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**WORK LIFE BALANCE for WOMEN in AGE GROUP 25-40.**

**IS IT ACHIEVABLE?**



by

**DOROTHY MITCHELL**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for a B.A.**

**in Human Resources Management**

**National College of Ireland**

**Mayor Street, IFSC, Dublin 1**

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## **DECLARATION**

**I hereby certify that this material which I now submit for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of a B.A. in Human Resources Management is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.**

**Student No. 03255018**

Signed: Dewitt M. Miller

Date: 28.07.06.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Much research has been carried out on Work-Life Balance but little has been done on women only, for whom the balance is more critical than for men. Because of many factors the number of women in the work-place has increased rapidly in recent decades and a great many more are progressing up career paths while, in most cases, are still the main family carers. It was felt that a survey of these women was essential to get an idea of how they are juggling the various aspects of what they do, what they would like to have changed and whether a work-life balance can be achieved.

For this purpose a survey was carried out by questionnaire and three of the respondents were interviewed in depth. An intensive investigation was made of the literature and research on work-life balance and its importance to organisations and to society in general. Conclusions are presented and recommendations for further research with the expectation that in time family-friendly policies would become central to the thinking of organisations on the basis that a happy, healthy work force is a productive one.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Work-Life Balance is a state of being that all workers and their employers should be striving to achieve, to help employees to combine employment with their family life, caring responsibilities and personal and social life outside the workplace. There are a number of policies and working arrangements that facilitate employees to achieve a better balance. These include statutory entitlements such as maternity, carers and force majeure leave as well as non-statutory forms of organising work. A list of these flexible work arrangements can be seen in Appendix I.

Work-life balance applies to all, male and female, but is particularly a problem to women starting or caring for a family. The survey accompanying this dissertation has been restricted to the women of the age group 25-40. Younger women in 9-5 clerical work have less of a problem than those in an advancing career path.

Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) stated in a report in December 2000 that, if Ireland is to remain competitive in the future, there will need to be an increased business priority put on developing appropriate work-life balance policies. IBEC is also of the view that work-life balance policies won't work if they are implemented on a 'stand alone' basis, but need to be an integral part of the overall business strategy if they are to complement the need of the business for flexibility and help to attract and retain highly skilled and valuable employees. According to IBEC, if you are an employer in Ireland in 10 years time, work-life balance could be one of the most important issues on your agenda.

Our workforce is changing and our ways of working are developing all the time. New technology gives us new opportunities and new flexibilities. Looking at Ireland's demographics, we know that today over 50% of women are currently going onto third level education compared to only 40% of men. We must encourage these highly qualified people to continue to participate in our workforce. The 20 to 24 year old bracket is the most populated age group. In ten years time many of these people will be working parents. Employers know that in order to attract and retain the best and the brightest, they must continue to develop work-life balance policies.

In the past couple of decades there have been a number of very strong trends in the workplace that affect women. Computerisation has led to the decline of the traditional female secretary whose required skills were the largely physical ability at speed of typing and shorthand. Now the secretary needs to be highly qualified in the mental area of computer skills. She (occasionally, he) can get through large volumes of work so the number of jobs at their end of the scale has greatly diminished. Another area of low paid female employment that has almost disappeared is in manufacturing, particularly in the textiles industry. A combination of mechanisation and re-location abroad to cheaper-labour countries has almost obliterated this traditional female work area.

At the same time the number and percentage of females in the workforce has increased enormously, driven by three factors: the need for couples to meet the modern demands of

high mortgages and lifestyle, to make use of a higher level of education for women and the modern tendency for women to express themselves.

The dissertation is being presented with an extensive review and assessment in Chapter 2 of the literature dealing with organisations and their employees as well as women in the workplace. The first 3 sections cover the nature of women and their place in the modern environment of work. Section 4 investigates the subject in the context of the implications for society and the following 4 sections deal with the organisational context. The next 2 sections cover stress and work-life balance myths respectively. The final 4 sections of this chapter draw from research and surveys, the last 2 being from Ireland.

Methodology of the survey is explained in Chapter 3, with sections on surveys in general, the questionnaire design, interviews, sampling methods and finally on analysis by spreadsheet of the questionnaire. Chapter 4 elaborates on the findings, firstly in detail the results drawn from the answers to the questionnaires and then with information derived from the 3 follow-up interviews. The conclusions are presented in Chapter 5.

This dissertation is applicable across all areas of work and the context is across all industries.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 PSYCHOLOGY OF WOMEN

Psychologists observed that even in groups of preschool children girls organise themselves collectively (Gaffney, 1996). They tend to talk in terms of 'we' rather than 'I' as they see themselves, and to actually operate, as a community, as individuals engaged in a network of relationships. This is in contrast to preschool boys, who are already operating on a different set of assumptions. They view life as a contest and that power, and indeed enjoyment, comes from learning to act in opposition to others and insisting and resisting as a matter of principle. These fundamentally different ways of seeing and dealing with the world persist throughout childhood and into adulthood.

It is within a network of relationships that women feel most secure and powerful and in a position to avoid isolation and abandonment. Thus their need is to minimise differences, to avoid conflict, to include everybody, achieving consensus and avoiding at all costs being seen to be superior. Women operate on the assumption that, since they are a community, compliance with the group will increase the power of the group, rather than the individual power of the person involved. The advantages of such an approach are considerable. When a wide range of people are consulted and involved in decision-making, they are more willing to implement the agreed policy because they feel that they have had a part in making it. However, the consensus approach can be a hindrance if a woman has to make quick or difficult decisions, or if there is conflict or confrontation. Such unwillingness to act alone ultimately will make it impossible to wield power.

Traditionally, in families, 'goodness' for women was equated with self-sacrifice and taking responsibility for others, resulting in a struggle for women to gain acceptance for the idea of rights, that self-interest is legitimate and equal to the interests of others. Women already know that, if they are ever to acquire more power and influence, they have to engage with men and with the hierarchical worlds men have created. They cannot afford to wait until the business world is organised in a way that women find more congenial. The tension created by the competing demand of the two worlds they inhabit, the women's world of collectivity-and-inclusion and the male world of competitiveness and hierarchies, often exhaust women. The resulting burnout is a loss, not only to the individuals concerned, but to society as a whole.

## 2.2 NEW GENERATIONS OF PEOPLE

According to Abraham Maslow (1998), once our basic needs have been met, human beings automatically reach for the next level up the scale. Reaching for self-actualisation, the top level, is the path to happiness. Generations born since the mid-twentieth century, in the Developed World and also in the upper echelons of the Developing World, represent a new mentality. They are characterised by a deep and abiding subjective sense of individuality and a yearning for psychological self-determination. These new individuals are more or less the predictable product of wealth and its consequences, which capitalism has brought about. People have become exposed to education, travel, information, knowledge, conflict and diverse cultures and peoples, while at the same time allowing the old traditional ways to dissolve. Life is offering more developmental experiences to people and as people are living longer they are exposed to more and more developmental opportunities.

A study done in the USA by the Radcliffe Centre for Public Policy (2000) indicated that the priorities of the 30-something men and women share a mutual desire to create a balanced life. Of the people questioned, 80%, men and women, said they would gladly trade a bigger pay cheque for more time with their family and friends. Young women are not the only ones who struggle to 'Have it all' and then blame themselves when their lives fall short of expectations. Men are suffering also, because, although their ideas about what it means to be a 'successful man' have changed, society continues to measure a man's success solely by the size of his salary.

When women began to have an impact in business it was thought that practices would change to accommodate their requirements and desires, which are different from men. For example, women are still the family carers, and it was expected that organisations would come to recognise that and make allowances. Although lip service has been paid in that direction, in practice and application, little has changed. The result now is that women, disillusioned with business, have altered their ambitions from career advancement to work-life balance.

Macko & Rubin (2004) refer to Generation X who are now aged 30+. They started work when jobs were scarce and valuable and one had to stay in to keep a job. Working women had the support of their non-working family-carer mothers. The jobs were largely secretarial with little responsibility attached. The next Generation, Y, who are now aged 10-29 are starting work in a time of labour shortage which allows women (and men) to be choosy and

dip in and out. They have little family support as their mothers are also working. These are the women who will be in real need of a good work-life balance.

Macko & Rubin stated that in interviews the 30-something men were enthusiastic about equal partnerships. When pushed to explain what this really means, the definition of an 'equal' partnership became hazy and even the most progressive of them were still struggling to work out the ground rules. The truth about 'equal partnerships' is a lot murkier than we would like to admit and to some degree most young couples are still unintentionally sliding into socially traditional roles despite their professed desires not to do so.

Macko & Rubin also interviewed more than 100 college-educated women aged from 25 to 37 across the boundaries of salary, race, geography and experience. While they had different stories to tell, a similar theme emerged. They were all raised to believe that their futures were defined by options, futures without limitations, and yet they all described feeling trapped in one-dimensional lives very different from what they expected. Of these women, 75% felt that their profession interfered with their personal life, about half of these saying that the conflict was very severe.

Zuboff and Maxmin ( 2002) argue that the focus has moved from a reliance on group identification towards a deepening sense of self and also towards perceiving others as individuals. The authors contend that there is now a chasm between what the old organisations are offering and what the new individuals require and need, by trying to foist old patterns on new people, preferring what was to what was needed next. As a result, individuals have been left on their own to absorb the shocks of change, each person being

forced to walk alone. Contemporary experience of work is marked by a deepening conflict between how one wants to live and how one must live. With few alternatives, people seem to feel more than ever that they must keep silent and comply.

### 2.3 NEW GLASS CEILING

Macko & Rubin (2004) have suggested a new Glass Ceiling for women. The positive 'you can have anything' cultural message that defined the youth of to-day's 25-40 year-old women can shift in their minds to a 'you should have everything' brand of guilt at 30 and beyond. This expectation gap leads many of these women to question their choices if they are not well on their way to having the perfect career, body, husband and the perfect children. They may feel that they are stuck charging along in the wrong job or relationships, or are frustrated that their personal or professional lives are not moving forward as they had planned. They reach the point of pressing the 'pause' button and taking the time to identify areas of their lives they would like to change. They appear to have hit a new Glass Ceiling, which prevents women who want a life outside of work from getting ahead and doesn't allow women who are getting ahead to have a life outside work. Work-life balance is not being obtained. The ever-expanding work week, and the New Glass Ceiling it has created, are replacing gender discrimination as the primary barrier to young women's professional advancement to upper executive ranks. Unlike the original glass ceiling, which was marked by definitive clear roadblocks, this new Glass Ceiling manifests itself as a series of subtle trapdoors and its impact is often couched in deceptive language about 'choices'. While it is still too early to sum up succinctly how younger women are re-writing the rules, it seems that this generation appears to be questioning whether the cost of success, at least as it is currently set, just might be too high.

## 2.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIETY

Madeleine Bunting (2005) states that it is through work that we seek to satisfy our craving for a sense of control, of mastery, of security and autonomy in a chaotic, insecure world. We are always promised more if we work that bit harder. A work ethic has evolved that promotes a particular sense of self and identity which meshes neatly with the needs of market capitalism, through consumption and through work. Ours has become a more work-centred society than ever and it also purports to fulfil more of our needs than ever. She puts forward the idea that, with the decline in community, political parties and faith institutions and the fragmentation of families (to all of which our grandparents would have been able to look for help) employment has become the main, often the sole, provider of what we need for a fulfilling life. This gives employers unprecedented purchase over our lives; how we are organised, how we perceive ourselves and how we shape relationships with others, both colleagues at work and personal relationships outside it.

Family life no longer revolves around one breadwinner and one carer, but typically around one full-time and one part-time earner; in a generation we have seen a dramatic shift of time and energy from the unpaid caring economy into the paid labour market. The result is a care deficit, through a shortage of time and energy to invest in relationships, with neglect in the care of children and across the myriad of interdependent relationships which sustain us in families, friendships and neighbourhoods. The result is an emotional impoverishment of all our lives; the office is now where the heart is, not the home, as the complexities of the workplace demand an ever larger share of our emotional resources. How can families meet for meals when both parents work on shifts? What becomes of families when the job market

pulls both parents apart? Politicians proudly point to the low unemployment rate but overlook the price we pay in long working hours, exhaustion and rising stress.

The consequence of this crisis can be traced in the rising incidence of depression. By 2020, it is predicted, it will be the world's most prevalent disease, accompanied by family breakdown and the rise in loneliness. Given the insecurity, pressure and stress of our working culture, it is hard to see how work can provide either identity or belonging in the way it has done in the past. (Bunting)

Bunting points out a much more sinister consequence of this crisis of human sustainability and it is one the author of this dissertation has witnessed in her own private practice as a counsellor. When people cannot cope with the stress, lack of meaning, ever more emphasis on the bottom line and fear and insecurity in the workplace, then the defence-coping mechanism may be triggered. This mechanism finds a substitute in rigid, clear-cut ways of thinking which can spill over into fundamentalism. This crisis cannot entirely be placed at the door of work, but employment is one of the prime causes because it is driving a stress epidemic as more and more is expected of employees and it is depriving people of both the time and the energy to lead lives with a rich diversity.

## 2.5 COMPETITIVENESS AND THE MARKET ECONOMY

Bunting states that it is in the workplace that the pressures of market disciplines such as competitiveness and cost-effective efficiency impinge most directly on people's daily experience. Paid employment is, for many, their only experience of collaboration with others

to achieve a common goal and it is increasingly poisoned by competition, insecurity and stress.

Bunting considers that the great failure of market economies is that they take no measure of externalities, that if something does not have a market value, it doesn't exist. The emergence and development of the environmental movement pioneered the understanding of how markets, in a bid to drive down costs, 'externalise' them or, to put it more crudely, get someone else (usually the taxpayer) to pay for them. For example, polluting a river is cheaper than processing the waste product and recycling it. In just the same way, markets externalise the social costs of their ways of working; it is left to individuals – and their overworked doctors – to deal with the exhaustion, work-related depression, stress and the care deficit.

The greater potential danger in the current pattern of change is the emergence of a 'twin-track' labour market. There will be a set of jobs which are compatible with caring responsibilities and then there will be the highly paid, highly skilled elite. The childless and those who delegate their childrearing will be among the latter and break through the glass ceiling. But what will remain unchallenged is the outdated, old-fashioned male work ethic of single-minded total dedication to work. Caring will continue to effectively exact a tough penalty in terms of career progression and being a good parent will be held against you by your employer. Inevitably that will impact disproportionately on women, though there will be an increasing minority of men who will take on the main carer role.

Charles Handy (1994) considers that workers in organisations in the Western world are generally well paid, providing high-priced goods and services for those who can afford such things. But these 'proper' jobs are not ideal either as they can involve working hours to the extent of 'burn-out'. This is all in the name of being competitive. He quotes the chairman of a large pharmaceutical company, who summed up his business policy very simply. His formula was  $\frac{1}{2} \times 2 \times 3 = P$ : half as many people in the core of his business in five years' time, paid twice as well, producing three times as much equals Productivity and Profit. That is the way the business world is going, i.e. good jobs, expensive jobs, productive jobs, but fewer of them. It makes good corporate sense.

However, these jobs come at a high personal price. They are not for people who want more space in their lives, for other things and they are particularly difficult for women who want to raise a family. For a long time now corporate chairmen have been saying that their real assets were their people but few really meant it and none went so far as to put those assets in the balance sheet. Managers and directors say one thing and do another, arousing great scepticism in the workplace.

According to Barbara Ehrenreich (2006), it is the corporate or collective aspects of organisations that is the cause of the dysfunction and the feeling of insecurity in business. There are two legal ways of making money: (1) increase sales and (2) cut costs and, in most cases, the highest operating cost is the payroll. Layoffs can be engineered by mergers, which are so appealing to organisations and C.E.O.'s ego, as economies of scale are used, and by downsizing, which will please shareholders who, thanks to stock options, now include the

top-level managers. By eliminating other people's jobs, top management can raise their own income. In the last few years the habit of outsourcing of service jobs has further reduced payroll costs. There appears to be no doubt but that the 'lean and mean' trend, beloved of management gurus in the 90's, has undermined businesses, as more and more work is left to the exhausted, insecure survivors.

John Gray (1998) argues that 'free markets are creatures of state power, and persist only so long as the state is able to prevent human needs for security and the control of economic risk from finding political expression'!

The speeding up of communication, trade and capital flows generate unpredictable and constant change which filters down to daily lives, where individuals struggle to adjust. There is pressure to speed up their pace of work, to stretch their working hours to get the job done, to adapt family routines to the 24/7 service economy, to find new jobs, acquire new skills and to make sense of those constant necessary adjustments.

One of the policies introduced by organisations which can actually help people in their search for work-life balance is that of tele-working or e-working, which enables employees to work in their homes and actually helps organisations to reduce overheads. Many organisations resist this development because of a loss of control. An H.R. columnist in Personnel Management magazine (Kearney, 2006) praises Hewlett Packard for bringing 1,000 tele-workers back into the office. The company claims that being able to see people and teams in a room together raises productivity. The author calls this 'a brave step forward', as human

beings are social animals who not only like to be together but are more effective when they are. This move by HP, our H.R. person says, is a triumph of common sense over trendy work-life balance ideas. Cheapest isn't best and neither is giving people everything they want. The underlying message of the article is that people cannot be trusted to work on their own away from the office and this message is placed under the guise of balancing humanity and technology.

## 2.6 LONG HOURS

Author Fergus O'Connell (2005) contends that the power to reduce long working hours lies with each and every one of us. It is no use waiting for the company culture to change or for top management to send out a different message. This 'presenteeism' can come from our own feelings of guilt and seeking approval, both of which are likely to drive long hours as we do our best to be liked by colleagues and to be seen to be doing the right thing.

As far back as 1992, Juliet Schor (1992) wrote a book called *The Overworked American*, in which she says that one of the key drivers for the long-hours culture was the inability of white-collar workers to determine when they had carried out sufficient tasks to 'call it a day'. She said that two things came together: organisations want fewer people working longer hours because it saved on the overheads while individuals want more money. This bargain of time for money has created an insidious cycle of work and spend, as people increasingly look to consumption to give satisfaction and even meaning to their lives.

For some people there is no choice. Jill Andresky Fraser (2001, p.158) states that nearly one-third of Americans earn wages which, in a normal working week, would be insufficient to

satisfy their life-styles. She describes stressed-out white collar employees who put in 10/12 hour long days at the office, continue to work on their laptops in the evening at home and remain tethered to the office by mobile phone even on holiday. She quotes an Intel employee: ' If you make a choice to have a home life, you will be ranked and rated at the bottom. I was willing to work the endless hours, come in on weekends, travel to the ends of the earth. I had no hobbies, no outside interests. If I wasn't involved with the company, I wasn't anything'

## 2.7 TECHNOLOGY

According to Francis Green (2001) the singles biggest factor driving work intensification is information technology. It enables greater use to be made of time and 'fills up gaps that would otherwise be natural breaks in the pattern of work'. He quotes research done by Cooper & Worrall (2001) which shows that 42% of the workplaces which had introduced new technology in the previous 5 years experienced a substantial increase in the pace of work compared with 31% of the workplaces where no new technology had been introduced. Information technology increases pressure on employees to perform as companies themselves are subject to more exacting regulations and quality control. The three areas that have had the greatest influence are:

1. Increase in the mechanisms for accountability for one's work and thus depriving employees of autonomy.
2. Erosion of the boundaries around work (the routines of set working hours, the spatial separation between work and home) which for the entire industrial era had given people privacy and rest.

3. The arrival in the 90's of the mass use of mobile phones, e-mail, the internet and home PCs, which has made workers more available than ever to the pressures that their employers can bring to bear on them.

Few people have even started to think about how to put in place new boundaries, either legislative or cultural. Instead employees have been seduced by the promise of freedom and autonomy brought by technology when in fact it can bring the reverse of both. (Bunting)

## 2.8 CORPORATE CULTURE

Corporate culture has transformed tremendously over the past 3 decades as we have shifted from an industrial to an information-based society. Women now in their 30's entered the workforce during a particularly volatile era, marked by economic swings, ongoing mergers and acquisitions and ubiquitous corporate greed. This new corporate world has created new pressures and many of the women now exist in a perpetual state of 'proving themselves' to win respect or promotion at new companies or simply to keep the jobs they have. Ironically, while corporations exhibit less of a commitment to the employees, the employee is exceedingly committed to them. The workplace has become much more than a place to collect a pay cheque: With more young women than ever delaying marriage and children, and many moving to distant cities in pursuit of professional opportunities, the office has become the de facto community. For these women, the office has become the only stage where many important parts of their lives are played out.

Because the overworked week requires employees to spend so much time at the workplace, it is only natural that they would connect with colleagues. In the interest of recruiting and retaining staff organisations strive to create corporate cultures that foster a sense of

community. While all of this esprit de corps is not intrinsically harmful, it is not entirely harmless either. Some very murky emotional territory is created when our personal lives become so intimately linked to our professional lives and so many women have come to rely too much on a social network that could collapse with a layoff or change in professional status. Ultimately many inadvertently stumbled into a trap, in that **who** they are becomes too wrapped up in **what** they do, and emotional and financial security has become dangerously intertwined at work. While it is easy to get sucked into the ‘community spirit’ at work in the end it is important to remember that there is a fundamental difference between corporate culture and real communities. Corporate cultures are designed to serve the corporations’ needs, which inevitably evolve back to the bottom line and not to team spirit or personal growth.

Handy (1994) states that we have slimmed down our organisations, making them lean if not mean, but in the process we have made them greedy- greedy of our time, voracious in their appetite for our enthusiasm, happy to create a home from home for high-achieving work addicts. Women are welcome in these worlds provided they share these values- in other words behave like men. Clever organisations exploit this cultural context, this craving for control, self-assertion and self-affirmation and design corporate cultures which meet the emotional needs of their employees.

Bunting describes a chart on the wall in Microsoft’s Reading office showing a large ‘S’ curve which begins by identifying individual character strengths, and through a number of stages

translates them into a share-price increase. Human beings are instrumentalised as the means to an end- a share price.

We have become familiar with the debate about corporate power extending into political life and subverting the power of the State and we are aware of the way in which corporate power has infiltrated every aspect of civic life. We also need to realize how corporations attempt to mould and manipulate our inner lives through new styles of invasive management which sponsor our 'personal growth'.

The long-hours culture and its knock-on effects on our lives afflict every social class and most types of workers. This culture is difficult to change and leads to 'games' such as people leaving a jacket on a chair or a briefcase open when they go home so that others will think they are still in the building. How did it come to this? Traditionally, people were rewarded with promotion for the long hours they put in and others, who were expected to behave likewise, copied this behaviour. While many feel compelled to work long hours, they concede that it adversely affects their health, their morale, their productivity and their relationships with partners and children. Wealth should bring leisure, not hard work. Our rising GDP should have some payoff in increasing wellbeing or what is the point? Surveys show that a growing number of people want to trade pay for time.

Companies have tried to change this by writing a set of values, which they then inform everyone is now part of the organisation. Of course, this often makes little impact because there is no ownership of those values by people, even if they agree with them, because they were not involved in the process of developing them. Gambles et al (2006) suggest that there

is an awareness that policies tend not to address the cultural and organisational values that are so important in implementation.

## 2.9 STRESS

In the U.K. a Self-Reported Work-Related Illness Report found that Stress is one of the biggest contributors to absenteeism. It has cost the U.K. an estimated £3.7 billion per annum (Work-Life Balance Centre, 2006).

Psychologist Cary Cooper, Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University Management School In People Management (December 2005) speaks of a study he did with the campaigning charity, Working Families, which involved 600 working parents. He found that long hours and inflexible working arrangements were damaging employee productivity at work, leading to increased sickness absence and job dissatisfaction.

As reported in People Magazine (March 2006), more than 10 % of U.K. employees have made a serious error at work as a result of fatigue and ill-health. "4-7 Work-Life Balance" survey was conducted by the Work-Life Balance Centre, Keele University and the University of Sheffield. Mistakes included losing a major bid, approving a flawed report for publication, damaging an aircraft and transfusing the wrong blood product. 'While the number of people admitting to making a mistake was small, the consequences could be chilling', said Julie Hurst, director of the Work Life Balance Centre.

In a survey conducted by the European Foundation (2001) 60% of the European Workforce experienced stress in the workplace. Though society has become more open and forgiving in

recent years, to admit to feeling stressed in some companies is still seen as an admission of incompetence or failure. Most will automatically blame their own inability for any stress incurred at work and are ill-equipped to identify the warning signs. Stress is often seen as the norm. More and more people opt for the pub as a way of letting off steam. We are increasingly falling into the burn-out trap.

For too long we have been reading articles on how stress is costing organisations in both the private and public sectors. It is not just the personal problem of an individual. It is also an organisational problem, as people cannot operate to their potential, when under stress.

#### 2.10 MYTHS

The Guardian (Ward, 2005) reported that progress on work-life balance in the U.K. is a myth for many. A TUC study found that more than half a million workers had their requests for shorter hours turned down. The study concluded that, though 2.3 million employees now want to work fewer hours, even if it means less money, thousands are still being denied the flexibility they want.

Research done by Vedior recruitment consultants (onrec.com 2005), which involved 1,000 employees from almost 30 countries worldwide, showed that the global workforce had stopped striving for a healthier work-life balance, with less than a quarter of respondents putting their private lives before work. Vedior's C.E.O. commented 'not only are employees experiencing a reduced quality of life, they appear to have little desire or inclination to change the situation. A poor work-life balance not only affects the lives of individual workers, but can also, over the longer term, lead to a down-turn in business performance. It

is therefore imperative that either employers seek a change in attitude before they experience the fall-out of this trend or employees take more direct action to improve their lot'.

Gambles et al (Gambles, Lewis, & Rapoport, 2006) stress that there is a need to move beyond current policies and debates about work-life balance. They challenge the limited thinking that exists about how people who want a life outside the workplace can be valued as well as those who don't. They emphasise that changes have to be made at many levels, including governments, trade unions, communities, families and individuals.

## 2.11 RESEARCH

In the 1990's much research was carried out into the whole area of work-life balance and work-life conflict. One of the clearest findings emerging from much of this research is that, despite the wide range of policies supporting family friendly and more flexible working, many companies are still not meeting the needs of employees. Those that do meet the needs encourage their employees to achieve their full potential and to provide value for the organisation. The problems and challenges which face employees aiming to balance all their commitments are often the result of a deep and unstated view of an 'ideal worker' as one who commences his/her working life in early adulthood, continues to work the standard working hours for 40 years until retirement and takes no time off to have or rear children, care for other family or community members or engage in other non-significant non-paid work or educational activities (Bailyn, Drago, & Kochan, 2002).

For many organisations, if not the majority, their family-friendly and work-life balance policies are 'add-on' rather than tied into the organisation's business strategy. Indeed, for

many organisations there is even a clash between these policies and the corporate culture. This research paper will review the published research carried out in the area of work-life balance and then, using the findings, will suggest ways to move forward in order to persuade organisations to realise the full potential of their workforces whilst respecting their own corporate needs.

## 2.12 ROLE OF MANAGERS IN RELATION TO WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Managers have consistently been identified as being key to the success or otherwise of work-life balance initiatives. Both research and anecdotal evidence suggests that it is an employee's immediate manager who makes all the difference as to whether or not that employee avails of flexible work options. In October 2001 David Birchall at Henley Management College surveyed a group of managers in 30 countries (all graduates or participants on executive MBA programmes) in order to 'get a better understanding of what organisations are introducing in the way of work-life balance measures, what their impact is on organisational performance and whether a new breed of younger managers is utilising the measures to a greater extent than earlier generations'. (Retrieved from [www.WBLN.net](http://www.WBLN.net))

The survey concluded that:

- Employers have introduced a range of initiatives which do contribute to improved work-life balance, but at the same time they have also introduced measures aimed at increasing staff performance.
- Very few of the companies surveyed have taken a strategic approach to work-life balance.

- If work-life balance policies are to be introduced in a strategic manner, managers must understand the rationale, actively promote the benefits and support the message. The survey found that there was little evidence of this
- This survey is important in confirming that the traditional view of work-life balance still predominates and that without specific training in the benefits and strategic use of such programmes and policies managers will not promote them or see them as a useful business tool. (Presumably, Henley College was not including this in a module of their MBA!)

#### 2.13 RECENT RESEARCH IN IRELAND

Work Life Balance Network Development Partnership was set up under the Equal Community Initiative Programmes. Organisations participating were An Post, Dublin Bus, Iarnrod Eireann, Dublin City Council, Office of the Civil Service and Local Appointments Commissioners and Eircom. There is a strong involvement by the social partners, Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and the Irish Congress of Trades Union (ICTU) in an advisory and support capacity and Education & Training Services Trust (ETS) in a project management role.

This partnership produced a report on the internet which reviewed the current situation on work-life balance in organisations in Ireland, as well as some research from overseas. Much of what follows came from this report, which includes a report by Drew, Murphy, & Humphreys, (2003), which itself reviewed earlier reports. One of these was in Ireland in 2002, when the National Framework Committee commissioned research to gather

information of the types of family friendly policies in organisations and to identify existing research available in this area.

From reviewing the literature they concluded that in relation to work-life balance there is no 'one size fits all' and that the needs of employees will vary over their lifetime depending on their circumstances. They also observed that work-life balance is a people issue and not simply a woman issue, that it extends beyond the human resources function and really requires a programme of major cultural change. An analysis of secondary statistics highlighted the major shift across the E.U. away from households with the 'traditional male breadwinner' to 'dual partner households'.

A national survey of employers was carried out and 912 organisations responded (response rate 24%). The results highlighted that a long-hours culture does exist in Ireland with 86% of senior managers/professional, 61% of junior managers/professional, 39% of other non-manual workers and 30% of manual workers reporting that working longer than standard hours was common for them.

They also addressed the issue of availability of flexible working in the surveyed organisations with the following results:

| WORK FLEXIBILITY | ORGANISATIONS | EMPLOYEES | COMMON IN                              |
|------------------|---------------|-----------|--|
| Part-Time        | 73%           | 15%       | Public Services/Manufacturing          |
| Flexitime        | 52%           | 15%       | Public Sector (least in manufacturing) |
| HomeWorking      | 21-26%        | 5%        | Govt Depts, Electronics, Financial     |

TABLE 1

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TABLE 1

The benefits of employee satisfaction and productivity, versus the constraints of competing priorities and complexity, were also identified. An in-company survey of employees who had availed of flexible working arrangements and of their managers/colleagues was undertaken in five organisations and involved 1,006 employees, with the following findings:

Advantages of flexible work arrangements that were highlighted include:

- Reduced travel time and car parking problems
- More responsibility for own work
- Increased quality time for children
- Easier to make personal appointments

Disadvantages include:

- Difficulty in arranging cover
- Possible loss of promotion
- Difficult to manage
- Loss of earnings
- Perception that employee not serious about his/her job

The Report concluded that the demand for work-life balance will continue and possibly accelerate because of a number of factors including:

- The workforce is becoming more heterogeneous with more parents, women and retired workers.
- Employers and employees are both increasingly needing more diverse working time arrangements.

- Demographic changes will lead to an increasing need to retain valued staff due to a tightening labour market as a result of lower childbirth rates.
- Changes in information and communication technology will make it increasingly easy to work from a distance
- Flexible working has increased in other EU States regardless of economic upturns or downturns.

However, the development will be hindered by a prevailing long-hours culture within many organisations.

The following challenges were identified:

- The need to explore arrangements where reduced hours do not lead to reduced pay (e.g. by the use of compressed working or annualised hours)
- The crucial role of line managers in making access to flexible working arrangements more equitable across the organisation and at the same time meeting organisational needs.
- Ensuring appropriate and effective communication for the effective working of flexible options. The report highlights the role of IT in meeting this challenge.
- Lifespan changes in relation to work-life balance.
- Policy makers to provide transportation and traffic management to deal with the trend towards expanding commuting times.
- Avoiding a 'twin-track' scenario where men are in the 'fast lane' working continuous or excessive hours in full time jobs and women are in the 'slow lane' working reduced hours and taking career breaks.

- To transform organisational culture to one where flexibility is seen as beneficial to all, accessible on a fair and equitable basis and managed professionally.

#### 2.14 ICTU RESEARCH

Research into work-life balance was commissioned by ICTU and carried out in 2002, investigating the attitudes, experiences and actions of union officials in relation to family-friendly work policies and practices within unionised Irish employments. The research methodology chosen was qualitative using focus groups.

In the subsequent report, Initiating Change; Unions Developing WLB (Butler and Connolly, 2003), it was stated that all unions identified a wide range of problems in accessing family-friendly working. One of the biggest problems being the potential negative impact on others within the workforce if the person availing of the flexibility is not replaced. A high level of demand was reported, but many were unable to avail of what was available because they cannot afford it. In general, flexible working practices were reported to be more common in the civil and public service than the private sector, but they were mainly only available to those at the lower end of the organisation. A large number of barriers to introduction were identified and they fell under the headings of:

- Management concerns and caution
- Perception that the nature of the work does not lend itself to flexible working
- Perceptions about cost
- Perceptions that the commercial environment is unsuitable
- Administrative difficulties
- Lack of external support

- Organisations refusing to negotiate
- Organisations using the introduction of flexibility as an excuse to remove other favourable conditions of employment
- Barriers to promotion
- The hours being offered
- Lack of quality jobs available with flexible working hours
- Other concerns held by workers
- Lack of affordable suitable childcare.

Organisations which have introduced family-friendly work practices were reported to have vastly improved the morale. The report concluded that such policies were most likely to be available if:

- They are statutory and that the legislation governing them is clear cut in terms of interpretation
- The employer needs them for business needs
- The employer wishes to be a best practice employer in relation to HR issues (progressive multinationals and the Civil Service)
- Employees and unions are willing to demand them and push for them. There are difficulties with this in relation to (a) getting the collective to support it and (b) the willingness of employees to 'make a fuss' and demand family-friendly policies if they believe that it will impede their future career prospects.
- The cost of providing them to employees is not prohibitive.

The recommendations of the report included:

- Conducting and publicising research, which shows how being family-friendly and flexible benefits the bottom line.
- Improving training on development, including examples and models of innovation, with steps to introduction, strengths and weaknesses, potential benefits, etc.
- The development of a legislative framework for the effective design and introduction of family-friendly policies to include such points as:
  - Organisations must review the redistribution of the work of those employees availing of family-friendly policies and replace people where necessary
  - The impact of family-friendly policies on rosters and shift patterns must be planned for and organised
  - Timely responses to requests
  - Family-friendly proofing of collective agreements
  - Family-friendly policies are a basic right and once developed should not be removed
  - All policies to be jointly reviewed and monitored.

Over all there has been little take-up of family-friendly policies. As regards annual hours contracts, Clifford et al (1997) state that these have not been widely adopted by Irish organisations. IBEC carried out a National Survey in 2000 on Pay & Employment-Related Issues of 673 companies and 105,074 employees covering the Manufacturing and Wholesale

Distribution Industries in which they found that 13% of companies offered flexitime, but the amount of employees on Flexitime was just 3.5%.

It is apparent from these reports that trade union and employer bodies are well aware of work-life problems, having done extensive research, and have offered a number of proposals and recommendations. However, one awaits implementation, nor do they make any attempt to address the particular problems that affect female employees.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 SURVEYS

It was generally assumed that working women in particular have a work-life problem. In order to assess whether it can be achieved, information had to be garnered about the situation and opinions of the target groups. This was done by means of a survey. Although one might be able to do this from the census, which is a survey of the entire population, the census questions and analysis are not specific enough and, in any case, there would be far too much information to digest. Saunders et al (1997) tells us that we should not assume that a census survey will necessarily provide more useful results than a well-planned sample survey.

According to Walters (2002), surveys should be conducted in 3 broad stages:

1. **Preparation-** Developing preliminary theories.
2. **Formal survey-** Formally test and explore main theories with the aim of producing questionnaire findings. A questionnaire was designed and used.
3. **Follow-up-** Explore any aspects arising from Stage 2.

This was the sequence employed in this survey.

According to Kane et al (2001) the method that has been adopted in this dissertation would be called a mini-survey, as it was focused with 15-30 questions, a sample of not much more than 100 respondents and largely closed questions. There may be a problem with such a small sample if one wants to claim that the result can be applied to a much larger population,

but the authors note that under certain circumstances a sample of less than 100 can be appropriate for a population of 100 million.

They stressed the importance of defining the objectives, researching what has been done in any previous surveys and choosing suitable respondents. The first two suggestions have been followed in this dissertation but because the snowball selection method was used to satisfy time constraints, a poor sample spread was obtained. Kane et al (2001) also stress careful selection of questions and the importance of clarity.

### 3.2 QUESTIONNAIRES DESIGN

As a broad generalisation, written surveys completed by the respondent have 2 primary advantages. The first, and most obvious, is that they facilitate the collection of quantifiable data. The second is that so long as they are anonymous, they encourage the expression of views and attitudes that employees might feel reluctant to reveal orally. All questionnaires should also allow the respondents some space, if only at the end, to make additional comments in order to maximise the information obtained. This was done and yielded valuable information.

The questionnaire used for this survey can be found in Appendix A. The first page contains 9 questions about personal details such as age group and family/dependants as well as hobbies and the time allotted to them. Page 2 contains 10 questions ascertaining employment details such as hours worked, home/weekend working as well as commuting distance and time. Page 3 has one multiple-choice question about the organisational culture/structure, to select between the four categories suggested by Handy (1986), of which a description was supplied

with the questionnaire. The rest of page 3 and half of page 4 contain six questions about family-friendly policies and work-life balance. Finally, two open-ended questions asked for statements, if wished, about what the responder would change and any other comments.

The main purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain a breakdown of family commitments and time which are the components of work-life balance. Few of the questions were strictly multiple-choice. Generally a single box was supplied with a list of possible answers. This worked well enough as it allowed the questionnaire to fit into four pages and a total of 27 questions was not too onerous for the responder. The questionnaire was pre-tested to find out whether it flowed properly in a good sequence, sounded good when read aloud, did not take too long and was interesting and to the point. Feedback complimented the questionnaire on its presentation and content.

### 3.3 INTERVIEWS

It is desirable to complement a questionnaire survey with an occasional interview, generally semi-structured to suit the questionnaire. This will tend to add meat to the skeletal nature of a questionnaire and hopefully to put answers into a context which may be extrapolated to other responders. Semi-structured interviews are very time consuming, both in the interview itself and in the subsequent transcription, but have the advantage in that a line of questioning can be developed, based on earlier answers, and interaction will gain more precise information. The interview should be recorded by note-taking or perhaps tape-recording the conversation.

Saunders et al (1997) state that the lack of standardisation in these interviews may lead to concern about reliability. Interviewer bias, such as intruding one's own beliefs, should be

avoided as it may influence the interviewee's responses. Qualitative research using semi-structured interviews cannot be used to make generalisations about the entire population. For this dissertation 3 of the respondents were interviewed, one from each age group. Transcripts can be found in Appendix B.

### 3.4 SAMPLING

According to Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill (1997) the main types of sampling are as follows:

|                                      |                           |                              |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Probability (Representative)</b>  |                           | Strictly random and unbiased |
|                                      | <b>Simple Random</b>      | For homogeneous groups       |
|                                      | <b>Stratified Random</b>  | For categories, with quotas  |
|                                      | <b>Cluster (Area)</b>     | Random from geographic areas |
| <b>Non-Probability (Judgemental)</b> | Less accurate but quicker | Information gathering        |
|                                      | <b>Purposeful</b>         | For special groups           |
|                                      | <b>Quota</b>              | Non-random stratified        |
|                                      | <b>Snowball</b>           | Expanding from contacts      |
|                                      | <b>Self-Selection</b>     | e.g. from adverts            |
|                                      | <b>Convenience</b>        | Whatever is easiest          |

TABLE 2

In this dissertation the sampling method was a combination of Purposeful, in that it targeted Women in the Workplace aged 25 to 40, Convenience and Snowball. Fourteen colleagues and friends were asked to send questionnaires to people within the target group.

Approximately 100 questionnaires were printed and distributed and 10 were sent by e-mail.

A total of 133 questionnaires were returned, 78 original, 17 by fax and 38 photocopies. The nature of the distribution made a response level not applicable.

### 3.5 ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRES

#### **Tabulation**

The results of the survey were tabulated on an Excel spreadsheet. Each questionnaire was allocated a line and each question one or more columns. At the foot of the columns the number of each answer to a questions was totalled or, where appropriate, the numerical average calculated.

#### **Manipulation**

The answers of a number of different questions were sorted, in turn, either alphabetically or numerically to divide the results into groups. The following sorts were carried out:

- (a) into the 3 age groups
- (b) by marital status
- (c) with or without children
- (d) into the various cultures
- (e) by occupation
- (f) selecting those wanting more time for family and friends
- (g) by number of policies in place
- (h) by family-friendly rating
- (i) by work-life balance rating

The totals for each element of a sort were then copied to neighbouring lines to enable comparisons to be made. A variety of other sorts were tried but yielded no information.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS and FINDINGS**

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS/FINDINGS

### 4.1 QUESTIONNAIRES

Although the survey brought in a wealth of information it was difficult to derive much in the way of clear findings. Partly this was due to the snowball nature of the sample, which led to uneven clusters of responders rather than an even spread. For example, there were 20 (15%) teachers, 18 (13%) administrators, 13 (10%) accountants and 9 (7%) architects, the other 55% being spread across 31 occupations.

There were a number of discrepancies in how the respondents rated family friendliness and work-life balance. For example, the number of 9 family friendly policies in place (used as a rough guide to the family friendliness of the organisation) did not match the respondents' ratings of their organisation's attitude, as shown in these 2 charts:

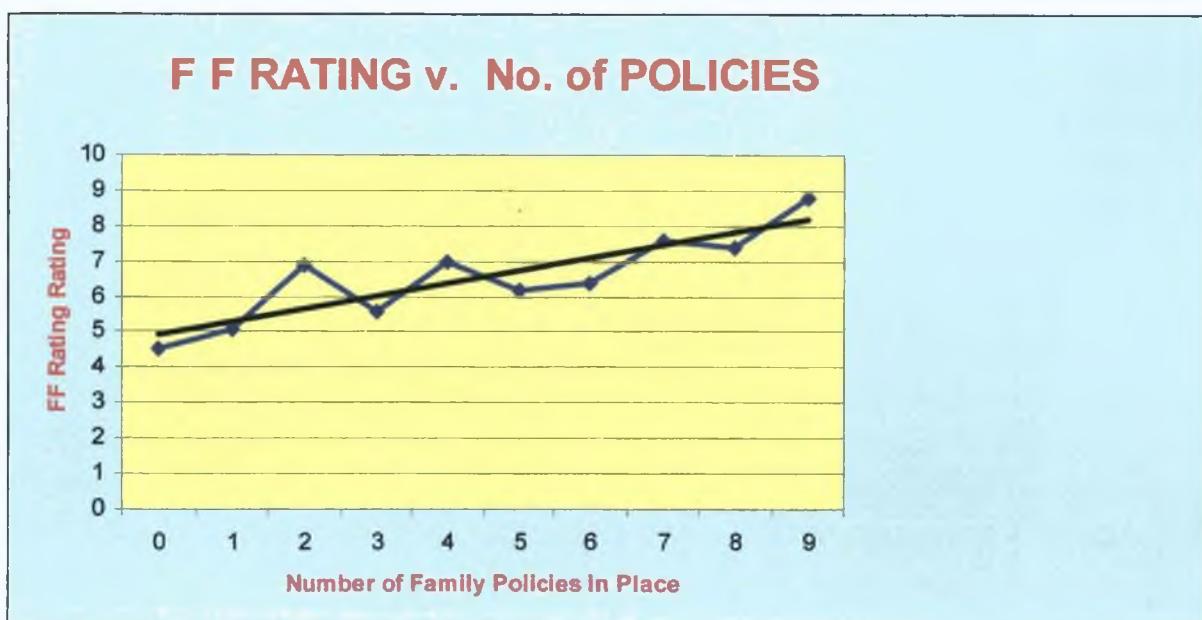


Figure A

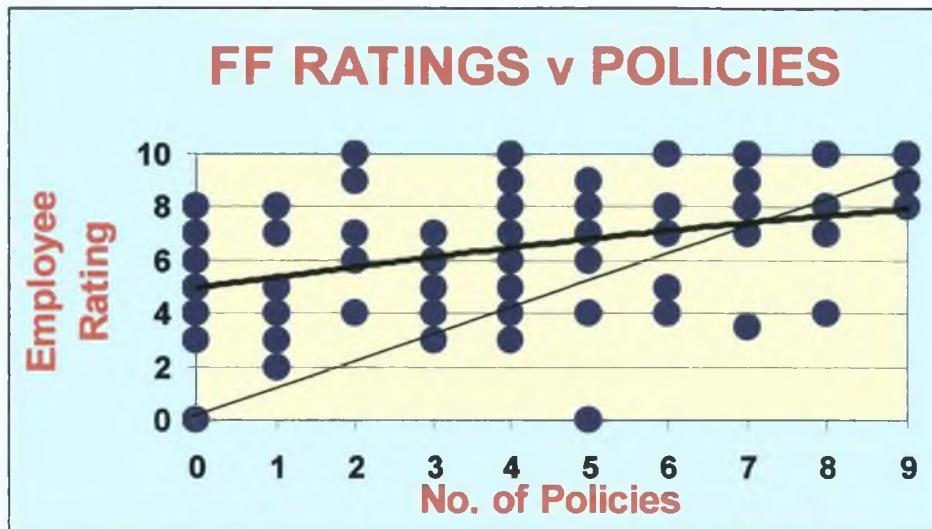


Figure B

The line chart (Figure A) does show a trend, albeit very erratic, but the scatter diagram (Figure B) is all over the place, as is the scatter diagram below (Figure C) comparing work-life balance ratings with the number of policies in place.

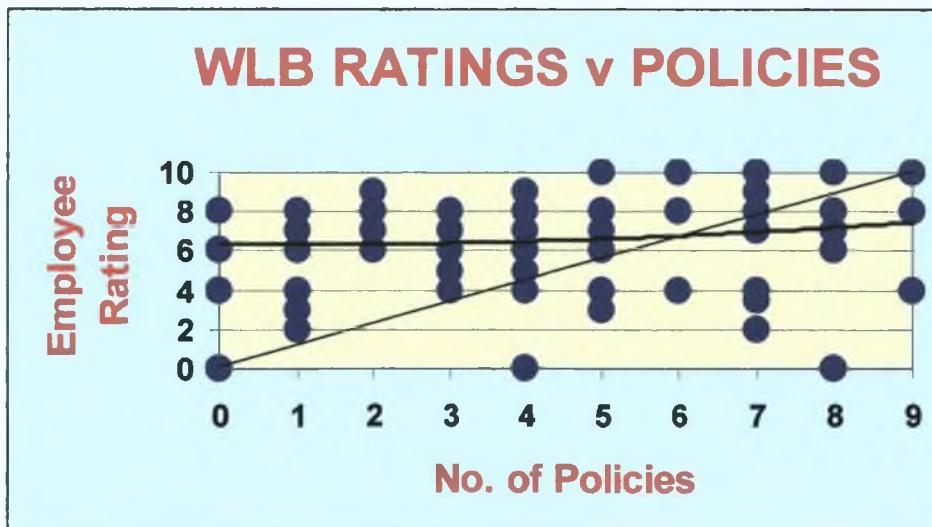


Figure C

It would appear that employee ratings are more likely to be a measure of the respondent's manager to these policies, which would often be on an ad hoc basis, at odds with company policy, either better or worse.

A question which was a problem for many respondents was No.18: 'What time do you usually leave home to go to work?' No fewer than 21 (16%) gave the time of leaving work to go home! It would appear that they had a pre-conceived idea of what the questions were leading up to and that time after work was more relevant to work-life balance than time in the morning. One has to be very careful in framing a question where the context might be at odds with the respondent's perception.

The findings will be discussed in the order of the sortings above, on Page 35.

#### (a) Age

A number of trends were obtained from the analysis:

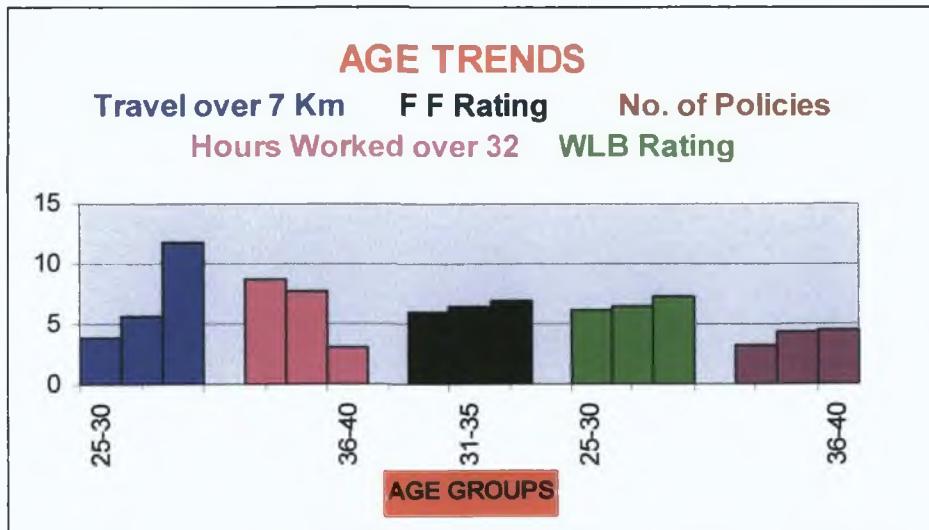


Figure D

With only 3 categories they may not mean very much. With any 3 different numbers in random order there is a 1 in 3 chance of a sequence. However, there is a consistency in the trends in that the older the group the shorter the working hours with a corresponding increase, albeit slight, in all 3 of family-friendly policy ratings, work-life balance ratings and the number of family friendly policies in place. A very definite trend was an increase in travel distance to work in the oldest age group. Most of the respondents work in Dublin, so does this mean that, as one gets older, one is more likely to have moved from the city to the suburbs?

Other trends were as one would expect:

| AGE GROUP | % MARRIED/ SEPARATED | % WITH CHILDREN | HOURS FOR HOBBIES | HOURS WORKED |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 25-30     | 10                   | 7               | 7.0               | 40.7         |
| 31-35     | 46                   | 34              | 4.3               | 39.7         |
| 36-40     | 62                   | 68              | 5.5               | 35.1         |

TABLE 3

Only 1 married person in the oldest age group did not have children. The figures look a bit odd because of 6 single parents. As expected, younger women, fewer of whom are married, devote more time to hobbies and work longer hours.

#### (b) Marital status

Little was obtained from this sorting that was not already shown by the sorting by age above, more of the older being married, with less time working or enjoying hobbies.

**(c) With or without children**

The table below gives some results:

|                          | WITH CHILDREN | WITHOUT CHILDREN |
|--------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| No. of Respondents       | 41            | 92               |
| Work Hours               | 34            | 41               |
| Hobby Hours              | 4.5           | 6.3              |
| Policies Rating          | 6.9           | 6.2              |
| Work-Life Balance Rating | 7.0           | 6.4              |
| Policies in Place        | 4.4           | 3.7              |
| Policies desired         | 2.2           | 1.0              |

Table 4

As expected, the number of both work and hobby hours was less for those with children and all 3 family friendly/work-life figures were higher. This was in line with the Age analysis.

Those with children also wanted more policies put in place than those without children.

It was also found that there were inconsistencies in the answering of the questions. For example, many of those who noted at the end of the questionnaire that they would like more time for family or friends gave high ratings to their work-life balance, including 1 ten (max) and 9 eights. Maybe they were being realistic, reckoning that a true work-life balance would include little work and that, as working women, the balance was as good as they could get.

**(d) Culture**

There was nothing of value in this tabulation, which is not surprising. Culture is difficult to define and the definitions supplied with the questionnaires were by necessity complicated

and, in any case, most organisations fall into more than one category. The answers supplied would, in most cases, be purely guesswork.

**(e) Occupation**

This sorting produced no meaningful findings. The largest group, Teachers, was examined in more detail, but even within this group nothing was found. It was interesting that only 4 of the 20 teachers hit on term-time working as a policy!

**(f) More time for Family and Friends**

39 (29%) expressed a wish to have more time for family and friends. The percentage was lowest in the youngest group. Some of the results were as follows:

|                          | WISHED FOR MORE<br>FAMILY TIME | NO WISH<br>EXPRESSED |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Hobby Time               | 5.0                            | 6.1                  |
| Work Time                | 40.4                           | 38.4                 |
| Work-Life Balance Rating | 5.4                            | 7.1                  |
| Family Friendly Rating   | 6.4                            | 6.4                  |
| No. of Policies in Place | 4.3                            | 3.8                  |
| No. of Policies Desired  | 1.3                            | 1.1                  |

TABLE 5

The differences between the 2 groups, with the exception of Work-Life Balance ratings, are modest but generally in the expected direction. However, these are only averages and many of the questions attracted answers that were inconsistent.

**(g) Family Friendly Rating**

**(h) Work-Life Balance Rating**

**(i) Number of Policies in Place**

Pie charts of the answers of these 3 questions all indicate that organisations are not at all family friendly and up to half have a poor work-life balance:

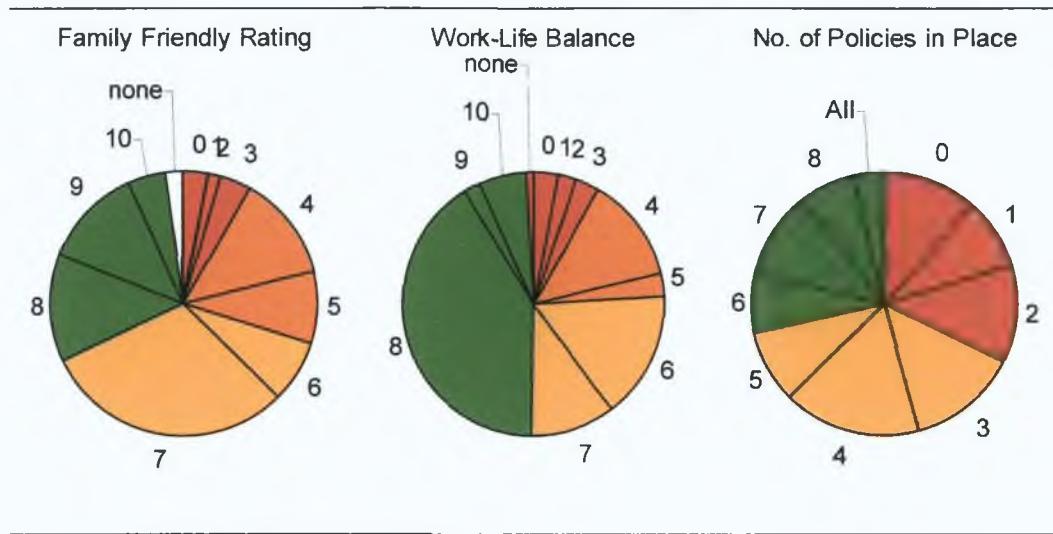


Figure E

Sortings were carried out on each of these answers and 3 resulting charts are presented (Figures A, B and C on Pages 36 and 37). As discussed above, in the introduction to the findings, there is a very wide spread in the answers, with only gentle trends in the right direction. One fact did appear was that the fewer the Family-Friendly Policies in place, the more policies the respondent desired to be made available, which is hardly surprising.

#### 4.2 FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Transcripts of the three interviews are presented in Appendix IV. Ten of the most relevant statements from the last page of the questionnaires returned were used as a basis for conducting the interviews. These statements can be found in Appendix III.

The 3 interviewees were very different, one from age group A being an HR manager in a large software company, one from age group B being an architect in a relatively small family firm and the third from age group C being a General Manager of a non-profit organisation. As it happened all 3 gave very low ratings to their work-life balance, so they had much to complain about. The interviewer (the author of this dissertation), being a counsellor, had great difficulty with this as there was a tendency to slip into counsellor mode in that some of the questions were inclined to be leading. This only became obvious when the tapes were played back. The two younger interviewees really needed to talk through their difficulties. A big issue with both of them was the amount of work they were expected to do. They also felt that as women are better able to multi-task, they fell into the trap of thinking they could do everything. Their male colleagues just said 'no' and this was accepted. The architect stated that all of her professional female friends were approaching burn-out and she had made the decision to get out. The other interviewee has decided to seek a less stressful job. This is in line with the findings from the literature.

Only the eldest had children and, even as a GM, she cannot take family time out or the question would be asked 'why did you take the job if you cannot give 100%'? She has found it easier to get better work-balance because her mother had given up her job to look after the children. The other 2 interviewees both made similar statements about any of their colleagues with children.

There were no family friendly policies at all in place in the organisations of the 2 younger interviewees. The non-profit organisation of the eldest has a full set of policies in place, but evidently not for top management.

The architect came up with a disturbing statement. A male college friend and she were interviewed for the same job and when they compared the salaries mentioned, they discovered that he had been offered 20% more. They had identical qualifications. Such discrimination is now illegal, but difficult to detect behind closed doors. This practice did not appear in the modern literature and neither was there any mention in the questionnaires. No quantitative assessment can be made from a single interview, but one can assume that it is still a problem.

The youngest interviewee mentioned 'presenteeism', which had been discussed in the literature. She gave many examples, including one where they would pre-time their e-mails to be delivered long after they left work, to give the impression that they were working longer hours than they were. Perception was the issue, not overtime.

The HR interviewee had only heard the term 'work-life balance' bandied around and was not sure exactly what it meant. A male colleague reckoned that it was something to do with women with children. There is obviously some way to go even for employees to know of the principle, let alone to get it into the organisations' culture.

## **CHAPTER 5**

## **CONCLUSIONS**

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

For a number of reasons, including a poor sample spread of respondents and discrepancies between different answers supplied, there was little of any quantitative value derived from the questionnaires. However, a wealth of information was obtained from the questionnaires as well as from the literature review and the three follow-up interviews, so one can have a very good idea of the dire state of work-life balance. All the indications are that a proper work-life balance is rare in organisations, largely due to the long-hours culture and either a lack of family-friendly policies or a reluctance to allow them when they are present. It is particularly difficult for women when they become mothers and also if they are promoted to managers.

The dissertation confirmed that there is a mountain of literature and considerable research about work-life balance, in Ireland as well as elsewhere, but very little of it refers to the problems of working women. Where for men work-life balance is between work and play, for women it is between work and work. This is why work-life balance is essential for women as, not just them, but their family depend on it, without taking away from their ability to develop and benefit from the job skills they have acquired. Their country needs both sides of women's work to be balanced so that we can have a healthy society.

This investigation has gone some way in that direction and a further, more comprehensive survey needs to be carried out to confirm the level of the problem for women and find out exactly what is required to satisfy the needs. A number of improvements of the survey could be made to be more effective. It is necessary to obtain a larger sample which should be more

representative of the various types of working women. Questions should be refined so that the context of each question is clear. The three interviews were invaluable in the amount of information obtained, and even though they should not be extrapolated, they enabled a greater understanding of the answers given in the questionnaires. It is considered that more interviews would be a considerable aid to the research. However, they are very time-consuming but more selectivity in the recording would save time.

Family finances up to the 90's generally were satisfied by one working parent. Women had the option of a working career or staying or returning to full-time family care. Those choosing a working career did so because they wanted to work and a satisfactory work-life balance tended towards work. Today, higher living expectations, with its high costs, allied with high house prices with their attendant high mortgages, make it imperative that women embark on career paths to make ends meet, including those women who, in an earlier time, would have opted not to work. These women demand a work-life balance tending towards life. It is strange that, when workers were in surplus, flexible job practices would have given more employment, but the climate was not right. Now, when there is (theoretically) a move towards flexibility, there are insufficient workers to satisfy this trend. Work-life balance means less work per person, therefore more employees.

The interesting new ingredient in organisations is a generation of women who are far more challenging of the work culture, and a generation of men who want a new deal to give space to their relationships with their children. The sense of entitlement of the new generation now in their twenties will give a positive edge to their ability to renegotiate work. They will be

able to take up that effort of debate, argument, campaigning and sheer stubbornness required.

It is possible that they will succeed in edging the working culture onto a more humane path.

The research in this dissertation has confirmed that women view most organisations as having a 'macho' institutional overwork culture, in which their concerns are given, at the very most, lip service. Any family leave they may get is only available if it does not affect the organisation. Three of the factors which may help to change it:

1. As the emotional labour required in managing the organisation intensifies, it may find women's emotional skills increasingly valuable and be less willing to see large numbers of women fall away on the narrowing pyramid. It may find it needs women at the top of the organisation as well as the bottom.
2. Companies will have to shift to assessing employees not merely on the basis of the amount of time they spend at their job but on their effectiveness while they are there.
3. Diversity has become an issue of corporate social responsibility. The public reputation of a company which has no senior women and does nothing about it suffers and has less legitimacy as an institution.

There are many other points of hope:

- 18-24 age groups view the working conditions of their parents with horror.
- Sociologists have charted a shift to post-modern values, with people in Western industrialised nations growing disenchanted with materialism and looking for self-expression and fulfilment.
- The growing pre-occupation with well-being and health may also challenge the overwork culture

On the other hand, the re-envisioning of success and achievement needed is no mean task in a culture intoxicated by public recognition and celebrity.

These are the ideals that need to be incorporated into organisational culture for a proper work-life balance to be available without prejudice. The challenge is to find ways of doing this without harming work-place effectiveness. This will require challenging structures, cultures and practices. There is no quick fix. The changes to achieve all this needs to happen at multiple levels including government, organisations, community, family, and individual level. Perhaps we could start at the educational level, in schools and especially business colleges.

It is this cultural debate about success, achievements, the limits of efficiency and what it is to be human which needs to be linked to a political debate. We, as a society, need to challenge the centrality of work in our lives, and reconsider the price we pay for our wages. We need to question the way work is organised. Time is both a personal and political issue. The employment agenda should not be ruled only by the dictates of business needs, but also by human needs, such as rest, leisure, caring for dependants, the welfare of children and giving individuals the opportunity to reach their full human worth. The economy should be the servant of our needs not our master.

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## **APPENDIX I**

### **WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

## **WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

### **Flexible Work Arrangements**

Flexitime

Annualised Hours

### **Flexible Leave Arrangements**

Non-Statutory Leave Arrangements

Compassionate Leave

Term-time working

Employment or career breaks

Sabbaticals

Study Leave

### **Reduced Working Time**

Job Sharing

Work Sharing

Part-time Work

1. Fixed part-time working

2. Voluntary Reduced work-time

### **Flexible Location**

e-Working

### **Flexitime**

An arrangement whereby employers and employees negotiate hours instead of the standard 9-5 model.

### **Annualised Hours**

This scheme means that an employee is contracted to work a defined number of hours per year rather than per week.

### **Job Sharing**

This is an arrangement to divide one full-time job or to share work between two people with the responsibilities and benefits of the job being shared between them.

## **Non-Statutory Leave Arrangements**

Apart from statutory entitlements such as annual leave and maternity, adoptive, force majeure, parental and carer's leave, other leaves are increasingly common. These include:

### **Paternity Leave**

A number of employers are recognising the importance of making provision for such leave.

### **Compassionate Leave**

Most employers recognise the need for leave in emergency situations.

### **Term Time Working**

This system means that the employee works during school terms but not during the school holidays, appealing in particular to parents of schoolgoing children.

### **Career Breaks/Sabbaticals**

This is a period of absence from work, which may or may not be on full pay, and duration is normally related to length of service.

### **Exam and Study Leave**

When an employee is pursuing further education an organisation may provide paid leave for the purposes of study and to enable the employee to sit exams.

### **Part-Time Work**

This means basically working fewer hours than a comparable full-time worker in the same organisation.

### **e-Working/Telecommuting**

This generally indicates work that uses new technology and can make the worker 'location independent'

## **APPENDIX II**

### **Letter to Questionnaire Participant**

May 10, 2006

Seamount  
Knockroe  
Delgany  
Co. Wicklow

Dear Participant,

I am completing a B.A. In Human Resources Management in the National College of Ireland. In partial fulfilment of this I am undertaking a thesis on Work-Life Balance in organisations specifically for the group women aged between 25-40.

The thesis will be based on the information gained from a sample of this group. The survey is in the form of the attached questionnaire. It is important for me to get a reasonably large and varied sample in order to be able to draw some valid conclusions. I hope to be able to show a connection between different types of organisations, their work-life policies and the participant's perception of her work-life balance.

I would appreciate your completing the questionnaire and returning it as soon as possible and not later than 22<sup>nd</sup> May.

All information will be private and confidential.

Thank you for your participation.

Yours sincerely,

Dorrie Mitchell

Telephone 086-2499335  
Fax 01-2017422

## **APPENDIX III**

### **Questionnaire**

**WORK/LIFE BALANCE FOR WOMEN AGED 25-40**

**PART I Personal Details**

Number:   office use only

1. Age: 25-30  31-35  36-40

2. Marital/ Partner Status

3. How many children do you have?

If you have no children skip to Q6

4. What age is your youngest child?

5. Do you have to use childcare facilities? Yes:  No:

If YES, please state type: on-site, off-site crèche, minded by family member, etc.  

6. Have you any elderly dependants? Yes:  No:

7. Do you have any dependants who require any special care or have any special needs (e.g. infants, elderly, people with disabilities) Yes:  No:

If answer is yes, please give a brief explanation.  

8. What hobbies do you have?

9. How much time can you allot to them each week?  Hours

**WORK/LIFE BALANCE FOR WOMEN AGED 25-40**

**PART II Employment Details**

10. What is your occupation?

11. Type of Employment: Fulltime, Part-time, Temporary,  
other (please state)

12. Position Held: Managerial; Supervisory; Clerical,  
other (please state)

13. Into which sector does your organisation fit?

|                |                      |                      |         |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------|
| Private        | Semi-State           | State                | Charity |
| Not for Profit | Other (please state) | <input type="text"/> |         |

14. Typically, how many hours do you work per week?

15. How many of these hours are worked at home?

16. How many week-ends per year do you work?

17. Is there pressure for you to do overtime? Yes  No

If yes, is this from

(a) a need for extra money? Yes  No

(b) pressure from boss, work colleagues, etc.? Yes  No

(c) other (please state)

18. What time do you usually leave home to go to work?

19. What distance and time is your journey to work?

Kilometres:  Minutes:

### WORK/LIFE BALANCE FOR WOMEN AGED 25-40

20. In looking at the broad types of **organisational culture and structure described on page 5**, which is closest to the culture/structure prevailing in your organisation? Most organisations are a mixture so you can tick whichever type(s) are closest.

A

B

C

D

### PART III You, Your Organisation and Family Friendly Policies

21. Which of the following family friendly policies are in place in your company, that you are aware of?

- Paternity Leave
- Adoptive Leave
- Parental Leave
- Leave for Family reasons
- Childcare Facilities
- Other (please State)

- Job-Sharing
- Flexitime
- Employ/Career Break
- Term-Time Working

22. Which of the above **not** in place would you like to see and why?

23. How would you rate your company's family friendly policies?

Excellent

Good

Fair

Poor

10

|                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
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**WORK/LIFE BALANCE FOR WOMEN AGED 25-40**

24. Have you studied while employed in the past 2 years?

Yes  No

25. If Yes, have you had support from your employer?

Yes  No

If Yes, in what way?

26. How satisfied are you with the balance you have between your work and your personal life?



Please give reasons for your chosen rating.

27. What aspects of your personal life would you like to be able to manage better while at the same time remain in employment?

If there is anything further you would like to add to the above about work-life balance please feel free to do so, onto a separate page if necessary.

## TYPES OF CULTURE/STRUCTURE IN ORGANISATIONS

### A. POWER CULTURE      Web

- ◆ a single source of influence, possibly just one person
- ◆ more likely to be a power clique comprising a small number of people
- ◆ often referred to as the spider's web
- ◆ typically a family firm or a small business
- ◆ working in such an organisation requires the employees to correctly anticipate what is expected of them from the power holders and perform accordingly.

Examples of Power Culture: Family firms, Small businesses.

### B. ROLE CULTURE      Hierarchical

- ◆ roles or positions in the firm are given primacy over the individuals who fill them
- ◆ sustains its existence beyond the contribution of specific individuals
- ◆ recruits people successfully into preset roles
- ◆ rules abound in this culture
- ◆ performance of staff is required up to the formal job description of the role
- ◆ better performance can, in some cases, be considered dysfunctional
- ◆ power in these cultures is predominantly endowed by position in the hierarchy rather than by any other bases.

Examples of Role Culture: Life Insurance companies, Banks, the Civil Service, State Industries, Local Government, Teachers, etc.

### C. TASK CULTURE      Matrix

- ◆ define the problem
- ◆ allocate appropriate resources
- ◆ wait for the solution
- ◆ performances are judged in terms of results
- ◆ culture is one of teamwork rather than individual effort and reward
- ◆ management is seen as being basically concerned with the continuous solution of problems.

Examples of Task Culture: Advertising firms, I.T. Firms, R & D Depts., etc.

### D. PERSON CULTURE      Cluster

- ◆ the organisation exists to help the individual achieve his/her purpose
- ◆ culture preferred by professionals
- ◆ can preserve their own credibility and their own freedom
- ◆ can be part of an organisation
- ◆ have colleagues, support and added flexibility that association brings.

Examples of Person Culture: Groups of doctors, lawyers, architects, etc.

## **APPENDIX IV**

### **Issues for Interview Discussion**

## **QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

- 1. How happy are you with your work-life balance?**
- 2. Women work hard in their 20's to achieve success and get promoted. Then in their 30s, they have babies and everything stalls.**
- 3. FF Policies available but deadlines have to be met.**
- 4. Policies OK but family leave damages prospects**
- 5. Companies inflexible with women when managers.**
- 6. If women's WL is good, the perception is that they are not working seriously**
- 7. Enjoy the work- feel guilty.**
- 8. Separate work and life- blurring of boundaries**
- 9. Difficult to leave before 6 (presenteeism)**
- 10. Pressure from Self, as women might need to prove themselves, particularly if they have children**

## **APPENDIX V**

**Transcripts of Taped Interviews**

## INTERVIEW WITH E.B.

### **PROFILE**

**General Manager, Non-Profit Organisation**  
**Married with two children.**  
**Age: mid-thirties.**

**Interview conducted: June 2006**

D.M. So the first thing I wanted to ask you: how happy are you with your work life balance?

E.B. Not as happy as I could be. ...

D.M. On a scale of 1-10?

E.B. I suppose now it would be at 6 or so. Previously it would have been 1-2. The change of job has improved that. That's not to say that I moved job because of that – I actually thrived on it. But now I can see how much earlier I get home and how later I get to work and this has improved my work life balance but it is still not high enough. I still has problems switching off when I get home and I still slip in to the computer to do some bits and bobs at night. I would hope that by this time next year it would be at 7-8.

D.M. So that will link in with a couple of other points here e.g. separation of work and life – do you feel there is a blurring of boundaries?

E.B. Yes, you have to consciously switch off – you have to actually make a choice to – to ignore that or not.

D.M. And how easy is this for you to do?

E.B. It depends what is a burning issue to be looked at. If I bring my brief case home or leave it in the car. If I bring it into the house then I end up doing some work.

D.M. And would you discuss any of the work issues with your husband?

E.B. Yes, I would run things by him. In this way one is bringing the work home with one, of course.

D.M. Yes, but it is a big part of your life, isn't it?

E.B. A very big part, yes. And also I would guess that a lot of the problems would be to do with people in terms of staff and their difficulties with each other – HR problems, relationships etc. In passing it across to somebody else one can get a different perspective on it. Which can be very helpful.

D.M. So the blurring of boundaries does happen?

E.B. Oh yes, very much so. Very much so.

- D.M. I don't know whether it is true that it is mostly women who do this?
- E.B. Oh no, because my husband would do the same. And again when he is talking about projects etc. that would not be taken on board by me but when he gets on to people issues I would discuss these with him and the pros and cons about how the HR department dealt with them etc. etc.
- D.M. But the fact that you do this has its upside, don't you think? After all when you are both discussing these issues you are taking to each other and even if it is about work it is communicating and sharing problems. You are respecting each other's point of view and for your own relationship I think this has a very positive side.
- E.B. Oh yes, I would find it very strange if we didn't share each other's day like this. It's such an integral part of your life you can't not share what's happened today whether it was a good or bad day whatever.
- D.M. On reading through the literature on the blurring of boundaries I believe they were referring more to the way that the people in the organisation encroach on your space for example, if someone is getting phone calls at 9 p.m. about a meeting in the morning, etc.
- E.B. Yes, when you are off duty, you are off duty that sort of thing
- D.M. But in your case your husband is making the choice of discussing with you at home what happened during his day this is not the same thing. And you are both getting something out of it.
- E.B. The opposite in fact with the new job I would not be contacted except in case of emergency when I would get a call out. But previously I remember a female colleague telling me that there would be a meeting scheduled for 8 a.m. and she stated that she was going to refuse to be there at that time as she had children to drop off at school. They would have to wait for her to attend at 9 a.m. There was no consideration given to the fact that she had family commitments at that time in the morning. Perhaps this was because it was a male who was head of the organisation?
- D.M. In her case it was interesting that she made the decision not to go there any more.
- E.B. And she had a very senior position in the organisation.
- D.M. I wonder if it damaged her.
- E.B. No. it didn't, which was quite interesting!
- D.M. A big question that has surfaced in the course of this dissertation is- are women doing this themselves because of self esteem issues, you know, feeling that they have to be better than men being in a male oriented organisation and feeling they have to behave like men. A type of peer pressure.
- E.B. Absolutely.

- D.M. When I put this to them in the questionnaire none of them took the responsibility , as in “it’s coming from me”. They said “there’s too much work to be done, there is a deadline – whatever ”.
- E.B. Of course one is competing with oneself as well.
- D.M. Is it coming from the standards that we’ve set for ourselves? I suppose it is about awareness really.
- E.B. I have seen this at senior level where the high powered females can get so much done and have the capability of making it seem effortless. I would have done this myself, of course, and when I was leaving, people would say “how on earth did you cope with that” .....but there was a downside to that in that I was run ragged and I was bringing in the briefcase home, putting the kids to bed, watching the 9 o’clock news and getting out the briefcase to open the post because I would have been at meetings all day and would just have not got to it. So, we pressure ourselves. You sit down and plan your diary. If you say to your secretary “don’t put anything in for Thursday she’ll do it for you.” It’s down to oneself to do this.
- D.M. So it is pressure coming from within?
- E.B. Yes, you fill your own diary. Nobody is doing that for you. You just have to say no.
- D.M. That’s one of the big things evolving from this research – the pressure from within- but I wasn’t quite sure how it was now. Another interesting thing in the current literature – they are looking at organisations having caught up with the new world - the newer people, the newer early-to-mid twenties coming in who are different individuals who are not that mad about buying into the collective stuff. And the organisations, which have not changed in a hundred years, may have to adapt to them.
- E.B. They won’t be able to build a psychological contract with them.
- D.M. Exactly - that will be fascinating to watch too.
- E.B. That is interesting. As an aside, in my last job we would have had 17 at the same level as myself, and in 2003 three new people came in and one of them who had come back from maternity leave. She decided to take one day a week off, and she was at a very high level and indeed in her own peer group that was frowned upon. Because it was thought’ how could you do a job at that level and not be in on a Friday’. There was no point in asking her to do a task when she was not going to be there. So she was side stepped in a lot of things while you’re looking after your own service you are also asked to do a lot of communal things for the wider organisation but she was never asked.
- D.M. And that would go against her?
- E.B. Yes and it discounted her for the next step up. So there is a case where you make sure you are available because you are competitive and you want to and family needs damage your prospects. I think it would be the case if I said I wanted to take unpaid leave I would be asked “why did you apply for the job when you knew you wanted to take leave”.

D.M. Because as I say we are still back there where the work was the important thing, in looking at how we are going to deal in the future with sustainability of life or happiness or whatever you want to call it, something has got to give and something is going to give. Someone has to look after the children. What about psychological damage?

E.B. That is also putting a huge burden on working women.

D.M. I guess they/we are going to wake up sooner or later because women make up larger and larger percentage of the workforce.

Another statement made was that women work hard in their twenties to have success and get promoted etc. When they are in their thirties they have children and things can stall. But, probably, only if you take time out.

E.B. Like I said, it depends on the person. I can see how that would happen with some people who wouldn't maybe necessarily have been that ambitious and they will stop and take time out and their careers will stall. But taking time out for maternity leave I didn't find that. I suppose I just threw myself back in the minute I went back to work.

D.M. But also that is very much accepted (maternity leave). However, taking any other kind of leave over and above that is not viable.

E.B. You would end up doing 5 days work in 4 days and getting no benefits out of it. It depends on the person. If you are very driven you are not going to take that extra time out which is a shame. It is crazy - we have it upside down. But we didn't make it like that. Society, I suppose, has set the world of work up.

The sharing of the family responsibilities, no matter how good your husband is, I mean my husband is wonderful but I know that 70% is me and the other 30% is him. And I know if I had another child, it would be the same.

D.M. Support is what you are getting, not total division.

E.B. It's not 50-50, but we've come a long way since our parents. It's only helpful up to a certain point but it's not desperately helpful for your career. When the children were in crèche if they were sick I had to take the day off and make the work up at night at home or whenever I had the chance. He was the main earner.

D.M. At the same time you were working on your career too and climbing up the ladder. You weren't just going in and shuffling bits of paper around. You had a responsible job.

E.B. I was competitive in my own way, as he is! But I know at the end of the day I take care of the children.

D.M. You were being realistic - it's not whether it's right or wrong it's just the way it is.

E.B. But I can see how that statement would be made but you can't generalise.

D.M. Another statement made was work-life policies are fine but deadlines have to be met.

E.B. It depends on what type of organisation you are in and what level you are at. If you are in senior management and in certain types of organisation where people can work around your absence, it's OK. It could also be a question of time management – if you are not managing your time well – and you are not given training for it and you are not good at it naturally, some people just are not. It is presumed you know how to do it.

D.M. Are companies inflexible when it comes to women managers?

E.B. Don't know if we can generalise. You see it is mainly the perception that we have. The example I spoke about earlier. That was more to do with the H.R. Director we had. He was very powerful and could progress you up the career ladder and if you didn't fit into the nice little box he had set out for you. And as she took parental leave she was disregarded. Of course, the rest of us idiots were working every hour. So, I don't really think you can generalise. Maybe its our own fault because we accept the behaviour whereas if we all said no then maybe it would be different. What could they do?

D.M. Yes and it is not about apportioning blame, that HR manager was a very powerful person who thought you work you work and that is it.

Another statement made: if a woman's work life balance is good then they are not taking their work seriously. You are more interested in your children and your family than you are in this job, so in other words it was about "what is the most important thing?" the work has got to be the most important thing because presumably you're paid for it and also the work ethic. If you are not working you are not doing anything worthwhile.

E.B. I can see where that statement comes from. I don't know whether it is the company which is like that or me that is like that.

I'm just thinking of something interesting in my new job a very senior male manager doesn't work Fridays. He has a property portfolio and he spends Fridays looking after this, and there isn't an eye batted.

D.M. Yes that is fine because he is not looking after a four year old! He is earning money! Another statement: people feel guilty if they are enjoying the work instead of being at home minding their children?

E.B. I can see where they are coming from, my rationale is that I am a better mother because I work, I love it,

D.M. You don't feel guilty?

E.B. No, unless I miss a play or a ballet show, or if I can't re-jig things and come in late one morning, then I feel guilty till I get into work and then I forget about it.

D.M. Is there the a difficulty for you to leave work before 6? You know the story about people who leave their computers on with jackets on the backs of the chairs so people will think they are still at work? ...presenteeism... So I suppose it is down to the culture.

- E.B. And it is down to the person as well, some who would be out the door at 5 o clock, there is also the thing of the person who stays a long time. Maybe they are only there so long because they are so tired that they can't concentrate and that is why it is taking them so long to do the work! And then there is a bit of the poor me, I have to work such long hours! Self sacrifices. Then trying to be supermum, I can do all of this so well. Being able to multitask is part of our downfall because the guys can't do it and so they won't.
- D.M. It will be interesting to look at the future... and a lot of these young people will not take the abuse. I spoke to a woman in Microsoft who was saying that the company organises people to come at lunchtime to do massage on the stressed -out employees. People are saying: Oh they have to do that to keep them, you have to query why they have to bring that in even though it is lovely there is often something more behind it!
- E.B. I know an organisation in which between Jan-April 2003 had 29 people giving stress certs, they had to be given time off work.....then the knock on effects and other people have to pick up the slack.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

## INTERVIEW WITH S. B.

**PROFILE:**

Architect

Getting married this year

Age: 30

**Was in stressful job, had left it a month previously, now working for herself.**

**Did the interview on her experiences in the job she had just left.**

**Interview conducted June 2006**

D.M. So the first thing I wanted to ask you: how happy are you with your work life balance?

S.B. The work was obviously top loaded. It would have been nice to have more free time – it's unevenly balanced. All your energy and your thought goes into work. It takes so much time – after your work to wind down – you spend your weekends recovering instead of being able to pursue hobbies because it takes so long to unwind from the stress of the job and that's not necessarily just overtime.

D.M. OK so the aftermath it's the residual stuff that's left?

S.B. Absolutely.

D.M. And would you say this is attributable to the fact there are not enough people to do the work?

S.B. Definitely – I personally would relate it to an almost greedy boss. I get the impression that he takes on too much – whether it is that he remembers the 80's when it was tough and you had to have jobs lined up or else he's just afraid that he'll miss some of the good jobs that could turn into really good clients. He takes in the jobs and just throws them at everybody and whoever lifts up their head or whoever comments will get the job to do – completely arbitrarily – whoever is sitting beside him is the most stressed in the office. And that used to be me.

D.M. So – it was whoever was in sight?

S.B. Yes – whoever was in sight, there was no structure behind it – like whoever was free – and also I think it would be women because they were more organised about the jobs on hand, they could tell you at what stage they were with each job whereas a guy would tell you to get lost, he's busy. The girls wouldn't do that to him. But he would have as much respect for the guys as he would for the girls. Having said that, in the job, all the project managers were women.

D.M. That's interesting.

S.B. I believe that is because they are more efficient at organising several jobs at a time. He wanted somebody who could be an intermediary who could work with the technicians and pass on the jobs to them and supervise them. Even though he would completely overrule you anyway. He liked quiet guys, funny enough – it was the Alpha male thing – He didn't want any rivalry from any guys. He would get quiet, studious, hard working guys who could work really well at one project at a time. They he would get women with a bit of character and confidence about them who could carry a few jobs at a time and do all the project management. None of the women were married or had kids.

D.M. Suppose you were thinking about getting married and having children at that time do you think you would have had to leave?

S.B. I don't think I would have been a nice enough person at home for kids with all that stress from the office and I don't think there would have been any facility for part time, there wasn't anybody who did part time, no job sharing. The boss and his wife both worked in the organisation, they didn't have kids, they worked Saturdays

D.M. It was their whole life?

S.B. It was completely their whole life. They wanted to have a social life with the office. They tried to organise baseball matches, weekends away but it was always the office. We wanted to socialise with our own partners, our own friends. But it became completely their life, very insular.

D.M. Well, I would see it more as keeping you all together for their sake, you know, one big happy family.

S.B. Absolutely. And I think it worked with some people. Some people said how fantastically generous they were to take us away on weekends. And they were generous in that respect. But we never had tea-breaks, never had lunch together. So I missed the bonding during the day. To go away for the weekend was like going with strangers. These people you were forced to be nice to them. I believe that something like a teabreak is a fantastic invention for bonding. Let's say take out 20 minutes let everybody bond, get on well and then naturally go out to the pub themselves, don't organise anything for them and it will happen naturally.

D.M. It seems like a lot of control.

S.B. He was a control freak I think. A lot of control. And that's why I think even though he wanted to pass on jobs to you and he did, you couldn't even get stuck into them because he would come and interfere again and say "Oh, what stage is this at?" and he would draw over all your ideas. He was so swept up and stressed. So

stressed. He was a nice man but so stressed. Even if he heard you suggesting something it became his idea. He would say "oh I had this idea" and one would think – "I just told you that" And he would do this at meetings. He would say "oh when I wrote that report" ..... and it was signed by SB at the end. And he just couldn't see it you know he had just been so closely involved he thought he had produced everything and had done everything. So although I loved the job and the work I didn't get the recognition for my input. Which was sad. He lost out.

D.M. Now that you aren't working there any more, can you look back and feel "I was very stressed"?

S.B. At the time I didn't think I was. Now I realise I was. It wasn't really obvious at the time. It was more that I was tired. You know, to sit down and read a newspaper after work was hard work, you know you would want to do something frivolous and that's not like me. I usually like to stretch my mind. I like to do different things, I like a challenge. It was unusual for me wanting to deal with easy things. It must have been a sign of stress. But having said that I was very healthy so there wasn't any really obvious signs of stress.

D.M. You played sports, didn't you?

S.B. Yes, but I craved that I craved the release you know you crave your Yoga, your time off. Even meeting somebody at lunch time was a bit of a hassle. I would much rather go to the park and sit on my own to digest the stuff that had happened on the morning. Sometimes it was better off not to take time for lunch, just keep going to get the job done. But, there was no end to it. The jobs just kept coming in there was no sense of satisfaction. Whereas in college when you were stressed out you had a winding down period afterwards, you had a few days to clear your desk. At work there was never that . Just as you were ready to put your deadline in he would come along with another 3 jobs and more of the stress with them.

D.M. Presumably he is still doing it?

S.B. Presumably.

D.M. So there wasn't, or was there, a family friendly policy as in special kind of leave, compassionate leave..... Etc.

S.B. He would be sympathetic you know if somebody's parents were sick.... There was one girl who had a problem, not sure exactly what. She was getting kidney infections, low blood count, that sort of thing. She was allowed to take time off. But she had to repeatedly tell him that she was stressed out at work and he would say....oh, yea, yea.... And he would leave her be for a couple of days then he would give her the job straight back.

But she did work different hours. And it was quite clever on her part because she wasn't a morning person. So she never started before 11 a.m. and then she would work into the evening, which was clever because he was stressed out first thing in the morning when he'd come in. Whereas I would start work early sometimes at 8 a.m. and that was bad from the point of view because he would start throwing jobs at me first thing, whereas I had come in early specifically to get my own jobs done, so by the time she came in at 11 am, he was exhausted going around everybody else with the jobs.

D.M. So she missed out on them?

S.B. Yes, I envied her at one stage because of that. By the time it came to evening he was quite relaxed so they actually had a great relationship funny enough.

D.M. So it was about him and his feelings. Where he was at and his mood. And you are talking 18 people under this one person?

S.B. And in two different offices. He knew he was pushing himself to the limit, but he was addicted.

D.M. He may have justified it by saying "well, I push myself as hard as I push them. If I can do it, so can they"?

S.B. Yes, and I could never say that he was lazy. Apart from the fact that he was designating all the work he himself worked very very hard I don't think he was even thinking that deeply. He said to himself, I need this done there's somebody - grand now I can get on to the next one. But he was working at such a ridiculously fast pace. The other problem I had with him was that he would constantly undercut which I don't think was doing anybody any favours. He would say Royal Institute of Architects standard cost is 5% of the building costs. I will only charge you 2.5%. This was to draw in the clients and get the business in. That was fine from his point of view but not from ours. He obviously had to pay us decent wages otherwise we would go to another office. But we would have to produce twice the work so he could recoup his money. We would have words so say if the RIA are setting standards that is to protect architects. We were working so hard we deserved this money, not undercutting it.

D.M. But then he could afford to do that as in would do that because it was his business he didn't have to talk to anyone else except his wife.

S.B. Yes and they agreed that between them.

D.M. So all in all there was no "out" to it?

S.B. It was very difficult to get to a stage where you could think "I am beginning to get control here" and he definitely did, as I was there longestgp, pass over some control, and you could go through the process – "great I can trust her" this took quite a while but was fantastic for me because it bolstered my confidence. Also the experience was great because he did let us be completely in charge of all aspects of the job which worked brilliantly but there was just too much of all of them. I believe I could have cut my workload in half and still had a full time job.

D.M. That is a huge amount of work. Were the hours very long?

S.B. No. He was very funny like that. I think he was justifying himself by saying "if they're not working long hours then they're not overworked". But the thinking was that "you should get all of this work done before you leave at 6 p.m. I need this for tomorrow morning." And, if you were still there at 6.30 7p.m. he would say "go home, go home" - fair enough he didn't pay overtime. But there were some times when one was tempted to stay on to get something finished off and out of the way.

D.M. He probably thought from that he was running a good shop.

S.B. I suppose. The odd time when I stayed late you could see him being uncomfortable about it . In the early days I would think "gosh there are so many jobs on I'll stay on to try and clear the backlog. But this was pointless, there was never any sense of job satisfaction. You could never say "great I can now spend a couple of days doing some filing and unwinding that was an achievement".

D.M. What a pity. Because it seems that you really enjoyed the work?

S.B. Absolutely. I really loved the work.

D.M. So he being the owner of the firm, the culture that he set was the culture that prevailed?

S.B. Yes, and I think that if he had taken on a partner, it would have diluted the stress at the office although he probably felt he couldn't have controlled a partner – he wanted to do it his own way. He was a good boss in the sense that he had good vision, just he wasn't good at management, not a people person. But he did have the drive he had the talent, he would do the research.

D.M. As a professional you could admire that?

S.B. Oh yes, I did admire him – he was only 40 - I do think having a partner might have made a difference – a lot of architect's offices are headed up by one individual. And of course from the family point of view, there was him and his wife working in the business and they

didn't have kids. In the job I worked before that one, the guy didn't have kids either. He used to joke in the office saying that if anybody got pregnant they would be out of there. It was only a joke but at the same time..... How many women have we worked with in an architect's office who have children? I have only ever worked with one woman in an architect's office who had kids, now I think about it?

D.M. Why do you think this is so?

S.B. With the stress levels in these places plus the lack of reliability time wise e.g. there is no guarantee that one can collect a child at 5.30. perhaps that is it. Maybe priorities change though. Something like 50% of qualified architects are women – that's an increase from 40%. They all do better in college they get better results at college. When it comes to 10-20 years in the profession, there is only 5%-10% of female architects out there. It drops radically.

D.M. So you have been in 2 different offices?

S.B. I have been in 3 different offices in Ireland and 1 in New Zealand.

D.M. And in any of those, were there specific policies for taking leave, taking time off for parents.

S.B. I can't really say, architecture is really project based. If some people are doing the same thing every day, it might be easier to replace them or miss a day. But in architecture, there are builders on site and they need specifications now.

D.M. So you couldn't job share?

S.B. No that's not feasible, because somebody else would have to know your job inside out. Now there was a tiny amount of job sharing from the point of view that other people would know enough about your job that if something happened to you or you went on holidays they could supervise your job but they couldn't give full time to it.

D.M. What about something like flexi-time?

S.B. The woman I mentioned was on flexi-time. I did broach the subject with them because we were moving out to the Coombe where there were not as many facilities for lunch, perhaps you could take a shorter lunch break and finish early. He was amenable to this. But in the beginning he was a bit scared because he was thinking "hang on, it's going to be so hard to keep an eye on people". Everybody was doing such long hours anyway, they almost felt guilty with the whole flexi-time and ended up doing more hours. This did not really help anybody but it was nice that he took it on board, I was actually impressed with him. But I set that up I really had to push and push it. I set up some filing systems in the office. I changed things for the

better in a lot of respects but it was all over and above my really busy job. So there was no thanks, no recognition for it.

D.M. Would it be noticed?

S.B. Oh no, a lot of things were very much embraced and it was felt "this is great. This works".....I suppose I felt in the office doing all this - yes things worked better. But there was no specific "Oh S. is quite handy she did this and that".....

D.M. You didn't get mentioned..... there wasn't a note put on your personnel file? So the next time a job came up as office manager..?

S.B. Yes. On certain things like that they slipped up. For instance when I left, I got no card, no night out and I got no reference. He misses the little touches, which would make him a better boss.

D.M. And what was his wife doing in the company?

S.B. I think she felt that she was not running it, it was up to him. She does the accountancy and reception.

D.M. Don't you think that a lot of these social issues would fall into her bailiwick?

S.B. Yes and a lot of the time she did do it. But sometimes she just didn't. I think they felt it was a lot of hassle.

D.M. And did you go out with the other people, socialising?

S.B. Again there was that link missing. Everybody worked so hard - you didn't want to go out with them, you were looking at them all day you just wanted to get out. And because he selected people on a specific basis, the guys were very quiet and studious not very good at socialising when they went out. The girls had much better personality about them, but because they were the ones that were really over worked. They wanted to go home not go out. It was two tiered – there were only 3 girls in their thirties, working really hard project managing. And then there were the guys doing the drawing etc.

D.M. So no Human Resources policies?

S.B. None

D.M. You got a written contract, did you?

S.B. No, no written contract.

D.M. Sounds like a disaster waiting to happen.

S.B. An awful lot of architects office don't have written contracts. I don't know why they all get told to ask for one but it has never really happened.

D.M. Amazing. Any of you could have taken him for constructive dismissal for over work – on the basis of stress and the hours etc. you might have had to resign.

S.B. He had an office manual and I think that some of that stuff was in it. But there was no time to read it. The job had to get done. I think there was one time when it all built up – it wasn't really a thought process just an emotional reaction – I was working late one night trying to get some jobs done. I asked if I could talk to him and I just started crying. I was very embarrassed I had never cried in the office before. I can take a lot and can deal with narky builders etc. and it doesn't really get to me because I enjoy the work. He tried to be nice to me but he talked over me because I think that was very much "if I keep talking, I'll find an answer". I was trying to tell him that I had too many jobs in that field drawings were going out without my self approval, I was afraid that they were going to come back and bite me in the bum and that I was ashamed of some the stuff going out. He did think that I was a perfectionist and I do have a high standard but not to the extent that every little "t" had to be crossed etc. Not at all, many of my friends would say that I was rather too relaxed. But there were certain things that I thought were below standards and I was not happy putting my name to them. I thought while I was being emotional I might ask for a few extra grand and flexi-hours as well! He was quite amenable to all of them. So I thought "my God why didn't do that sooner – a few tears and emotion. I feel great now having done it". So the next day he took 2 jobs from me – admittedly only small jobs – but I appreciated the gesture. I think I had about 10 jobs on at the time, so he reduced them to 8. But... he left them in the "in tray" and marked them for "N". But N never took them up because he was way too busy. Two weeks later the jobs were still sitting there, clients ringing up chasing them. But he didn't ring the clients to explain the delay, didn't officially pass them on to somebody else. Eventually they came back into my lap. And it was more embarrassing because I had to catch up, to explain to the clients that work hadn't been done on it, and update them. So this episode made a difference for about one and half weeks, I would say, and then it all went out the window.

D.M. Did you get the money?

S.B. I got a lot of what I asked for and that was great but on a par with parents who can't see the kids and buy them presents instead. Something like that. Throw some money at it. Even when I handed in my notice he was stumped for words, his pride wouldn't let him thank me for working there didn't make any attempt to ask if there was anything that he could do to change my decision.

D.M. No reason for him to.....

S.B. A lot of people said to him that they were all overworked was there any chance of re-shifting things. He looks at things but not with an open mind. He even got one of these people in to analyse how the office was run and we all thought this was fantastic. I even said to this person that I didn't think it was going to make a difference. She was insulted and said of course it would make a difference that's what they were there to do. Needless to say, nothing changed except that we all got ring binders with all the information in them. They did a couple of surveys and a lot of people said "dictatorial, and the alpha male control freak", etc. When he read them he said "my goodness that's obviously exaggerated" You have to defend yourself of course when you read such insults about yourself. But it made no difference.

D.M. Only if they spell out to people what it could mean – what are the implications of it. Give a bottom line implication, but unless it was really hurting him at the bottom line..... people come and go and other people just pick up the jobs, quite honestly.

S.B. Of course if he takes people who are young – they are keener, and cheaper. But they do leave to go travelling so he does have a high turnover. During my two years there, 8 people came and left. I think for them it is very much a reminder of what is happening. There is a fair amount of denial for their own protection. In all fairness they are both really, really, nice people. And people feel a loyalty to them because they are so hard working and trying their best etc.

D.M. It would be interesting to look at the stuff that the consultants that were brought in to look at from a human resources angle. You know work study is one thing but somebody could literally take them for thousands. The longest standing employee there, how long have they been there?

S.B. But young people wouldn't do that sort of thing. There are two people there who have been there for 7 years. But they are so loyal at this stage they would never do anything. They knew what they were like when they started off and maybe they were nicer to work for back then. One of the girls who was on a slightly higher level than I, I can tell she is so highly strung because she is stressed the whole time and that has to affect every aspect of your life.

D.M. People can get sick in these circumstances.

S.B. The other girl got sick. I think she will leave eventually. She has asked to go to the country office because there are only 4 people and the boss doesn't work at that office he supervises it. She is very valuable to him but she will have to stand up for herself.

- D.M. The previous place you were in was bigger?
- S.B. No, smaller
- D.M. And the person who owned it ran the office?
- S.B. Yes. Because it was a smaller office it was fine. He didn't have kids and there were comments about people having kids etc. But I feel that he got to know you as a person and would have been happy for you if you did have kids and would be happy to accommodate you. I think it is hard for smaller offices to support part time people.
- D.M. Stress is a very insidious thing because most people don't know when they are really stressed. They can't even contemplate what life would be like without it.
- S.B. You almost convince yourself because the adrenaline is such a rush "this is the business-- I'm doing what I love
- D.M. It's also creative, you are creating something- it's not just a case that you are pushing bits of paper around, you are actually creating and that is just fantastic using all your creative skills etc.
- S.B. Absolutely. Nobody minds the 9-5 hours the hours themselves are manageable as long as when you leave at 5 p.m. you switch off if it's the kind of job that is easy going enough and even during that day you need breaks, you need to unwind , need to be able to make your phone calls, have your cup of tea. We are capable of working those hours but of course it is different when you have children. I think women deserve to have a career if they've gone through the same process as guys to get that far.
- D.M. But also they are needed in the economy they need the male and female, they need the yin and yang they need all that balance together. You would think it not be beyond the brilliant brains to be able to figure this one.
- S.B. I think a lot of the people who are at the top have either made their money and the wife doesn't need to work or else people at the top aren't interested in having relationships with children but you can't possibly fight a female politician for all these rights if you are trying to bring up a family and have a career and do all these things at the same time so you need some people to stand.....
- D.M. I don't even think that it is a lack of interest in children I think it is that there is this organisation where we have to keep competitive we have to cut our costs and the way to do that is to have less people on the payroll. Yes, we can downsize, do merges, get rid of people and all for this bottom line see where we are going next year or the shareholders can get a better return and anything else goes by the

board like people's health, their wellbeing, like the children, like the human relationship aspect. It's capitalism at its best.

S.B. And in a strange way it has got worse instead of better. I remember being involved in my father's workplace at Christmas parties and kids were invited. Whereas now, people have more money, there is more money to be made the jobs are more stressed, its all go it's just not helping anybody

D.M. No, we have brought it to we want to earn the money so we can consume more and we are consuming more because we are unhappy because we don't have the balance in our lives so that goes into the vicious circle of more money more consumption.....

S.B. And then to get more money you just keep moving office and then you are not bonding with the workplace, you are not having that nice atmosphere that goes with it.

D.M. Yes it is the career ladder- it will be interesting to see what way it goes in the next few years

S.B. Having said that some people are going in the opposite way they are saying that's it I am working from home or I'm taking maternity leave and just staying at home and some women are taking this stance because they feel bringing up their children is more important.

D.M. Oh yes, if they can. There are people who don't have choices who are in low paid work, who are on the breadline- the husband goes out at night to work, the wife goes out by day. Then there are the people who really wouldn't be happy at home, you know, who need to go out to work , women in particular who have the brains and the ability. And also it would all fall apart and go back to the Stone Age if there aren't women in the workplace to keep the balance to keep the feminine piece of it.

S.B. And I think a lot of women are eager to please it is a natural thing to look for approval from your boss I know they can intellectualise and say this is ridiculous I don't need this approval. A lot of my friends would tell you..... we all came out of college and went straight into work and said right we're going to do this properly and by the time we get to 30 all the girls seem to be burnt out not because they are ready to have kids .....

D.M. No, it's maybe to do with the way organisations are set up- they are made for a male society, this has been so for a hundred years designed for a male society so what women have to do is to become more like men.

S.B. And who wants that?

- D.M. Exactly and that's why they are not true to their authentic self. They have to be more of a man than the man is – to prove themselves.
- S.B. Even men don't like women to be masculine to be that strong character that they're used to relating to. So I think a lot of women are getting to the stage where they are burnt out, they are slowing down. They want to take time off and the position is left there for some guy to walk into. It also happens to be the age where women are thinking of having children – career women. I finished college at 23 that's 7 years of a working career before you get to the stage where you say "I'm tired now". One of my friends when she found out she was pregnant said "great, now I can take a break". How on earth can having a kid be having a break??
- D.M. But it takes her away from the grind – to another grind!
- S.B. I don't think she is fooling herself. Just looking for a slower pace
- D.M. I just think that women are up against it still. Because they were in my day and that was 10 or 11 years ago when they were all mostly male managers. One thought "oh this will change, this will change"
- S.B. Perhaps women themselves have to back down. Men are perfectly capable of looking after the children when both people are working
- D.M. It's more about the culture of the organisation I think it would be very odd for him to be seen doing it he has to be careful about his career too.
- S.B. I think that people would get used to it. Some of the guys that I know would be perfectly happy to be house husbands, and perfectly happy to share it.
- D.M. It just depends. One woman I interviewed said there was a HR guy in the last place she worked and there were 17 women at her level and one of the women had a baby and decided she was going to take a Friday off. She was passed over totally. But she went ahead with it anyway. It wasn't in his sight at all. So if you have got somebody like that in charge of you .....
- S.B. And I don't think it is about money. If somebody is going to do a 4 day week they accept that they will be paid for a 4 day week and that's fine.
- D.M. She also said that a very senior male manager takes Fridays off because he has a property portfolio and that's fine- nobody bats an eyelid.
- S.B. In one of my offices a guy used to take a Wednesday afternoon off to play golf – not a problem. How can they get away with that? Because

it was cool, he was potentially talking to business people which he very rarely was.

D.M. I wonder if it is related to the fact that he is paid. This guy's portfolio – he was obviously making money out of it. You are at home looking after a child – it's unpaid, therefore it's undervalued. Actually it would be interesting to see if a woman took a Friday off to look after a property portfolio how would that be viewed?

S.B. I think a woman looking after a portfolio would not be boasting about it. The guy would be the whole competitive, showing off business. Whereas, a woman would be different. We work differently and until you have women up at the top it won't change.

D.M. Or you get organisations which come to terms with the fact that they will lose the brightest if they don't do something about it. That may happen. There are some excellent organisations.....

S.B. I know my aunt works for Renault and they were amazing to her when she got sick. She could work whatever hours she liked and she still got all the company benefits, the car etc. So she stayed through her whole sickness from their point of view they have a loyal employee she will never leave them.

D.M. Yes there are some such organisations but the majority are not like that. One of the statements made: if women's work life balance is good, the perception is that they are not working seriously.

S.B. Amongst my friends everybody is working too hard and have become disillusioned with work at the moment -- all of them

D.M. All architects?

S.B. No. There's an engineer, a solicitor, marketing executive, the most stressed of all is doing out a bus timetable, two are working for the Government, which jobs are looked on as being the most relaxed . They are girls and take their jobs seriously

S.B. Yes. One who is working for the Government does. I think that people in civil service jobs there are two types – one who really gets stuck and the other who says "well I'm getting paid anyway, I'll take a lunch break.

D.M. On the basis that they get paid anyway never going to be out of a job there not going to go bust or be taken over.

S.B. Yes.

D.M. So all of your friends have got to the stage where they are really fed up?

S.B. Yes and its not like they have children either

D.M. I wonder – should we consider educating the women? As in ‘you go in to an organisation and this is the way its going to be’?

S.B. I think a lot of women take on the work though.

D.M. Precisely there needs to be somebody saying ‘Danger here’ we’re saying ‘oh it has to be done, I’ll do it and then I know it’s done”’.

S.B. Yes. You say “it’s a little job really I will do it and get it out of the way”. I think women are more like that in general. For instance, if your friend has a problem you’ll take it on whereas guys aren’t like that. They are more self sufficient. They’ll worry about it at the time the friend is telling them but then it’s gone. They won’t lie awake at night worrying about it like we would. We are just built differently, I suppose.

D.M. The problem is that we have people who are willing and organisations want you to do work longer and longer hours and harder because they don’t want to pay more people. But a man will say “no”

S.B. I think men are much better at saying “no”. Women don’t like letting people down.

D.M. I really believe that organisations now are going more and more against the female personality. It’s about money and profit and about the bottom line and that approach goes against the feminine psyche.

S.B. Yes, and in general I think that women are more sensitive to clients they want to help as opposed to making money from them.

D.M. Yes, to make the world a better place to make the house/building you are designing a better place for whoever to live in. And they’re the people who will get “caught” when the hammer comes down

S.B. Yes, because they will be in the right place at the right time

D.M. That man – your ex-boss, if he had taken on 2 more people the rest of you wouldn’t be so stressed

S.B. He tried that but he just took on more jobs with them. And he always went for the same type of guy, never anyone who had more personality than himself.

D.M. That's a strategy in itself. He had the women in the places where he wanted the work done and the men who would not argue with him. It can be difficult arguing with men.

S.B. Having male and female in the office is a very natural thing and there isn't the same competitiveness between guys and girls. One guy who qualified with me, who was a year older than me, but I am convinced he was on more money than me. He was excellent but did one job at a time.

If you go back to basics newspapers, the greatest source of information, are written by men for men. I know that there are women editors but they are women who have to think like a man. They're doing male jobs. Women are not just interested in reading about numbers, money. They're more interested in the reason and meaning behind it. Men are more interested in what they are worth moneyswise, women will say "well, I trust this person, if they are offering me this wage as being the standard wage, perhaps that is what I am worth"

D.M. And the disparity is everywhere. Although pretty well unspoken

S.B. Yes, and I never thought I would accept this. I came out of an interview and a guy who had the same qualifications as I asked me what had I been offered – when I said 20K, he said funny I was offered 24K. Very same everything but he was offered more.

D.M. So it looks like different scales for women

S.B. I just don't know. People just don't talk about wages. However, I did happen to see the wages sheet from my last job, the accountant left it on the photocopier by mistake. It wasn't necessarily a guy/girl thing because in that office things were a bit more even. What was clear was that less confident, shyer people were definitely on less money. Because although they worked probably twice as hard, they wouldn't ask for more consequently, they didn't get more.

D.M. So, as we discussed they want the longest possible hours for the lowest cost. I expect you are glad to be out of that environment now?

S.B. Oh yes. But at the time I didn't realise how stressed I was I loved the work, I loved the excitement, when something went wrong at the last minute, the challenge was great it keeps you sharp. I realise now when I visited my mum after work she would constantly say "calm down". I was so obviously wound up.

D.M. It is difficult for us to see it ourselves but other people can see it in our behaviour. Goodness alone knows what it is doing to our insides.

S.B. Yes, now I see it in other people and I will take them to one side and say "this is definitely not worth it"

D.M. There is a huge fear factor though. I had a friend who worked in a stressful place - she was staying for the pension. But when the time came for retirement she actually asked them if she could stay another 9 months. And they said "yes". Then a new person came changed the culture, got rid of the "deadwood" and that was that. If you saw her now you wouldn't believe the difference. It was about fear of filling the vacuum in her life which of course she filled easily!

S.B. Yes, but there are so many options out there. But you need to be really stuck to go looking for them.

## **INTERVIEW WITH D.C.**

**PROFILE:**      **H.R. Manager, Software Company**  
**Getting married this year**  
**Age: 28**  
**Moved from one stressful organisation to another**  
**Hoping to move again.**

D.M. How happy are you with your life work balance?

D.C. I am not happy at all.

D.M. On a scale of 1-10 where are you?

D.C. One?

D.M. Really, what is that about then? Does it come from you or long hours or what?

D.C. I think it was a mixture of things. A lot of it was pressure I put on myself, the actual hours worked also the type of job, the type of work even when I am not there it is always on my mind - it is coming home with me, I am dreaming about it, waking up in the middle of the night even when I am not physically there I am thinking about it, the pressures of it.

D.M. So was that coming from pressure from your boss, that things had to be done to a deadline, were there not enough people working there or what?

D.C. I believe the volume of the workload, that one person just couldn't physically do it plus I don't have one boss, I have four – two where I work, one in town and one in Aberdeen - so I am reporting different things to different people - some are HR some are operations and business managers. So there are 4 reporting lines so that is the difficulty, trying to juggle, trying to decide what they each want. The work is generated by people. None would send me a task list, I had to work that myself but the volume is very high in terms of the type of people. We have some very young people, it's very multi-cultural, people are there for a year or two.

D.M. What sort of age group?

D.C. Probably mid twenties – a lot of problems, a lot of performance issues, a lot of leavers, high attrition

D.M. Do you do some HR?

D.C. Yes that is my job I am an HR person. I was the HR person working for our people on behalf of the Client. So making sure that we were doing what we're supposed to do from our employer's perspective and if the Client didn't like one of our staff we had to deal with that too

- D.M. So it was all people stuff you were dealing with? And ever generating?
- D.C. Exactly.
- D.M. So, how many people do you have to take care of?
- D.C. 100 people
- D.M. And is it just you?
- D.C. Yes.
- D.M. Three of the women in my class are one person to 120-150 in their HR job. That is impossible to do you just can't do it.
- D.C. What I found also with previous employers because both of them were similar in that they were after new business. They would find the resources to win the business, to sell it, then they would put into transition phase. They never, ever, increased the support roles they only increased the head count for the new business.
- D.M. So the same number of people are carrying out the backup but for more business.
- D.C. Yes, the same number of people.
- D.M. It was probably a deliberate policy?
- D.C. I think it was a matter of budget. HR and finance cost the business money, they don't make it. I do think this is overlooked . It was the same with the last employer, always winning new business which we still had to support, we still had to train them, we still have to recruit them, provide the general HR support in terms of team. That has always been the case in my experience
- D.M. I must say when I was in management 10 years ago, the people who were out selling were the ones who got the money. The rest were dispensable. So not a lot has changed.
- D.C. I don't think so. We increased our headcount by 25 people, which isn't huge. The account manager came to my desk and said they would be in my area and that was my extra work load and there was no question about- could you handle that or anything.
- D.M. So when you do your Annual Review do you have to get the four of them- do they all have an input or what?
- D.C. Well, I haven't been through it yet myself, but I am assuming they will I will have to get feedback from them all.
- D.M. And when did you start.

- D.C. September
- D.M. Who does the annual reviews for the other people?
- D.C. I do. That's what I'm working on at the moment. And its all done everyone at the same time. I will have to go through this as an employee in December but the rest of the organisation bar the support roles are done in September so we're working through it all now
- D.M. You must be doing it every day.
- D.C. Well, I basically work it to ensure that global guidelines are followed and percentages across the different rating of salary. I do workshops on them and that sort of thing
- D.M. Sounds like a very heavy number.
- D.C. It is. But interestingly enough a month ago I was ready to crack. A new senior manager joined us who was more sensitive than most and she said "you're not very happy". I was very honest with her and said I wasn't. She then made arrangements for me and another colleague of mine in the Client company (who has 140 people to deal with) to share an administrator.
- D.M To help you with the backlog.
- D.C. If we can prove that this is needed but it was huge for us
- D.M. Where is your colleague situated?
- D.C. She is next door to me
- D.M. And where will the administrator be sited?
- D.C. Between the two of us. There going to have 2 desks one by me and one by her.
- D.M. So how will that be shared?
- D.C. Half days I reckon. Because if we left a gap of a day the type of work that we are on we would need someone heading in every day
- D.M. I think it might work
- D.C. I think it might. It is certainly better than how it is at the moment.
- D.M. You mentioned about there being issues particular to young people ?
- D.C. For the Client company we look after all of Europe, middle East and Africa so what we're looking for when we're recruiting is languages. That plus they have a degree, they have experience. At the end of the day if they can speak Arabic we

take them in. They would be less experienced in life and professionally, possibly new to the country a lot of the time.

D.M. And non nationals?

D.C. Yes most of them. We have about 18 different nationalities. So Irish are in the minority, so literally every day it is different people coming in from different countries. Different cultures, different religions a lot of the time when I'm meeting with a new person they don't even know how to open a bank account – a lot of it is handholding.

D.M. So they would need special support more than the ordinary?

D.C. Yes. They would be more dependent than other groups

D.M. The culture thing would be quite big. From your point of view it must be very difficult.

D.C. Yes it could be. My counterpart in the Client company, she is used to working with the typically consultancy people in X.... who are completely different with salaries, they had to get a first at college and be extremely polished, professional people. When I used to talk to her about employee issues I had, it was completely alien to her.

D.M. It is at the other end of the scale really.

D.C. Exactly. Because I am there 6 years I now understand the cultural ways, not perfectly, but enough to make allowances and I can say, that's quite Germanic in approach (not in a discriminatory way) but that's the style – the Dutch for example, are very difficult to deal with. For example, after a meeting people would come back to me and comment on how rude they were. I would then say "but that is their way" you would make allowances for them because that is how they are. When this girl came into our area and was dealing with this multiculturalism you could see her thinking how difficult it is.

D.M. It probably links in with this. Somebody said that life work policies are available but deadlines have to be met. Do you have work life policies presumably you know about it. Do you have anything over and above the general?

D.C. No . I've heard the phrase "work-life balance." But I've yet to see it. And that includes the policy on it.

D.M. Are we talking just lack of it completely?

D.C. I suspect people think if they just use the phrase the odd time that it exists. I think it is a lack of appreciation for what it actually means .....

D.M. It wouldn't be high on the agenda anyway.

D.C. No. Interestingly we are doing our financial year HR plans for the business units and when I was writing mine up recently I was looking at other counterparts across Ireland, the UK and Norway etc. and I was seeing this enhanced work life balance and workshops etc. I feel I would be interested to attend one of these to see what it is about.

D.M. It is the buzz word now- the fashionable thing coming up. A lot of books are written about it. I believe these "fashionable" things are coming from a need - it's going to get quite serious – the amount of stress -the company doesn't own you body and soul, yet it seems to think that it does.

D.C. Yes it does.

D.M. So would they give you fancy stuff - days off – massage, etc.

D.C. No. And because I transferred across to X.... under TUPE legislation my terms and conditions from my previous employment were honoured. And they were better than X..’s. I have more holidays now if I get a new job in X.... they will give me a new contract and I will get less holidays. It is interesting – they are talking about working from home, flexi-hours but only if your job allows it. So the odd time I work from home because I have reports to do.

D.M. . But that would not be the norm and not for everybody?

D.C. For some it depends on the jobs, for some it would be, but in our work area no.

D.M. Because flexitime is what people seem to be looking for generally.

D.C. And working from home. I remember when I used to come in at 7.30 to have some quiet time before everybody came knocking on the door. My boss said to me “you should be able to leave at 4 p.m”. And I tried to do this, I think I managed one day. You just can’t leave early.

D.M. Would that pressure be coming from you or everybody else sitting there?

D.C. Everybody else sitting there. They had forgotten that I was in at 7.30 . You would be better off coming in at 10 a.m .and staying until 7 p.m. If you leave at 5 p.m. it’s like your taking a half day.

D.M. That was another thing that came up. It was difficult to leave before 6 p.m....Also, if you really do have a good work life balance the perception is that you are not working seriously and companies are inflexible with women when they become managers. It’s ok when they are starting off, but the higher up they go the harder it is to get flexibility.

D.C. I would think so, yes, to all that, because they would have more to deliver. And at the end of the day the job has to be done

D.M. You are actually engaged now? And getting married soon?

D.C. Yes.

D.M. So do you think that if you are thinking of having children how will that change your job.

D.C. We are talking about that and I would not bring a child into the world and go to work where I am

D.M. Really ?

D.C. Oh absolutely. The amount of stress that I bring I would not do that to a child. I would not even consider it. That's why I am currently looking to move. Several women came in their forties to our company more experienced than me in life work everything, married with one child possibly and I saw strong women come into our company and leave it half the person.....to the point where they were bawling in the office. One particular operations manager, a very strong feisty woman with one child and she left a shadow of her former self. She had got to the point where her relationship with her husband had suffered, her child she had no time to spend with her. She decided that was it she had enough and she left. That was a year and a half ago and now she is so much better, she took a drop in salary but she has a happy life, her child is happy and she looks back on what it did to her child. That stuck in my head. I bring my work home to my fiancé and this affected our relationship and I could not do that to a child

D.M. Is that because of the amount of work or the pressure coming from above that caused these women to go like that. I get the impression that we as women have to prove ourselves in a male world, do we have to work harder or do we take so much on or..... any ideas on that?

D.C. I personally think it is to do with female bosses not necessarily to do with the men. And this applies to my friend that we discussed as well. Without wanting to sound sexist, certain women who have risen to senior level in the organisation have proved to be completely ruthless with no morals.

D.M. Otherwise they could not have done it, they're competing in a man's world.

D.C. Yes, they have become more self conscious and insecure themselves they make sure that the women below them stay at a certain level. They are so top notch about where they are they are tough on other women. That's my personal view

D.M. It's a dilemma isn't it? Talking to younger women I just feel they are saying "you know I just don't want this if I had a child there is no way I would be fighting my way up, I would be so exhausted. For what? What can you say? What are your priorities?

D.C. Also all the complementary healing has become so big and the more you hear about it the more you can't actually get away from it. But there is a reason why the more I talk to young people from college and I am still young 28 I'm only starting my career. When I came out of college I was very ambitious and I am almost burnt out. I'm like the 40 year old woman

- D.M. Isn't it brilliant that you have come to see it so early? Another interview I did with a young architect, your age, who packed it in. She tells me without any exception ALL of her friends are burnt out at 28 – she just said "I'm out of here" and I said to her "are they all architects" she said "no they are spread across industry, They play football, they are feisty they are healthy and saying "I just don't want this". Her view was you do all this men come to it in their thirties, so they step into jobs when the burnt out ones give up. But you are right. People are searching for meaning. Another thing that came up: The separation of work and life is blurring.
- D.C. Oh I would log on when I got home. I would log on and get responses and it's waiting for me when I come in in the morning. The company doesn't sleep. When I take a few days off I would log on before I got back and do all my e mails because I couldn't face going in. That is me no one tells me to log on but the minute I get back there is a line of people waiting . In fairness there was one man who rang me about 5 p.m. on Friday I answered the phone in the car on the way home. He asked me where I was and I said I was on my way home, he said "Oh it will wait until Monday", I said "well you can talk to me now". He said "No this is your time, this will wait for Monday". I thought this is good. But there is another guy there who works from 6 a.m. until midnight and he has no life. He bases everyone else's standards on his standards. By comparison I feel I'm skulking out at 6pm even though I've been there since 7.30.
- D.M. How would it work for someone to change their hours. Would someone else have to take up the slack?
- D.M. This might work with you being in HR – when work life policies are in place and some people take advantage of them, the others have to pick up the slack. But you don't have that anyway.
- D.C. But if somebody changes their hours and does less hours the work load doesn't change it is still there so possibly someone else would have to do probably by default. They are not going to say well you're only doing a 4 day week, but they are not going to take that work off you. In my job I would have to do a 5 day job in 4 days. It's only suitable for some jobs.
- D.M. So the X..Company HR policies are less than perfect?
- D.C. I think so, they have HR policies but I haven't seen this one in practice. The new senior manager starting with us, she has a child and this guy who only lives to work, said now you will see life work balances coming into play. To them, you have to be married and have a child for this concept to kick in. But you have to have a life. But since this woman has started she is e mailing from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. She takes turns at driving her child to school and picking him up. So some weeks she will come in at 8.45 and leave at 5.15. And I overheard her saying I am sorry I have to leave and pick my child up I am really sorry. I thought, stop apologising. Then she said "the earliest I can log back on is 8 p.m. I have to spend some time with my child tonight. She had to repeat this several times. I thought this is not work life balance, but she is a senior

manager and it is expected. To me it is lose-lose.

D.M. So it is not relevant unless you have a child?

D.C. No it is not relevant.

D.M. And to him of all people because he is the one who works and works and works.

D.C. Yes, his only hobby is he runs, a singular/individual thing. He wouldn't ask me how my weekend was. He doesn't want to know about personal stuff.

D.M. He is perfect for there

D.C. Yes, he lives and breathes his job he has been there for 7 years and there is nowhere better for him than this place.

D.M. Tell me, when you decided in your head that you were going to leave what happened what was the response, how did you feel?

D.C. In terms of my hours or what? I think I got so bad I couldn't care, I had gone beyond caring. I finally made the shift. I decided I'm better than that. To me it takes strength to leave, I had to stand up to it. I saw these women saying it just wasn't worth it and leaving. I envied them. I still give it my all at work don't get me wrong last night I was visiting my sister and I logged on but I actually logged straight off and thought this can wait until tomorrow and I hit the snooze button this morning which is unheard of, the alarm goes off and it is like a military operation. But the shift is on I finally got to the point where I realised this isn't good for me, physically, mentally, so I don't care, I'm not afraid any more.

D.M. What is that fear?

D.C. I suppose fear of failure, fear of the competitiveness, the perception if you are seen to be working there late, if you are seen to be logging on at night and e-mailing. I know people who draft e-mails by day and will send them when they go home at night. It's a game to people, a calculated game

D.M. But is everyone playing it?

D.C. I don't think everyone is but a lot of the key influencers are and people will tell you how hard they work instead of getting on and doing it. But you are competing against those people.

D.M. Does the company give any special benefits? Indian head massage at lunchtime?!

D.C. The Client company is good, we don't have the benefit of it. The gym costs 50 Euros per annum personal trainers. Babies are in there. To me it's strategic what they are doing, the wife and child come and the husband can see them.