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## WELL-BEING AND EQUALITY AT WORK

### RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AS DRIVING FORCES



“Työhyvinvointi” or well-being at work is a Finnish concept. It incorporates the entire life situation of employees in an holistic way, not just job satisfaction and a safe and stimulating working environment, but also the balance between career and private life, whatever that private life may include. [Monikko](#) is a research and development project that explores ideas and tests models which enhance the “Työhyvinvointi” concept. This EQUAL Development Partnership (DP) is proving that, to be complete, the concept must integrate gender equality and diversity into the workplace.

Monikko is an important component of the “Work/life balance research and development programme” of the [Finnish Institute’s of Occupational Health](#) (FIOH), whose aim is to examine the connections between management practices, employee satisfaction and productivity in an increasingly competitive and globalised world of work. Evidence is being gathered of the crucial role that employee well-being policies play in reconciling work and family life and also in company strategies for improved productivity and competitiveness. In her foreword to FIOH’s recent newsletter presenting the state of play in the Monikko project, Kaisa Kauppinen, Research Professor at FIOH and Director of the EQUAL DP highlights a trend that is already visible. *“Research evidence shows that in well-managed firms and organisations, employees typically enjoy a better work/life balance. Management practices associated with ‘good people management’, such as fostering talent and rewarding staff performance, are likely to be found in conjunction with good work/life balance practices: family-friendly policies, flexible working, shorter hours, working from home etc. In Finland, the newest innovations, for example, household and childcare services offered by the company, can be found in those companies which rank high on the ‘Great Place to Work’ list.”*

FIOH is a national institution with outstanding experience, which is involved in many relevant networks linking policy makers, managers, human resource staff, employers, trade unions and the research community, at both the national and European level. Thus, it is extremely well placed to disseminate its EQUAL achievements and to trigger social and political impact.

### A COMBINATION OF KEY AVENUES

Together with the Family Federation of Finland and two consultancies specialising in gender equality and diversity, FIOH is implementing five sub-projects which examine differences and similarities between the two sexes, regarding age, ethnicity and family situation. Most of these sub-projects are orchestrating research with the development of new approaches and methods to be used in enterprises and organisations.

## GENDER AND ... AGE, FAMILY SITUATION, ETHNICITY

The first sub-project studies stereotypes in working life are related to age and gender, as well as the so-called 'tacit knowledge', in the public sector, within a fire and rescue department, a hospital and seven schools. In particular, the researchers looked into the process of transferring the skills and experiences of older workers to younger employees. The research analyses the role of age and gender in the process of passing on this tacit knowledge. Work culture and its dynamics play a role, as the young people also possess tacit knowledge that is worth passing on.



The methods of studying and passing on tacit knowledge in organisations included focus group interviews and workshops. As a first step, competences and qualifications which are needed at work were identified. Group members explained what specific knowledge and skills were needed in their jobs and how these were acquired either through formal education or work experience. After completing this step, the group continued to consider how to pass on its tacit knowledge. It turned out that the most important way of doing this was through informal discussions with colleagues during the working day. This kind of knowledge sharing is only possible if there is enough time and space for discussion. It also demands direct interaction between people of different ages. For example, the firemen were familiar with the concept of tacit knowledge and due to their working shift, which last 24 hours, they often had time to talk with their workmates about best practices in their jobs. Nurses and teachers may not always have the same opportunity to share experiences at work. Even then, it seems obvious that knowledge sharing is more natural and extensive in settings where people work in teams and have time and space for interaction, which then also facilitates the use of the strengths of people of different ages. Once all the findings are complete, new tools for age management and well-being at work will be developed.



Another sub-project focuses on work, family and changing gender roles and has studied the issue in five enterprises, operating in economic sectors that predominantly employ either women or men. The findings revealed well known and but also surprising trends such as:

- As both parents move away from traditional gender roles and stereotypes, young fathers become more committed to looking after the interests of their children;
- Family friendliness in enterprises is not only connected to flexible work organisation and strategies for well-being on the job, but also to a climate where family issues are a natural part of the discussion amongst employees;
- Female dominance in the workplace favours a culture of discussion and this, in turn, seems to have an influence on male managers and employees;
- By contrast, in male domains, managers may consider a satisfying family life as important for the well-being of their staff. However, male dominance in the workplace counteracts family friendliness: the lack of a culture of discussions in which the family is an issue is considered by female employees as being restrictive;
- Practices that are determined to a large extent by the attitudes and behaviour of men cannot be totally eliminated from work environments because the workplace is important in defining and maintaining a sense of male identity.

According to the researchers, if companies want to develop family-friendly policies with a gender dimension, they should take account of the differences in workplace cultures and their different effect on women and men. This requires the development of new social patterns and ways of thinking that help to recognise and avoid restrictive attitudes and practices towards either sex.

## MEASURING AND ENHANCING DIVERSITY

The remits of three more sub-projects are closely connected, as they are all concerned with diversity. One of them is developing a Diversity Barometer, which is a tool to measure attitudes towards diversity in Finnish working life. Here diversity is defined as securing equality whilst considering peoples' differences in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, family situation, disability, religion, conviction and personality. In particular, the barometer, which is designed as

an Internet based survey, will target the business world and address a representative sample of 1000 companies, including SMEs as well as large corporations. Another target group is the personnel managers of Finnish municipalities and this will include a sample of 700 people.



The barometer is being developed in three stages. Firstly, Monikko organised a so-called Delphi expert panel to find out about the perspectives and ideas of Finnish experts on how diversity might develop from now to 2020. The people involved had worked with diversity issues in administration, science, the third sector and the media. The most significant result from the panel was that all experts expected that there would be much more diversity in Finland and that the number of immigrants would double by 2020. Immigrants now represent 3% of the population and

the largest groups come from Russia, Estonia, Sweden and Somalia. In the future, most immigrants are expected to arrive from the areas of the former Soviet Union and the new EU Member States. The experts also predicted significant changes in the value system of society. According to the forthcoming report on the panel's anticipated developments, families with children and the ageing population will be the focus of attention. Ari Haapanen, who is currently preparing the launch of the barometer, sums up some of the key points of the report that has been drafted by two other FIOH researchers. *"People will request working hours that are better tailored to their specific needs. And while sexual minorities will be able to improve their situation in the workplace, people with disabilities, and particularly those with mental health problems, will encounter difficulties. The experts see the necessity to enhance diversity in Finland, especially in terms of attitudinal changes and social climate. Finland should, they advise, invest in diversity education at school, improve legislation and immigration administration, make access to work permits easier and use positive discrimination."*

The results of the expert panel form the basis of the questionnaire, which is at the heart of the Diversity Barometer and is the second stage in its creation. It addresses the importance of the above aspects of diversity as well as their relevance to company policies such as recruitment, management and leadership, work/life balance, career development and corporate social responsibility. The second part explores the motivation for diversity management which may include securing a qualified workforce, customers' demand, corporate image, competitive advantage and ethical reasons. A last part measures attitudes through provocative statements. The outcome of the whole exercise will provide the input for the third and final stage, which is a round of interviews with representatives of enterprises. These interviews are meant to provide follow-up information on those good practices emerging from the barometer survey that can be incorporated in Monikko's mainstreaming strategies.

The recommendations of the Delphi expert panel are already being put into practice by the "Promoting Diversity and Equality in Enterprises" sub-project. Whilst supporting four pilot companies in using diversity management and empowering them to develop inclusive organisational cultures, it is establishing a workbook, tools and new models to promote diversity in the everyday life of companies.

Mainly research-oriented, the last project in this cluster studies multiculturalism in the work place with the aim of gaining a more focused picture of issues relating to the employment of immigrant women in Finland. In addition, an important part of the activities is dedicated to pooling good practices generated by immigrant projects. Findings point to the fact that Finnish employment policy for immigrants has mainly targeted refugees and asylum seekers, whereas the female immigrant population includes all types of women from highly qualified professionals to those who are illiterate. As little is known, generally, about the situation of these immigrant women, one of the outcomes will be a book presenting, for the first time, a broad picture of immigrant women's lives in Finland. Another first is a study on women from India, Nepal and Sri Lanka concentrating on a neglected group - the spouses of male professional migrants.



## DEVELOPING EQUALITY IN TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRIES



The sub-project with the most advanced activities aims to promote equality policies and find new methods of establishing desegregation in enterprises that focus on technology. Reflecting the recently reformed Finnish Act on Equality between Women and Men, [WOM Ltd](#), a consultancy specialising in gender equality issues, is supporting four companies in introducing equality planning as a way of complying with the requirements of this new law. The Act, passed in 2005, obliges Finnish companies and organisations employing more than 30 people to produce an annual gender equality plan, in consultation with staff representatives. According to the Act, the content of the plan should be primarily concerned with equal pay and other terms of employment. The plan must contain a gender equality assessment, measures for improving the situation, if necessary, and a review of the results of the previous year. Compliance with the Act is supervised by the Ombudsman for Equality who may bring unlawful practices before the Equality Board based at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. This Equality Board can request an employer to establish an equality plan and, if required, enforce its request with a financial penalty.

Sinikka Mustakallio is both the owner of WOM Ltd and the leader of this sub-project. Sinikka succeeded in bringing on board the key players in the country's technology sector including the [Technology Industries of Finland](#) (employers' organisation), the [Finnish Metalworkers' Union](#) and the [Union of Salaried Employees](#). These organisations helped to select enterprises from the major areas of the sector that are electronics and electro-technical engineering, mechanical engineering, the metal industry and ICT and persuaded four enterprises to join the EQUAL project as development partners.

[Planar Systems Inc](#), the Finnish branch and European headquarters of a US-based multinational company is one of these enterprises. Operating in highly competitive global markets, Planar Systems manufactures flat panel displays for industrial and medical use, as well as high tech home theatre equipment. Worldwide, the enterprise employs 600 people and the Finnish plant has 155 members of staff, 62% of whom are men and 38% women. For Jarmo Salminen, the Managing Director of Planar Systems in Europe, *"the reason for joining the EQUAL DP was 'strictly business'."* He is convinced that people are the most important asset of any company. *"To compete in a global market",* he says *"you must, of course, ensure that you have the latest machinery and equipment but, for me, creating a climate where people can give of their best, is a top priority."* Obviously Planar employees in Finland appreciate this corporate culture, as 60% have been in their jobs for more than 10 years. *"You can stick to this kind of humane culture as long as you keep up with the 'figures' requested by headquarters. Our figures are perfect, as we are profitable here,"* he explains. Jarmo admits, however, that before undertaking the survey to assess the equality performance, he had not been aware of the existing disparities. For instance, amongst the 14 people-managers who have a responsibility for the work teams in the enterprise, there were only two women.

Human resources manager Kaisu Segler is leading the process of gender equality planning at Planar Systems and she appreciates the support offered by Monikko. Together with Sinikka Mustakallio, she took the company through all the stages of equality planning.

### ▪ **Step 1: Setting up an Equality Team**

Kaisu contacted all the different groups of personnel in the company and informed them about the endeavour. She made sure that these categories of employees were represented on the team which was set up at the end of 2005 and comprises four women and three men, all of different ages. It studied the theoretical background of equality planning and embarked on a first discussion about practical steps that might be necessary.

### ▪ **Step 2: Surveying the gender and equality situation**

Sinikka's advice was *"Do a survey, ask the employees,"* and so a questionnaire was given to all members of staff. It contained 58 questions which focused on equal opportunities in general, vertical and horizontal desegregation, discrimination on the basis of gender and age, sexual harassment, career development and diversity. In total, 74% of the staff completed the questionnaire anonymously - 82% of the female and 66% of the male employees. Male

managers, who had believed that Planar Systems had no equality problems at all, found some results quite astounding. For instance, although no case of sexual harassment had ever been officially reported, some women mentioned in their responses that they had experienced such harassment. Also, despite the fact that there were no gender pay gaps in the same job categories, women thought they earned less than their male peers, whereas the men believed in equal pay.

- **Step 3: Specifying the areas for equality promotion**

Based on the outcomes of the survey, the Management and Equality Team agreed on several topics that would form the core of Planar Systems' equality plan. These included a zero tolerance policy to combat gender based and sexual harassment, more transparency related to pay, recruitment and promotion as well as making equality an integral and proactive part of the company's leadership culture.

- **Step 4: Planning targets and measures**

To involve employees as much as possible, regular information meetings for both the members of the different work teams and for the people-managers will now be organised. The idea is to encourage everybody, and particularly people working on the shop floor, to speak up and make their contributions which will be valued and recognised in an egalitarian way. Improved and regularly up-dated statistics on incomes will provide more clarity about job and pay classification and are expected to overcome any suspicion of pay discrimination. Besides encouraging women to report any incidence of harassment to their supervisors or the HR department, sources of information and advice will also be available in the workplace. Certain employees will be trained as resource people who can act discreetly, whilst supporting the victim and undertaking the necessary steps in implementing the sanctions that have been established in the equality plan. Finally, the recruitment and promotion of "diversity groups" will be accelerated. These groups include women, older workers and ethnic minorities all of whom are underrepresented in certain jobs and/or levels of the company hierarchy.

- **Step 5: Deciding on those responsible for implementation**

Backed by the top management, the Equality Team is taking things forward by drawing up a detailed equality plan that is tailored to the needs of both company and employees. This plan will cover a period of two years.

- **Step 6: Planning follow-up and information**

After these two years, the results will be evaluated and any necessary corrections, new targets and measures will be implemented through a follow-up plan. The company sees equality planning as a process that is already now resulting in a win-win situation for both the employers and the employees. *"We have learned that people have a personal interest in equality work. The survey was a real eye-opener. We have gained in knowledge about our staff's perception of equality and well-being in the workplace",* says Kaisu Segler, *"accommodating their needs and making the necessary changes will help us increase productivity and eventually have an impact on the income of the company. Our participation in the EQUAL project has enabled a sharing of ideas and experiences with other companies, which has produced new insights."*

Asked what advice she would give her peers in other businesses and economic sectors, Kaisu lists several key points: *"A survey is a must. Take your time to collect the information. We spent almost a year to prepare, implement and evaluate our survey. Involve interested employees at all stages of equality planning. And ask for help, like we received, thanks to EQUAL."*

## **WORKING TOWARDS A LASTING IMPACT**

During its remaining lifespan, the sub-project has still to analyse the usefulness of equality plans as tools for making gender equality a reality and produce a guidebook entitled "Equality Planning in Technology Organisations". However, it will dedicate the majority of its time to mainstreaming activities. The launch pad in this respect was a seminar organised in autumn 2006 which targeted other technology enterprises. The idea was to spotlight the four pilot companies since, for their peers, they would be the most credible advocates of equality planning. The Monikko team had expected around 70 participants, but 170 came and more were on the waiting list. All segments of the technology sector were represented and *"the most significant thing was that almost all*

*participants were men”, says Sinikka Mustakallio. She underlines that “they all stayed for the full day, listening to, and discussing with, our pilot companies. These managers and business owners were keen to learn about the process and details of equality planning. We expect that equality plans will be developed in many more companies and our guidebook will help them to produce their plans.”*

Anja Oksa, the Head of Equality and Cultural Affairs at the [Finnish Metalworkers Union](#) (FMU) sees Monikko’s approach as being completely in line with her union’s gender equality priorities. FMU has 160.000 members and 20% of these are women. *“Only between 20 and 30% of the companies in the technology sector have so far established equality plans. Gender segregation is high in our sector and in most of its companies. So, producing equality plans and overcoming the gender gaps are at the top of our agenda.”* Equality planning, she argues, is also paramount in protecting women workers with no or low formal qualifications from unemployment, if their jobs are transferred to countries where wages and production costs are lower. Thus, equality plans should contain measures for the training and up-skilling of women, particularly those from the older generation, who did not have the chance to acquire the kind of educational credentials that are gained by young women today.

According to Anja, the level of cooperation that has been achieved by the three social partner organisations in EQUAL represents a huge step forward. The fact that the two unions and the employers’ organisation have joined forces to work on gender equality is a success in itself, but it is also likely to have a lasting impact on future collective bargaining and the strengthening of equality planning throughout the industry. Anja, who has many years of experience as shop steward and trade union secretary for gender equality, is convinced that the technology sector has a lot to lose if it does not value women’s skills and their role in the workplace: *“Workplaces would be healthier and more productive if there were a better balance of women and men.”*

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