

Work-life balance in the ICT sector

Step 4: Design a solid implementation plan

It is advisable to prepare an implementation plan for the rollout of work-life balance measures. This should include the methodology and timeline, as well as details about who will collect what data throughout the process. Regular monitoring sessions, for example through monthly steering-group meetings, can help the team evaluate progress and fine-tune objectives.

The implementation plan should be based on a preliminary gender analysis in order to provide a baseline for measuring the company's progress on improving gender equality. A gender analysis will identify existing inequalities within the organisation and provide financial arguments as to how mainstreaming policies will increase productivity. Work-life balance measures can form part of either a global gender mainstreaming policy or specific affirmative measures; but without a preliminary gender analysis, companies will not possess data showing these measures are needed and what to expect after implementation, including in terms of overall results.

Read: What is gender analysis?



Piloting initiatives on a small scale, for example in one department to begin with, appears to have worked in a number of organisations, including some ICT start-ups. Long-term benefits for an entire organisation can be achieved by identifying a motivated line manager and supporting them throughout the pilot. This will enable programme organisers to identify resistance to change and measure progress. Piloting an initiative does not disrupt the main line of business during the experimentation and feedback stages and, going forward, modifications to the initiative can be implemented quickly and easily.

Preventing disruption to business continuity is a major benefit of piloting a project – the organisation can continue with standard business operations and ensure quality output. This can also contribute to internal communication efforts, with employees taking part in the pilot acting as early adopters and work-life balance spokespersons.

Findings from pilot projects must be shared within the company, as well as with external stakeholders. This step should be clearly outlined in the communications plan.

However some organisations prefer to weave measures and policies into existing organisational practices and processes, as opposed to launching a pilot project. This can avoid internal conflict between departments.

A detailed and transparent communications plan is essential to success. Leadership or HR should provide information about equality in the workplace and promote family leave to support gender-equal participation in working life. This informs employees of the positive impact of work-life balance initiatives and how they can participate.

If communication is not handled skilfully, work-life balance might be considered a passing minority concern – a ‘flavour of the month’ exercise that is made available to only a few select groups. Communication efforts can take many forms, including work-life balance briefing sessions, employee memos, employee blogs and video blogs, lunchroom notices, company newsletters, intranet announcements, interviews, and news articles.

It is also important to involve men in the roll-out of work-life balance measures. This can be done through a variety of initiatives, for example through asking men in leadership posts to act as work-life balance and gender equality role models.

Performance rewards can also be an effective incentive for employees.

**Example: Careers with children - work-life balance innovation
Deutsche Telekom AG**

From 2011 until 2014 Deutsche Telekom in cooperation with the European academy for women in politics and business - Berlin conducted a pilot mentoring program "Careers with Children". This pilot targeted women managers who were about to take parental leave, were currently on parental leave, or had just returned from parental leave. As part of the project, experienced managers support new parents during the parental leave period. This includes tips on career development and advice on how to reconcile work and family life. New parents also receive training on work-life balance measures. The project aims to increase female representation in management positions. Following positive results the company decided to continue with the initiative. The second phase was held 2014 – 2016 and in 2017 it started its third phase. The most recent phases have been organised almost entirely independently by the company. The project has shown that it is a lack of support for parents and carers that holds back career development, not gender itself.

Communication must go both ways. Employees need an environment that allows them to bring concerns as well as proposals to the attention of management. Communication must be constant, which is why it forms an integral part of the business case. Without open avenues of communication, employees can become disgruntled and thus disengaged. They can even sabotage implementation efforts.

Training costs also need to be factored into the implementation plan. Work-life balance measures require a degree of organisational adaptation and may require employees to acquire new skills. For example learning how to manage staff who are taking parental leave or working remotely. Training can also revolve around gender awareness and ways of addressing gender stereotypes in the workplace. Unconscious-bias awareness training should be provided for recruiters in HR and those running selection days and interviews. Acquiring new skills may also entail training and workshops for personal-life management, which will help employees manage their own work-life balance. Such training sessions can focus on exercise, childcare, health, and preventing burnout. The costs of such training should be offset by improved employee wellbeing and organisational commitment.