

## How current issues around Corporate Social Responsibility and Work Life Balance may affect Organisational Culture and Leadership: lessons learned from local, national and trans-national projects on Social Responsibility

### Abstract

The ESF project that I am evaluating is starting to produce some valuable and innovative tools and examples of good practice, some of which is being developed by the UK projects, and some is coming out of transnational working with Slovaks, Catalonians and Italians.

Interactive decision making tools that help organisations accommodate ideas of flexible working, and guides to explain the business case for Corporate Social Responsibility, are being prepared to support proposals for policy change at national and EU levels.

The transnational partner countries are all at different levels of preparedness and this may offer an interesting comparison on attitudes.

### Introduction

#### Equal

As many of you are aware, Equal is an ESF funding stream that was set up in 2005 to help member states to meet the “Lisbon objectives” of increased employment across Europe. These objectives included an overall employment rate of 70% by 2010, and with a specific target of a 60% rate for female employment to be achieved by that date.

Unlike many ESF projects, Equal was not totally centred on beneficiary numbers, (e.g. 327 unemployed women aged 21 – 28 gaining NVQs in postal code areas B35 and B36) this was more about finding ways that worked for specific groups of workers in specific circumstances.

So Equal funding was made available for projects designed to move the EU forward in meeting the Lisbon Agenda, and four Equal projects were set up within the Birmingham / West Midlands area. Each project has a number of smaller projects being trialled within it, and is also part of a wider Trans-national project. The purpose of the trans-national programmes is gain greater understanding of the realities of the contemporary European labour market; to allow experimentation to occur; and test out potential new developments that if applied more widely will help the EU to meet the goals set in its Lisbon guidelines.

CSR – what is it?

Corporate Social Responsibility was discussed by the Commission in a Communication on 22nd March 2006.<sup>1</sup> The Communication defined corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a concept where “companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations on a voluntary basis.” The Communication stressed that “an approach involving additional obligations and administrative requirements for business risks being counter-productive and would be contrary to the principles of better regulation.” Hence, the very firm emphasis that “CSR is fundamentally about voluntary business behaviour.”

Smaller companies and not-for-profit groups tend to use the term “Organisational Social Responsibility” to describe their activities.

CSR covers a wide variety of aspects of being a responsible organisation: as an employer, a purchaser, a provider, a neighbour and a member of society. This creates a number of checkpoints where a responsible business owner can consider their relationship with others.

**Social :** this covers Lifelong Learning for the workforce, genuine attempts to improve and sustain stakeholder relationships, managing diversity, improving quality of life (through work life balance, flexible working and healthy workplaces)

**Environmental :** covers the prudent use of energy, having regard to natural resources, waste management, and influencing the built environment.

**Economic :** this covers the protection of intellectual capital, investing in people, continual improvement, stakeholder relationships, understanding the business case for good quality and customer satisfaction.

**Employer :** a good employer will already have Investors in People, and a commitment to lifelong learning, they will be managing diversity, and helping the workers to reach a balance.

**Work Life Balance** (with all the difficulties that the phrase includes) fits into CSR as it is an aspect of the responsible organisation, so employers would already be providing family friendly, flexible working, and a commitment to coaching, mentoring and developing employees

WLB has different meanings to our transnational partners – Southern Europeans have flexible working and paternity leave legislation, but the culture often moves against parents wanting to opt for a change in working patterns.

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<sup>1</sup> Implementing the Partnership for Growth and Jobs: Making Europe a Pole of Excellence on Corporate Social Responsibility. Communication from the European Commission COM(2006) 136. 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2006

## Adjust the Balance

One of the West Midlands Equal projects, Adjust the Balance, sought to address specifically the issues of employer engagement with Work Life Balance and corporate social responsibility; research and development of new ideas, and creating a qualification, a Foundation Degree in Work Life Balance with Staffordshire University. Funding was channelled to over 30 projects looking at older and younger workers, Work Life Balance in the South Asian Communities of Birmingham, preparing young people for work, issues affecting employees with disabilities, women returners. It was also used to assist employers to help their employees with work placed stress, introducing healthy workplace programmes and even using fitness coaches at work as a way of engaging men in learning.

## Transnational Partners and outputs

This Transnational partnership is called Equilibrium, with partners from Slovakia (Silver Heads Club from Bratislava), Italy (Store), Spain (Ressort based in Barcelona) and Adjust the Balance from the West Midlands. Further details of the work and outputs are on [www.equal-equilibrium.com](http://www.equal-equilibrium.com)

The purpose of Equilibrium is to support Employers and Employees towards implementing better working practices in the themes of

- Work Life Balance (WLB)
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- Flexible Working Forms (FWF)

Partners achievements at national and local level:

### Silver Heads Club

- research on FWF among employers
- training for people from target group (ICT, Accounting, Individual training)
- mainstreaming on national level

### Store

- Booklets on sustainable development on a local level
- Workshops on creating social enterprises
- Charter of Values for social enterprises
- Guide lines for social enterprises' implementation
- Research on CSR diffusion among citizens
- Social points: services desks

### Ressort

- Tools specifically designed for SMEs
- Individualised approach in the assistance to the SMEs participating in the project

- Identification of good practices as the best way to raise awareness amongst the rest of SMEs
- Use the Ressort website as the main tool for information and communication CSR news, tools and documents and project achievements.
- Raised awareness about CSR among local authorities and SMEs participating in the project

#### Adjust the Balance

- Considerably raised profile of WLB and CSR
- Developed a foundation degree in WLB
- Successfully developed a network of new women entrepreneurs
- Work in progress: Ongoing research into flexible working practices affecting people with disabilities and different cultures

#### Outputs from the workshops on Flexible Working Forms, Corporate Social Responsibility, Work Life Balance

- Interactive Business Tool for employers to test flexible working forms
- Shared Glossary of Terms relating to Flexible Working
- Case Studies of good practice on Flexible Working and WLB
- “Top Tips” booklets on CSR and Equality & Diversity
- Research into the changing role of men in work and family life
- Employer Awards in WLB and CSR
- Female entrepreneurs’ website
- Policy evaluation studying the impact of Lisbon objectives and EU employment guidelines / targets

Additional transnational visits -  
 Barcelona, New Uses of Time  
 Benevento, Balancing Business

Last December the Adjust the Balance partnership held a Symposium at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham, and brought together over 500 employers, entrepreneurs, policy makers and practitioners to discuss aspects of Corporate Social Responsibility. This event will be repeated this coming December 11<sup>th</sup> and ECLO members are warmly invited to attend..

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