

FAMILY AUDIT CERTIFICATION IN TRENTO, ITALY: A GOOD PRACTICE IN THE FIELD OF RECONCILIATION OF WORK, PRIVATE AND FAMILY LIFE WITH A FOCUS ON BENCHMARKING - ITALY

Brief abstract:

The Family Audit Certification was initiated in 2008 by the Italian Province of Trento, Agency for Family, Birth and Youth Policies. This regional project on certification of companies through Family Audits commenced in 2012, following a national trial. The Family Audit is based on a well-developed methodology. After carrying out an Audit, each organisation develops a three-year Family Work-Life Balance Plan with actions and measures that the organisation plans in six areas (work organisation, work-family balance culture, communication, fringe benefits and services, family district, new technologies). 111 organisations have been involved in the Family Audit process, (44 public, 67 private) – 88 have received the Family Audit Certificate (benefitting 35,000 workers). It has led to a network of stakeholders (unions, employers family and social organisations, research organisations etc.) helping to promote awareness. The awarded organisations are listed on the Family Audit website.

The entire Family Audit process is monitored for a relatively long period of time. A study of the impact of work-life balance plans from a sample of 18 participating organisations showed the tangible benefits of carrying out Family Audits; another study showed the positive impact of reconciliation of work and family life within the organisation and across the region. The practice is transferable, but the costs of the Family Audit process might become an issue in times of economic crisis.

Description:

The policy context for the Family Audit process can be found in the Family Policy Intervention Plan approved in 2004 and the White Paper on Family and Birth (2011) both of which aim to qualify the Trentino Region as “family-friendly” oriented territory close to the interest and needs of its citizens. The family policy set up by the Autonomous Province of Trento counts many specific interventions promoting not only social aid but also the well-being of families and relies on cooperation between government and local councils, as well as networking of all social actors, profit and non-profit associations.

The community becomes a “friend of the family” thanks to the “Family in Trentino” brand name. The logo is granted to those private and public structures (such as municipalities, museums, restaurants, hotels, etc.) aiming to implement new initiatives and new services for resident and transient families. The brand name is granted by a committee formed by the provincial executive body and according to specific sector standard criteria. The organisations that have obtained the brand name are listed on the websites: www.trentinofamiglia.it and www.familyintrentino.it.

The Family Audit certification was first initiated in 2008 at the local level in Trentino, a frontier land that lies in the heart of the Alps, mid-way between two of the highly developed areas in Europe: the Po valley and Bavaria (the area includes about half a million inhabitants – less than 1 % of the Italian population). It is led by the Department of Family Policies at the Autonomous Province of Trento. In 2012, the Family Audit has been spread nationwide by the Autonomous Province of Trento thanks to the national trial approved by the Presidency of the Council of Ministries – Department for Family Policies of the Minister for International Cooperation and Integration. The possible funding of a second national trial is under consideration by the Italian Government.

The Family Audit has drawn on the experience of the “*Audit Beruf und Familie*” introduced in Germany in 1995 and similar experiences in Austria and the Italian Autonomous Province of Bolzano. The methodology was adapted to the characteristics of the local territory.

The measure was targeted at public/private companies and institutions and its objective was to adopt or improve human resources policies for work-life balance, with particular attention given to the time devoted to work and family life. The specific aims and objectives are:

- a) For the employee: to have the possibility to choose to work in an organisation which opts for work-life balance policies that result in a positive working environment at an organisational level, and on a human resources level the employee's motivation and satisfaction is increased creating more productive and supportive work relationships.
- b) For the entity company/public institution, association, group or any other organisation that implement the Family Audit Certification: increasing the quality of the relationship between personal life and work is fundamental to raise the quality of employees' work performance, to obtain more effective productivity, to reduce absenteeism and turn-over, and to decrease gender differences in relation to family responsibilities.
- c) For the territory: improving the sense of community and cooperation in order to provide a better basis for social responsibility as this helps the community, workers and their families to overcome daily difficulties.

The process of certification is a management tool that promotes cultural and organisational change within commercial or public-sector organisations and allows for the adoption of policies for human resources management geared towards improving the wellbeing of employees and their families while furthering the organisational mission. The Family Audit process lasts three and a half years: 6 months for auditing and 3 years for the adoption of the internal Work-Life Balance Plan. Once the process is complete and the certification obtained, the entity is allowed to use the brand name Family Audit and furthermore can decide to extend the programme for 3 years.

The entire Family Audit process is monitored by two external certified professionals: a Consultant and an Evaluator who are both qualified by the Certification Body – the Autonomous Province of Trento and listed in the Public Consultant or Evaluator Family Audit Register. The Consultant supports the implementation of the Family Audit process, specifically designing the internal survey and the Work-Life Balance Plan. The role of the Evaluator is to verify whether the organisation is implementing the Family Audit according to the "Guidelines".

The method and the implementation of the Family Audit standard are illustrated in the "Guidelines". (Provincial Law nr. 1/2011 and "Guidelines" approved by the Provincial Council of Trento - sanction n. 1364/2010 <http://www.familyaudit.org/?q=node/23>).

The process starts with an internal check-up of the organisation to acquire knowledge of the workers needs and expectations. There are various methods to adopt the standard:

- identification of a Family Audit Representative within the organisation;
- internal Working Group initially supported by the external Consultant;
- internal survey to identify workers' care obligations;
- progress evaluation of the Family Audit carried out by the external evaluator;
- Family Audit Advisory Board to evaluate the quality of the work and issue the Family Audit certificate and authorise the use of the brand name.

The Advisory Board is composed of representative from the institutional, academic and economic sector, associations responsible for the protection of the collective interests and family associations, as well as a representative of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministries – Department for Family Policies of the Minister for International Cooperation.

The HR Data Survey is the tool that gives the picture on the composition of the employees' status within the organisation, which is updated annually. Thanks to this analysis, it is possible to acquire indicators used to identify the characteristics of each employee such as gender, qualifications, position, but also information on how human resources are managed i.e. type of contract, average age, care needs, absence, leave, career progression, flexibility, turn-over, training courses, etc.

The Certification Body, the Autonomous Province of Trento, extracts a synthesis and elaborates the data according to work-family balance indicators. The synthesis is published on the Family Audit platform in the reserved area (see: www.familyaudit.org).

The other tool that each organisation develops is called internal Work-Life Balance Plan. The plan contains actions and measures that the organisation intends to run during the three-year process. In order to finalise the Work-Life Balance Plan, an internal survey within the organisation is conducted through workshops and the support of the external Consultant.

The framework within the Work-Life Balance Plan is arranged in 6 macro-areas divided in 11 fields:

Work Organisation:

1. time scheduling;
2. work process;
3. work place: telecommuting, decentralised work, etc.

Work-Family Balance Culture:

4. expertise of management;
5. development of the human resources managing the work-family balance policy as: equal opportunities, maternity and leaves, etc.

Communication:

6. finding new tools for internal and external communication;

Fringe Benefit and Services:

7. financial aid: bonus schemes, insurance, etc.
8. family services: medical health support, counselling, family support during school breaks, canteen, use of company's equipment, time-saving services, parental support, etc.

Family District:

9. reorientation of organisation's services according to the Family District objectives;
10. corporate social responsibility;

New Technologies:

11. orientation to ITC services: using new technologies to optimise the work time both for the employees and the organisation.

The efficiency of the Family Audit initiative is confirmed by the research (<http://www.familyaudit.org/?q=node/532>) and study conducted by the University of Bologna, due to be published shortly. The study has examined the impact of the measures of the Work-Life Balance Plans on a sample of 18 organisations and the repercussions on the work, family and private life of thousands of workers and their families. Thanks to the Family Audit process, the needs and requirements of each employee are taken into consideration according to gender and diversity applying specific actions such as time flexibility, telecommuting, part-time, use of inclusive language in business documents, time bank, and customised work schedule. The main achievements of the measure are:

For the certification body:

- Up to now, 111 organisations have been involved in the Family Audit process, 44 of which are public and 67 private. A total of 88 organisations have obtained the Family Audit Certificate is 88, which also includes organisations involved in the local and national trial. Over 35,000 workers have benefited. (<http://www.familyaudit.org/?q=elenco-organizzazioni>).

- As a consequence a network of cooperation and interaction has been developed among social actors, public, institutional and private entities, family, social and trade associations, trade unions, research centres and other organisations.

For the organisation:

- Active participation of employees in the internal analysis is fundamental to the systemic evaluation carried out by the Family Audit process.
- The Family Audit promotes an innovative cultural and managerial approach to human resources and is coherent with the aims of corporate social responsibility.
- The systemic analysis during the Family Audit process results in management and cultural changes and a greater management engagement with the life of employees.
- Monitoring of the data during the Family Audit process stimulates management to be more conscious of the values underpinning their organisation.
- Increased employees satisfaction and the efficiency of the different actions introduced by the Family Audit process.
- The Family Audit has led to a notable decrease in absenteeism from work for health issues and an increase in general employee wellbeing.

The Family Audit is continuously evaluated during the 4 year period. An annual evaluation of all the documents and a visit to the organisation are made by the evaluator. Evaluators are experienced professionals who are accredited by the Family Audit Advisory Board and are enrolled in the public register of the evaluators. Overall, the Family Audit Advisory Board checks on the progress of the fulfilment of the measures contained in the Work-Life Balance Plan.

With reference to the national trial, an additional tool of analysis for the global Family Audit process is the semi-annual and annual report provided to the Board of the Department for Family Policies of the Minister for International Cooperation and Integration.

The Certification Body also provides a monthly report that monitors the development of the Family Audit process among all the organisations, broken down by private-public sectors and the many company categories. The Certification Body under the Autonomous Province of Trento works through an operating structure (composed of 8 people belonging to the Agency for Family, Birth and Youth Policies) and the support of the Advisory Board.

The Family Audit initiative has a number of innovative aspects: it introduces family-friendly measures in line with the needs and expectations of employees and thus represents a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach; the *Work-Life Balance Plan* and its constant monitoring stimulate quick changes within organisations; and a common information platform (www.familyaudit.org) makes the data available in open-source format.

The main success factors of the measure are that the Family Audit certification produces benefits to the employees – both men and women – and the organisation itself. Two of the most notable include the wellbeing of the employee in managing work and private life and benefits to company productivity.

The Family Audit certification provides advantages to the certificate holders in giving them access to public funding via tendering and competition, and for the company it is a tool for organisational improvement.

The Family Audit initiative is transferable because of its adaptability to different regional contexts. The Italian example demonstrates (i) good governance and knowledge of the local environment, (ii) a broad cooperation network, and (iii) its competent Certification Body plays a crucial role in the success of the initiative. Despite this cultural resistance is still present within some organisations and represents one of the main challenges.

**Further information:**

Website: <http://www.familyaudit.org>

Data: http://www.familyaudit.org/?q=banca_dati

Guidelines: <http://www.familyaudit.org/?q=linee-guida>

Publications: <http://www.familyaudit.org/?q=node/23>

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