

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Globalisation is challenging the sustainable development of institutions and its peoples all over the world. As Diversities become the true nature of the global and local scenarios, companies turn to their Human Capital as their critical resource to increase innovation and creativity; to reduce structural and operational costs; to improve corporate profits. Today and in the future, Managing Diversity is a corporate commitment and strategy that organisations must develop to achieve results through the integration and satisfaction at work of their Human Capital to leverage their contribution to corporate objectives. Work/Life programs are therefore a cornerstone of the new way of managing companies and its peoples. Integrating diverse employees to successfully approach and service diverse clients, diverse suppliers, diverse shareholder, diverse stakeholders in the different parts of the world / markets / sectors; become a business imperative.

The European Institute for Managing Diversity in collaboration with Dr Carmen Dominguez, head of the Department of Sociology and Organisational Analysis of the University of Barcelona, have conducted during 2003 the present research in the field of Diversity and Work/Life policies. During the years 2000 and 2001, the European Institute for Managing Diversity was commissioned by the European Union initiative ; Leonardo Da Vinci to carry out a research at European level under the title of "Diversity in Europe". The result of that project was a Case Based report that evaluated the attitude towards Diversity awareness and Work/Life practices of companies in different European countries.

Research objectives

The present research aims at monitoring the findings featured in the "Diversity in Europe" report..

- That is, monitoring the awareness and level of implementation of Diversity policies and Work/Life practices of companies operating in Spain. The report includes comparative information regarding the behaviour of companies operating in other European countries and the United States.

And at the same time analysis of the report includes:

- The Work/Life policies implemented by companies based in and outside of Spain.
- The availability of Work/ Life vendors that operate in Spain to give support to companies when implementing Work / Life schemes .
- The degree to which companies in Spain tend to outsource their Work /Life programs.
- The attitude of corporations in Spain tend to optimise Work/ Life programs in their company.

Methodology:

The research addresses two main segments of organizations. On one hand a sample of 400 companies, either operating in Spain or abroad (United States and Europe), that includes all sectors of activities: such as financial services, automobiles, consulting, telecommunication. Companies recognised for their strategic management of Human Resources. And on the other hand, a sample of 100 Work /Life service vendors, with headquarters in Spain and abroad; that offer Work /Life support schemes to companies for their employees.

Questionnaires were sent and collected by e-mail, post, telephone and in personal interviews

Highlights of the results from Companies

Of the companies that participated in the project:

- 27% of the leading companies in Spain replied that Work / Life balance is actually not a priority
- 71% of the companies operating abroad offer a Work / Life package of 13 /18 different Work/Life schemes to their employees
- 18% of the companies in Spain that participated in the research offer between 15/25 Work/Life schemes to their employees, while 73% offer less than 10.
- the priorities in the design and implementation of Work /Life schemes vary. While outside of Spain companies offer social oriented and care family care support, companies in Spain implement more support in education , home maintenance and leisure services to their Human Capital
- companies outside of Spain are more keen to contract an external vendors to implement their Work Life corporate programs and services.
- companies abroad measure Work / Life schemes by their contribution to corporate profits; while in Spain companies evaluate more employee satisfaction as well as the attitude of employees towards the company

Highlights of the results from Vendors

Out of the Work /Life Vendor companies that participated in the project:

- All of the vendors based outside of Spain are interested in expanding their services to other countries, mostly in Europe. None of the Spanish Work/Life service companies mentioned such goals.
- Abroad, vendors are more oriented towards providing consulting services (i.e. psychology, career planning, legal), and information support regarding elderly and child care.
- Spanish vendors are focussing more in education, support for the disabled ; and in home and entertainment services.
- Vendors abroad valued more: the contributions that Work/Life programs represent to their client companies ; employee integration and participation in corporate objectives; the quality of the working environment ; and the impact on innovation and creativity. Spanish vendors focus more on the contributions to create loyalty and trust; reduction of absenteeism, problem solving and improvement of interpersonal relations
- In both groups all vendors carry out a preliminary research and use similar methodologies when giving service to companies
- The most frequent techniques used by Spanish vendors to measure return of Work/Life programs. Customer satisfaction survey, and company reports regarding the level of achievement of corporate objectives?
- More foreign rather than Spanish vendors measure their programs' results. In general customer satisfaction, service variables, and company reports are the most used techniques.
- Vendors abroad measure their programs results more than their Spanish counterparts. Overall, the most frequent techniques used to measure return of Work/Life programs are customer satisfaction survey, service volume, and company reports regarding the level of achievement of corporate objectives.

Conclusions and final words

From the information obtained by this qualitative research, the following features can be highlighted ..

Work/ Life Services as a Business

It is clear that present Work /Life services still have a low market demand in Spain, for vendors. There is a significant gap between the demand for Work/Life services from Spanish based companies, and the high level of demand from international companies particularly from US based firms

Only 73% of leading companies in Spain replied positively that Work /Life is an interesting policy and tool for their company. It is also important to note that the awareness has varied from a 1% reported in the "Diversity in Europe" qualitative research carried out by the EIMD in 2000-2001; There is a major evolution in the awareness of Diversity and Work/Life balance policies in Spain.

Another relevant aspect is that while most companies in Spain provide such services without external support to their employees; in other western countries the situation is the opposite. International firms tend to outsource Work/Life program services to external vendors in order to expand their range of schemes offered to their Human Resources. The market behaviour shows, that in contrast with the situation abroad, most Spanish vendors are directing their services to private homes (one on one basis) rather than to companies for their employees. Vendors based outside of Spain on the other hand, focus their business strategy on corporations as clients, to give Work/Life balance support to their employees.

Services

The difference in the range of services offered to employees by Spanish based companies and those offered by companies based abroad, is outstanding.

Some schemes such as Information services (i.e. management training on work/ family balance, elderly and childcare centres and services, etc.) and Consulting services are offered more by companies and vendors abroad than in Spain. Other schemes however such as care services, especially in the area of education, and Home concierge services are more frequent in Spain. Several considerations have been mentioned to help analyse the reasons and meaning of such differences. However non really clarify the reason why in Spain, a country with a alarming ageing population and low birth rate, both vendors and enterprises are not addressing this issue as a priority.

The corporations need to develop tools to improve employee satisfaction and inclusion as a strategy to increase corporate results and achieve sustainable growth in the global scenario. And vendors need to develop a business strategy; as creating a client of companies, base increases exponentially their business volume.

Most of the companies abroad provide a similar high range of Work/ Life schemes to their employees. A minority of the Spanish companies provide a very high range of services to their employees, while the majority only offer a limited range of Work/Life programs.

Benefits

In general companies participating in this research, highly appreciate the benefits that Work/ Life balance programs have on company-employee relationship and on employee performance and inclusion in the work place.

Research and Measurement

While the research and measurement of the impact that Work Life programs have on companies, employees and homes with working parents, is a common practice among companies operating outside of Spain, measuring and evaluating results is less frequent in Spain. Measuring and evaluating methodologies are implemented by a minority of the companies located in Spain which participated in the research. However, the Spanish vendors do commit to such practices, and tend to start carrying out research and measurement activities when implementing Work /Life schemes for their clients.

On April 4th 2003, the Spanish Administration established a "certificate for companies that offer Work /Life schemes that help employees balance personal and profession life".

Yet major findings related to the behaviour of companies in Spain related to Work / Life policies show that Spanish organisations are far from contributing to the inclusive environment that the Spanish Administration and the European Union directives are promoting in order to develop more dynamic entrepreneurial activities; to create more new jobs; and to develop a better quality / equality labour environment

Companies in Spain are only recently implementing Work / Life balance policies as a corporate strategy rather than as a problems solving tool to address the new divers profile of the labour market.