

Work life balance – the impact on a woman's career prospects

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for a BA (HONS) in
Human Resource Management
BAHHR

National College of Ireland
2012

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material which I now submit for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of BA (HONS) in Human Resource 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

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Abstract

In the context of work flexibility and work-life programmes, the question arises as to whether work flexibility is a mutual gains enterprise for employers and employees. This dissertation continues the debate on the firm to incorporate a work-life balance agenda. The extent of numerical and functional flexibility is correlated with the extent of work-life balance support. Company benefits are not linked to numerical flexibility, but in both the employer and employee surveys they are consistently associated with a functional flexibility and work-life balance supporting arrangements. This would suggest an integrated approach to human resource management, where some companies engage in a modern employee focused approach and other companies tend to be more practical.

From an employer perspective functional flexibility supports employee benefits and mutual gain. In respect of the hypothesis that work-life balance policies are more beneficial to the employer than the employee, the analysis shows that work-life balance supports are important for mutual gain. Overall benefits for the employer such as cost saving, tend to occur in companies where a redundancy policy, little or no functional flexibility and where family-friendly/work-life balance arrangements are irrelevant.

The literature to date highlighted the need for new research given the global and in particular Irish economic recession from 2008 to present.

The aim of this study was to investigate the equality of opportunities provided by flexible working arrangements and a balanced work-life. The study will look at practical workings of flexible working arrangements and the reasons behind the development of such practices. It will also provide an insight into the perspectives of employees and organisations responsible for its implementation. It will highlight that whilst work-life balance, plays a part to all, it is predominantly a problem for mothers who are still seen as the main carers of children in the home.

Overall work-life balance favours the employer and the employee.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people, without whom this dissertation would not have been possible

To my husband and best friend Robert Thank you for the love and support you have always given me and for encouraging me through this particularly difficult year, I could not have done it without you

Also to my two young children Anna and Scott who unknowingly allowed their Mommy the time to study and write

To my employer University College Dublin, who funded this course for me and allowed me time off for study and exams As a staff member I was granted full access to the Michael Smurfit Library, Blackrock and James Joyce Library on Campus which proved invaluable in my research

To the participants of my surveys who gave generously their knowledge and time

To my wider family and my dear friends, thank you for believing I could do it

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Aims and Objectives of the study

The following research paper will attempt to highlight the difficulties of work life balance facing employees, and the differences in this regard between men and women. It will highlight the challenges and implications the event of having children has on women with regards to their career progression.

1.2 The scope of the study

“No woman in my time will be Prime Minister or Chancellor or Foreign Secretary, not the top jobs” (Thatcher, 1969)

One of the most striking differences between men and women managers is the shortage of those in the latter category. In most developed economies, leadership positions continue to be primarily male dominated.

Although most organizations worldwide place considerable focus on defining and developing good or preferably great leadership, at the CIPD conference in 2004 Warren Bennis a keynote speaker and leadership guru provided a chilling reminder of just how important leadership is when he said “research shows the impact effective top leadership has on shareholder value is that it goes up by 11%”

In an interview with People Management, Geoff Armstrong (2004 directory general of the CIPD) warned “leadership is growing in importance amongst challenges such as increasing globalization”

The reality is that in today’s market, mergers, acquisitions, restructurings, rationalization and downsizing have become all too familiar. This problem is further exacerbated by a changing, more diverse workforce. Employees demand loyalty and job security and they desire a sense of meaning from their work.

As organizational structures and cultures change, directive, task-orientated and hierarchical leadership of subordinates has to make way for managing high involvement work teams with an emphasis on consensus decision making and learning instead of control (Bohl, 1993)

The increased emphasis on new wave management techniques has highlighted personal characteristics and behaviours such as counselling, coaching, nurturing and collaborating. Traditionally these behaviours and characteristics are congruent with those portrayed by women. Growing evidence suggests that business requires a more feminine approach to management.

However, the question remains whether the 'feminization of management' will lead to a larger proportion of women in leadership positions (Bennis 2003). There is no shortage of women with the necessary technical and behavioural competencies ready to take up senior management positions in corporations. We can see the contribution of women in political and social arenas where they excel at senior levels. Women participation in education and in the workforce has resulted in a strong recruiting pool for senior positions. "Education has proved to be a powerful tool in improving the status of women" (Wirth 2001).

In 2008, 42.3% of the Irish population aged 25-34 was in third level education. This was dominated by females in the same age category. In 2000, 30.5% of females were in third level education (compared with 27.5% males) rising to 49.9% in 2008 (34.9% males) (CSO 2003).

In Ireland, women's career development may have been even less evident without supportive legislation. For example, in 1973 Irish women working in the Civil Service were required to resign once they got married under what was known as the "marriage bar".

The Employment Equality Acts of 1998 and 2004 have clear implications for workplace equality practices, quality of work and flexible working arrangements. In addition there are a number of "family friendly" acts including, The Parental Leave Act 1998, The Maternity Protection Act 1994-2004 and the Adoptive Leave Act 1995.

Previous Academic studies/reports show that a positive business impact arises from higher numbers of women at senior levels in organizations (Morrison 1992, Fernandez 1993, Mattis et al 2005, IBEC 2010, *McKinsey & co* 2011) According to both Morrison and Fernandez, a definitive competitive advantage can be accrued by possessing women directors

There are abundant opportunities and the skills set which women bring to the role of leadership are entirely appropriate for the management of knowledge organizations. It is therefore important to look at the personal factors, in particular, the maternity issue, which many women believe to be incompatible with the commitments involved in organizational leadership

The glass ceiling was defined as “a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy” (Morrison & Von Glinow 1990)

The term “glass ceiling” was coined in a 1986 Wall Street Journal report on corporate women by Hymowitz and Schellhardt. It is an idea that predominantly refers to barriers faced by women who aspire or attempt to accomplish senior roles (along with higher salary levels) in corporations, education, government, or non-profit organizations. There are other categories which could be classified within these barriers (ethnic minorities for example) but for the purpose of this paper references to ‘the glass ceiling’ relate to the failure of woman to climb the career ladder

The NDP Gender Equality Unit completed an Assessments of Gender Equality in 2006. The findings of this report include

- 1 More women than men at senior level were employed in organizations with 5-10 personnel
- 2 More women than men managers had less than 5 personnel working under their direct daily control
- 3 More woman than men leaders had a direct budget of less than 100,000 Euro per annum

- 4 More men than women leaders had a direct budget of more than 500,000 Euro per annum
- 5 Significantly more men managers than women managers had three or more children
- 6 Significantly more women than men managers were single

It could be argued then, that where women are managers they are managers predominantly of smaller groups and manage smaller budgets. In addition, those women who achieve management status are less likely to be married or have children.

Like large numbers of males, females choose to put their career first. They are prepared to make the same trade-offs traditionally made by males to ensure attainment of senior management status. They make conscious decisions to work long hours, make sacrifices in their personal lives and to make certain they avail of each and every opportunity for professional development. However, the question remains whether this decision also requires women to remain single or at least childless or, if they do have children if they are satisfied to have other people raise them.

Work-life balance is something that all workers and their employers should be striving to achieve, helping employees combine employment with their family life and social life outside the workplace. There are a number of working arrangements and policies helping employees achieve a better balance, including force majeure, maternity, parental leave. A full list of these can be found in appendix 1.

1.3 Structure

In chapter 2 of this dissertation the author will outline the history of Irish women in work and home. Chapter 3 is being presented with an extensive review of the literature dealing with work life balance of organisations and their employees. Methodology of the survey is explained in Chapter 4 with sections on surveys in general, the questionnaire design, interviews, sampling methods and finally analysis. Chapter 5 elaborates on the findings. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in chapter 6.

Chapter 2 – Background to Irish women - home and work

According to Article 41 2 of the 1937 Irish constitution

“By her life in the home the woman gives to the state a support by which the common good can be achieved. The state shall therefore endeavour to ensure that mothers will not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of her duties in the home”

The strict system of gender role behaviour that has governed the Irish society throughout most of its history is reflected in the above assertion. Despite the fact that great effort is put nowadays into eliminating gender discrimination, in the 1900s it was an inherent aspect of society. The social changes that occurred in other European nations with regard to gender views did not make their presence felt in Ireland, where the social roles that women could fulfil remained limited until the 20th century, due to the fact that it was essentially an agricultural society. In pre-industrial Ireland, within the household, women were the main bearers of strenuous physical work, which made them economically dependent on men. As such, the women were responsible for ensuring the sustenance and well-being of the family, particularly if the economic means and assets of the family were limited. According to (Luddy and Murphy 1984, p98), women were in charge of ‘rearing pigs, children and poultry, all of which contributed to the family income’.

Women were responsible for all the dairy production activities, even churning, which required hard physical labour (Dickson 1993, cited in Daly 1997). However, dairy production represented the only agricultural activity that ensured an income for women throughout the year. Women were also in charge of crafts such as the production of textiles, which were performed at home. Land cultivation and harvesting supplied women with about six weeks of work. In situations when the family lacked any financial means, the woman was forced to beg.

Harvesting was generally done by young, unmarried and childless women. The developments that occurred in agricultural techniques at the beginning of the 19th century were unfavourable for women as there was a decrease in the cost of farm products and an increase

in the number of male workers. As a result, by the 1820s, women were no longer required as farm workers. The justification for this was that women hindered the pace of work as they needed to stop in order to breastfeed. The long hours of hard work also took their toll on pregnant women and affected their health (Dickson, cited in Daly 1997, pp 9-17) observed that the men were free to find work in different places, sometimes far away from home, as their wives were in charge of farming, raising the children, and administering the household. Families that possessed more extensive farms were able to keep pigs and hens, which generated an additional profit or were exchanged for other goods. Their income did not permit women to live independently with their children, but it did contribute a substantial amount to the overall income of the household.

If their husbands died unexpectedly, women were exposed to the risk of losing their assets and workplace, which forced them to turn to prostitution and begging (Daly 1997, pp 9-17). However, cities offered a wider range of available employment, including shop-keeping and different types of services. There have also been a limited number of cases in which women managed extensive business affairs in larger towns. Women were not accepted for apprenticeships and they were even rejected from workplaces commonly ascribed to women in situations of economic decline. The employment divisions that were dominated by women were indicated in the census of 1841. These divisions were textiles, household and farm workers. The women who were domestic workers did not marry until their late twenties so as not to lose their job. In contrast, the textile sector welcomed married women, which formed more than one quarter of the total number of women working in this sector in 1871. Women had no right to a maternity leave, and new mothers had to go back to work immediately after birth, which caused health complications for both the mothers and the babies (Daly 1997, pp 22-40). As such, many women chose to quit their jobs after giving birth, although many others (one in five Catholic women and one in ten Protestant women) were forced to return to work because of economic pressure. In some cases, children were sent to work instead of the mothers. A number of women opted for less stable jobs such as sewing and laundering in order to be able to carry out their family duties as well. Daly goes on to say that, women living in Dublin and Cork usually worked as launderers and housekeepers even after the end of the First World War.

By 1911, 48% of women living in Derry and Belfast worked in the manufacturing industry, whilst women living in Dublin and Cork were employed in the domestic service. The former usually kept their job after they got married, whereas the latter left. Women formed one quarter of the employed labour force. The growing emphasis on education was responsible for this percentage in particular among women from the middle class, who preferred to be financially independent rather than simply rely on marrying a rich man. These types of professions derived from the initial duty of housewives, that of nursing. Women working as nurses or teachers had to leave their jobs when they got married as their new social status was not compatible with the role of workers in the industrial society.

2.1 Post 1922 - Irish women in work and home

The ratio of women working in agriculture compared to those who were not was 80:20 in 1926. Wives of farmers were not included in this statistics as the number of women working in agriculture would have increased exponentially. In the industrialized cities in the north of the country, women received paid employment outside the household, and their number increased during the Second World War, to replace the men that were sent to the war front. After the end of the war, in the period between 1961 and 1981, the percentage of employed women decreased in the south and increased in the north. Daly (1997, 41-51) noted that demographic transformations became pronounced during this period.

Gunmole, Heraty & Morley (1997, pp. 161-162) stated that the ascension to political power of Sean Lemass heralded the beginning of a new era of economic development in Ireland. By 1975, 60% of women worked in agriculture, while the other 40% worked in different other sectors. Despite the increase in the number of women working in the manufacturing and service industry, the marriage regulation was not removed and women still had to give up work when they got married, which had a negative impact on the percentage of employed women. Emboldened by the economic development of the country, numerous young couples got married. This was associated with a rapid growth in the birth rate, supported by medical innovations which increased the survival of babies. The high birth rate was also in part due to the official religion of Ireland, Catholicism, which did not approve of contraceptive methods. Women rarely chose to go back to work once they were married and had children. By 1981,

44% of women in the north of the country were in paid work, whereas only 20% of women in the south of the country were in paid work (Daly 1997, pp 41-51),

2.2 What evidence is there that women do both paid work and housework?

The nuclear family and the economic activities that rely on it can never be replaced in society (Murdock, cited in Haralambos & Holborn 1998, pp 317-321). In every type of society, whether prehistoric or modern, the gender separation of labour was ensured the completion of economic activities, offering 'rewarding experiences' to men and women, who 'cement their union' by working side by side. Murdock declared that the advantages of the nuclear family make it indispensable and he was not able to find a substitute for it in any of the two hundred societies he studied to support all the economic activities associated with it. Similarly Becker, (cited in Hakim 1996, p 14) has expressed a similar opinion, stating that the gender separation of labour is beneficial for both men and women as it enables a high level of specialisation, thus increasing overall productivity.

Morgan (cited in Haralambos & Holborn 1998, p 322), observed that the Parsonian assessment of the nuclear family proposed by Murdock as the ultimate economic structure represented a 'remarkably harmonious situation'. Due to the fact that he stated the essentiality of the family, the perspectives put forth by Murdock could be considered deterministic and showing disregard for other types of family structures. Becker has conceded that the labour market is discriminate against women, and that wives may suffer exploitation at the hands of their husbands. In addition, Becker has accepted that the gender separation of labour directs women towards embracing less demanding jobs in order not to neglect their domestic duties. As such, work segregation occurred, due to the fact that women looked for and accepted less challenging jobs. This situation had a negative impact on the perspectives of ~~un~~married men and women and on family planning. In this light, the theory put forth by Murdock of an equal and rewarding gender separation of labour based on the nuclear family is completely unrealistic.

Married women, irrespective of whether or not they are in paid employment, do double the amount of housework than their husbands and unemployed married women spend up to

seventy hours per week carrying out domestic chores and taking care of the children (Treiman and Hartman 1981). In contrast, the husbands only spend about eleven hours per week doing housework and taking care of the children. Even though married women are in paid employment and dedicate less time to domestic duties, their overall workload is still extensive. Two out of every three domestic tasks are completed by women, 'mothering the house' more than 'mothering the children', the latter task being carried out more by the husbands (Hochschild & Machung 1990, p. 8-9). Overall, Hochschild & Machung have determined that women with families and careers dedicate an additional month to domestic duties.

Women also need organisational skills to carry out domestic duties, which are kept in mind by the women rather than the men, who are thus able to focus on other issues, such as career. A remaining trace of the traditional marriage has been identified in this matter, according to Rapoport & Rapoport (1976, p. 47-62) whom have indicated that in the traditional marriage, women were expected to be subdued, supportive, compliant, obliging, as well as to keep their emotions under control and give priority to the mental health of their husbands. The findings by (Blunt 1999, p. 27) corroborate this view, married men having longer lives than unmarried ones, whereas unmarried women having longer lives than married ones.

The results of the "Commission on the status of Women" (1990) revealed that, out of all European men, Irish men are the least involved in domestic activities such as shopping, cleaning, cooking, and dressing children. Due to the longer lifespan and, implicitly, an increase in the old population, it is more than likely that in the future women will be made responsible for caring for older people.

Giddens (1997, p. 319) has observed that an increasing number of women choose to put their careers on hold when they become mothers. This is still the situation today, even though women now have the opportunity to have children as well as a career. Oakley (cited in Rapoport & Rapoport 1976, p. 47-62) has challenged the notion of an equal partnership in a marriage due to the fact that the woman is held accountable for the children by both the husband and by society. Moreover, Giddens is of the opinion that the reason why there are so many women who are not in full-time employment is that their husbands refuse to be put in

charge of bringing up the children. Despite the emphasis on equal work opportunities, (Homans 1975) has revealed that managers believe that the work performance of women is affected by their family duties and is reflected in 'large gaps in their work experience' and training failures.

As suggested by Watson (1995, pp 155-161), both the family and work duties of women are negatively affected by the fact that there are combined. The majority of women are aware of the fact that their career will be affected by pregnancy and child raising and that they will have to find part-time work to be compatible with their family responsibilities. In their study of over five thousand women, Martin and Roberts (1984) discovered that the choices that women made with regard to their education, training and career revolved around the fact that they would one day have husbands and children and all the responsibilities that they entail.

If women wish to have both a career and a family at the same time, it is more than likely that they will complete both tasks inefficiently, or else they will master one task and be incapable of the other. The statement made by (Maddock 1999) that the gender separation of labour offers 'rewarding experiences' may be valid, but it remains unsure who receives most of the rewards.

2.3 Childcare

Flexibility represents the essential element for working mothers, who have the alternatives of part-time and temporary work, or job sharing. People without children cannot relate to the issues related to childcare. It is very difficult to find a perfect childcare arrangement. It does not exist. Assume that you will have to come to terms with the fact that you are going to have to live with this nightmare of compromise and guilt.

The purpose of this study is to encourage women to carefully balance their life objectives and goals. It would not be difficult to disregard the perspective of this paper regarding motherhood as insufficiently idealistic to be considered cheerful. Would it be equally as easy to demonstrate that the assertions made are fallacious?

(Blunt 1999, p 26) has provided a list with several of the instances in which children require attention and tending to

- The dietary and clothing requirements of children vary with their age
- Children easily fall ill
- Children have to be organised for play sessions and school
- The school schedule of children is widely different
- Children are required to do homework
- Children require to be properly looked after
- Children require packed lunch for school
- Parents have to be present at their children's school events

The rate of work participation for women has grown considerably. Most married women do work for financial reasons, but it could also be argued that there are many women who work, not for financial reasons, but for social reasons, for they're bored in their homes and they want to meet people and so on and so forth.

Despite the fact that the income of working mothers is crucial for numerous families, social employment services are inadequate. As stated by ~~N~~Nicolson (1997, p 388) there is an increasing feeling of guilt among working mothers brought about by 'the complicated and contradictory feelings provoked by maternal ambivalence'. If they want to have both a career and a family, women have to forego their 'maternal instincts', whether real or instilled by social preconceptions. ~~N~~Nicolson (1997, p 393) observed that working mothers are often faced with health problems due to their family and work responsibilities.

In his research related to part-time workers, ~~W~~Wickham (1997, p146) stated that 'Irish managers are some of the most convinced of the benefits of part-time work. On this dimension also the British manager's enthusiasm is only exceeded by that of the Irish'.

Part-time job positions were frequently held by 'women with the responsibility for the care of young children'. European nations generally have different governmental regulations with

regard to this matter, but Britain and Ireland share a number of similarities, for example, maternity leave

Family structures vary, for example from the two adults and two children with one earner, to one parent families. Consequently, more people than ever are combining family care and employment outside the home. In summary, several trends are significantly influencing the relationship between family care and employment. Although Ireland is currently in a recessionary period, there are still a large number of people combining family care and employment, such as women and dual earning couples as well as more employed single parents. Consequently, family members are not available for caring responsibilities. As the population ages, the need for family care givers is increasing. Also there are changes in the nature of work. Many workers are experiencing more autonomy, with increased demands and responsibility. Also, communities are changing. As more parents work outside the home, more children are receiving care outside the home. With increased geographic mobility, more families are helping with the care of the sick in their families. Those who provide family care do not receive due recognition for their contribution to society. Available technologies are having a considerable impact. With technological advances people can work from home. Commuting time is reduced and control is increased. Personal expectations have changed. Changing work practices, new technologies and changing consumer expectations, increase the demand on people. There are changes in social needs and a decline in the traditional two parent household and the extended family is often unable to help with childcare and eldercare and these costs have increased dramatically. Consequently, employees have greater financial, temporal and social burdens. There is also the discretion/choice argument. Worker participation in decision making has been highlighted but choice has been limited regarding working time. Government policy has changed. When the Amsterdam treaty was signed and came into effect in 1999, all the member States and their social partners committed themselves to support family-friendly policies. Research shows that there are high costs attached to ignoring work-life balance (Blyton, 1985, Jacobs and Gerson 1998, Coughlan, 2000b, Fredriksen-Goldsen and Scharlach 2001, Greenblat, 2002, Glynn et al , 2002)

Appropriate childcare services are required to enable working mothers to have an efficient work performance and to advance in their careers Houston (1997, pp 205-206) has presented a number of alternatives with regard to childcare, among them being

- Session services offer 3hour programmes for pre-school children
- Full day-care between the hours of 8 a m to 6 pm
- Childminder takes care of children at their residence until the parents come back from work
- Nanny au-pair resides in the family home, prices are different, according to agency and vacancies
- Babysitter takes care of children, particularly during the evenings

Access to these services may be limited or absent in certain areas, such as highly industrialized cities Families with more than one child may find the costs difficult to bear Situations may occur when one or both parents have to take a leave of absence from work, such as when the child or the carer is ill

Companies may choose to offer employees childcare services in the workplace, which would prove a great help to parents that cannot afford private childcare Among the services that could be made available are

- Nurseries located in the actual workplace or specially contracted However, they may be too expensive for companies, and organizing aspects such as schedule and eligibility may cause dissensions among employees The advantage of nurseries is that they are frequently more dependable than private ones and ensure employers that their employees will not be absent from work
- Childcare allowances can be either cash given directly to employees or payments made to a third part childcare fund Companies have to decide how to administer the payments equally and when to terminate them, for example, when children turn a certain age

- Voucher schemes offered to employees with children, who can then use them to contract childcare. Vouchers can be claimed directly or deposited into bank accounts. This option is beneficial for companies as they are not directly responsible for childcare arrangements.
- After school care. Companies employ professional staff to take care of children after school. However, companies may encounter challenges in the organization of such arrangements regarding which schools to include and which not.
- Holiday play schemes. Companies organize and pay for holiday activities for children, for example summer camps.

Chapter 3 – Literature review

The debate about the beneficiaries of work flexibility has now progressed to incorporate the work-life balance agenda. The core issue is who actually benefits. There is scant literature that looks at the connection between flexibility and work-life balance.

It is interesting to review the issue under the following headings, emerging significance of work-life balance, career progression, opposition from supervisors and colleagues, presenteeism, work-life interface and organisational characteristics. National and international trends will be dealt with. Work flexibility is now a feature of the workplace. There is a change in emphasis from mere work considerations to a work-life balance. This emphasis looks at the needs of all employees at different stages of their working lives. However, there are obstacles to work-life balance. Incidences of negative impact on career progression have been documented. The long hours working culture is leading to people valuing face time at work. Having work-life balance programmes means more work for supervisors, who may resent this. There is also the backlash from work colleagues who may not be availing of the work-life balance programme themselves.

Looking at the literature impacting on the work/family interface and various models will be proposed. In relation to the psychological contract, there is evidence of changing expectations between employees and employers. From one perspective, the literature highlights the insecure nature of the contract, whereas from another perspective the employee is being more motivated by the fulfilment of his/her values and goals. A number of organisational factors can affect work-life balance in a significant way. These are a) tight labour market, b) number of female employees, c) whether the business is a family firm, d) size of the organisation and e) work environment.

The literature to date uses interchangeably the terms work-life balance, family friendly, woman friendly and work/family policies, with the knowledge that they are aimed at different audiences (woman, employees, and people with children and/or family care responsibilities).

According to the National Framework Committee for Family-Friendly Policies

“Family-friendly policies are those policies which assist workers in combining employment with their family life, caring responsibilities and life outside the workplace. The broad definition includes statutory entitlements like maternity leave, adoptive leave, unexpected leave, parental leave and carer’s leave. Also included are other measures such as childcare and employee assistance schemes” (2006, p. 1)

Poelmans (2001) earlier suggests that the source of work/family research is in the late nineteen seventies, including works of Renshaw (1976), Kanter (1977) and Pleck (1977). Furthermore, Kanter (1977) mentions that at the beginning of the twentieth century, some firms turned workplaces into ‘independent institutions’. In doing this, Kanter suggests the corporations took over the family role. However at a later stage, firms attempted to separate this relationship. This attempt succeeded and changed, the perceptions of work and family were now regarded as interdependent. As more recent evidence suggested, it was no longer possible to separate the two, i.e. employers have a responsibility to employees to provide work and the employees should manage their lives separately. Now it is recognised that, in a labour market, flexibility of work and life is an essential part to satisfy labour supply and demand. It is true that employers especially in non-recession times need the flexibility to satisfy uneven demand for labour, such as shift working and adapting to production changes. Flexibility is also important for sustaining lifestyle choices such as family, education and leisure for employees whilst holding onto work positions (Kanter 1977, Fisher 2000, Saltzstein and Yuan Ting 2001).

Research by the Irish Management Institute (IMI), O’Connor (2003) showed that Irish Managers ranked as their top personal challenge in finding and achieving a work-life balance. It is now common for woman to make changes to their working pattern in response to caring and other responsibilities. This trend is now, being adopted by men. The number one incentive for attracting and retaining staff is to offer employees a better work-life balance (Withers 2001). In the same vein, the second Price Waterhouse Coopers International Student Survey (1999) found that graduates in countries from the five continents viewed a balance lifestyle as one of their main priorities. Clinch, Convery & Walsh (2002), found Irish people attached, ‘a high importance’ to family relationships.

A survey in the UK in 1998 on work life balance (WFD/Management Today 1998 p 54), showed that of 6,000 managers and directors, the following points of interest

- “Approximately one quarter would prefer some form of flexible working arrangements with regard to starting and finishing times
- Approximately one quarter would trade lower pay in exchange for more personal time
- Close to half of the respondents were finding it increasingly difficult to meet personal and work commitments
- Only one third said that flexible or part-time working would reduce their efficiency Half were adamant that it would not
- One third of all respondents reported that sheer pressure of work was becoming a prime cause of turnover in their organisations
- Eight out of ten respondents felt they had sacrificed something important at home for the sake of their career – the two largest sacrifices being missing children growing up and putting work before family
- In terms of the changes respondents would like to make in order to improve their work-life balance, shorter hours at work rank the highest This was followed by a desire to change the culture of the organisation for which they work”

It could be concluded from this study that the current debate about flexibility is no longer limited to family-friendly working arrangements, but to the achievement of work-life balance Family – friendly measures more specifically refer to those practices that help employees to manage dual responsibilities of work and family life However, work-life balance helps all employees seek a better balance and healthier lifestyle, in and outside of work

In both EU and National levels there is an acknowledgement and consensus on importance of balancing work with life According to Yeandle et al , the Luxembourg Jobs Summit in 1997 acknowledged the reconciling of work and family life as an aspiration, by facilitating a return to work for those, mainly women, who have been absent from the workforce for some time There is a need to develop policies which strike a balance between the interests of business and workers The Irish National Development Plan (INDP) did commit investment in this area of family-friendly work arrangements

Parallel to the line of argument, business leaders have a greater appreciation of social and ethical values. The research of the Families and Work Institute in New York has developed the Family Friendly Index as a bench tool for US companies. It places companies in one of three stages towards becoming a family-friendly employer (Galinsky et al, 1991, Yeandle et al, 1999, European Commission 1997, Coughlan 2000b). Inherent here is the notion that there is a need for balance between work and life outside work.

In a study of family-friendly work practices in small and medium sized enterprises (Fisher, 2000 p 15) the following main points were revealed:

- “Family-friendly work arrangements are provided in approximately one half of the respondent organisations. Similarly, in a Canadian study it was found that forty per cent of employers supported work-life initiatives (Dorrell, 2001).”
- Work family practices most commonly provided were for emergency and special leave, part-time working, flexible hours and flexi-time.
- Childcare was mentioned as the primary reason given by employees for requesting and availing of the family-friendly work arrangements.
- The initiative for introducing family-friendly work arrangements usually comes from employees. However, the employer occasionally “takes the lead”.

In the same vein, a large UK-based study found that there was a lot of support for work-life balance. The following are some of the key findings from the “Work-life Balance Baseline Study” conducted in the UK. This was a comprehensive survey of employers and employees and included the following results:

- “There is a high level of support for work-life balance. Many employers agreed that people work best when they can have a choice between work and the rest of their lives. Everyone should have a choice about the manner in which they want to balance home and work.”
- Employers and employees agreed that, while organisational goals have priority, employers have a responsibility to help people balance work and other aspects of their lives.

- Employees were less concerned than employers about potential unfairness arising from work-life balance practices
- People with and without caring responsibilities had the same response to work-life policies”

(Hogarth et al , 2000 pg xi-xv)

Family – friendly/work-life balance policies are an essential element in accommodating workers to integrate working arrangements with their caring role and personal life outside of the workplace. The evidence of availability of work life balance practices vary, this could support the current and future argument that the responsibility should be with organisations human resources and their policies

Family structures vary, for example from the two adults and two children with one earner, to one parent families. Consequently, more people than ever are combining family care and employment outside the home. In summary, several trends are significantly influencing the relationship between family care and employment. Although Ireland is currently in a recessionary period, there are still a large number of people combining family care and employment, such as women and dual earning couples as well as more employed single parents. Consequently, family members are not available for caring responsibilities. As the population ages, the need for family care givers is increasing. Also there are changes in the nature of work. Many workers are experiencing more autonomy, with increased demands and responsibility. Also, communities are changing. As more parents work outside the home, more children are receiving care outside the home. With increased geographic mobility, more families are helping with the care of the sick in their families. Those who provide family care do not receive due recognition for their contribution to society. Available technologies are having a considerable impact. With technological advances people can work from home. Commuting time is reduced and control is increased. Personal expectations have changed. Changing work practices, new technologies and changing consumer expectations, increase the demand on people. There are changes in social needs and a decline in the traditional two parent household and the extended family is often unable to help with childcare and eldercare and these costs have increased dramatically. Consequently, employees have greater financial, temporal and social burdens. There is also the discretion/choice argument. Worker

participation in decision making has been highlighted but choice has been limited regarding working time. Government policy has changed. When the Amsterdam treaty was signed and came into effect in 1999, all the member States and their social partners committed themselves to support family-friendly policies. Research shows that there are high costs attached to ignoring work-life balance (Blyton, 1985, Jacobs and Gerson 1998, Coughlan, 2000b, Fredriksen-Goldsen and Scharlach 2001, Greenblat, 2002, Glynn et al, 2002)

The literature suggests that in order to adapt quickly to changes in the market place and to a variety of personal, social and family needs, organisations must replace standardisation and control with new flexible work practices

Kodz et al, (2002) identify the work-life balance take-up gap. The main reasons can be summarised as follows

3.1 Career Progression

Perceived impact on career prospects was the overriding concern (Hammonds 1997, Allen, 2001). A study by (Galinsky et al, 1993, Hammonds 1997), of 80 major US corporations found fewer than two per cent of workers took part in work family programmes. Interestingly (Perlow, 1995, Nord et al, 2002) found that a 'negative career consequence' was behind workers at the Fortune 100 Company not engaging in work/family flexibility provided by the company

There are also difficulties in organisational cultures which support a long hour's culture. The most noticeable source of pressure comes from colleagues. According to Drew and Murtagh (2005), in a study of senior managers in a large Irish Organisation, the main obstacle for senior managers availing of work-life balance options was the long hours. This was shown as not compatible to the norm of sustaining a senior management post. Both men and women were of the view that their career progression would be adversely affected by availing of work-life balance programmes. In this organisation, work-life balance was a strategic objective. Similarly, in another study, employees working part-time and job sharing experience negative consequences regarding career progression (McDonald et al, 2005). In

contrast, Marriott Hotels in the US achieved a successful flexibility programme for managers in a pilot study of three hotels. Previously, their demanding work ethic was leading to talented managers leaving. Systems to save managers time, such as better IT facilities and shorter meetings, led to happier employees and better results (Munck, 2002).

3.2 Negative Reaction from Supervisors and Fellow Employees

Workers also cited the negative attitudes of both management and fellow workers (Hochschild, 1997). The well-being of the individual along with their own performance, was attributed to an increase in stress, tiredness and associated sickness due to the imbalance of negative attitudes from colleagues and managers (Bailyn, 1993, Kofidimos, 1993). Thompson et al., (1999) goes on to suggest that employers who do not consider greater compatibility between work and personal life for employees actually encourage tensions, thus giving rise to negative work results. Furthermore, the idea of employers making allowances for family or personal commitments of some employees is disputed. Supervisor and co-worker resistance to work-life balance programmes is a factor to be reckoned with. The company culture may not be supportive of family-friendly/work-life-balance policies and this can lead to resentment among those not availing of them. There are some major problems associated with family-friendly working arrangements such as (a) possible abuse by workers and (b) cause added resource demands on managers. Continuity in customer care was also cited as a problem. Employers generally want to be selective as to the provision of family-friendly work arrangements and this could lead to resentment among some employees. The latter can lead to some employees, who don't have children, carrying the responsibility for absent colleagues. Furthermore, these policies can lead to resentment among those who do not avail of these programmes (Young, 1996, Fisher, 2000, Nord et al., 2002). Also, there is the anti-feminist position of backlash (Faludi, 1992, Wise and Bond, 2003) which takes issue with treating employees differently e.g. taking the family needs of female workers in account while ignoring the needs of their fellow male workers. Another view is that employers should still provide work-family practices in spite of a backlash from those who would not avail of them because of the social good these programmes may bring about (Haar et al., 2005).

Increased workload has resulted in the emergence of presenteeism, where employees think they should work longer hours than contracted on an ongoing basis. Not only are longer hours spent and expected in work, but the work conducted in these hours is more intense. The majority of salary workers would like to work less hours, however some claim that their employers would not allow them to do so. A problem prevalent in certain firms, is the 'valuing of face time', whereby an organisation expects longer hours worked and appraise the workers 'commitment' to that organisation (Fried, 1998, Bond et al, 1998 Green, 2001, Glynn et al, 2002). An interesting observation in this regard is made by Hochschild (1997). She undertook a study of a company that is rated as one of the most family-friendly companies in the US. Hochschild was approached by the company whom wanted to understand why professional women were leaving at a greater rate than their male counterparts. She found that almost no one cut back their hours, although the companies policies allowed employees to do so. Also, employees with young children worked longer hours than employees without children. Furthermore, women who earned more were less interested in working part-time than those women who earned less. Hochschild's conclusion was that for some employees "home had become work and work had become home" (Hochschild, p 38). She agreed that work is valued and home is not, speculating that most people prefer to spend more time on tasks that are appreciated. Consequently, workers feel more important at work than at home.

Heavy workloads, lack of infrastructure, technology and not enough communication regarding what is available make work-life balance difficult to achieve. Also, there is insufficient initiative on the employees' part, to find what works for them. Cooper (2005) emphasises the importance of employees taking responsibility for their own personal development and using time better to achieve an effective balance. The influence of policies is important as many flexible working practices can result in a reduction in pay (Kodz et al, 2002). Negative feedback regarding lack of commitment to the organisation has also been reported (Allen 2001).

3 5 **Employer Costs**

Poelmans and Sahibzada (2004, pg 8-11) suggest cost issues associated with work-life practice and policies, and that organisations are worried about the bottom line and its impact on profits. Also, there are inconsistencies during high unemployment, where workers will neglect their family care responsibilities in a trade off to working conditions for available work. It is also suggested with regard to unions that they will utilise fully the work life balance policies of an organisation available to their members employed there.

The intricacies of family law also merit attention. Laws in relation to issues such as leave and childcare are spread across different government departments and vary from country to country, thus making decision making for employers more complex. There is confusion with many social players and many points of view. Furthermore, there are many initiatives coming from the government, non-governmental and private spheres in the area of family-friendly/work-life balance policies. Implementation of work-life balance programmes involves considerable input. Increased training costs and higher direct costs have been observed (Emmott and Hutchinson, 1998). Furthermore, there needs to be a positive culture adopted by an organisation, and the need to study and develop findings in order to cater for the diverse needs of each individual. These all come with a price.

There are concerns for both employers and employees, within the discussion on work-life balance practice and policies. It appears that a conflict of opinion does exist between the argument of family-friendly work practices and committed long working employees. Cost and time are relevant issues for employers. On the other hand, employees are concerned about the impact of the availability of these arrangements, with relation to their career progression, and a fear to the reaction of their supervisors and co-workers.

3 6 **Work-life Interface**

The relationship between work and family may be demonstrated through three theoretical models: *spill over*, *compensation* and *segmentation*. According to the spill over model, occurrences at work have influenced on life outside work. This effect can be positive or

negative According to the compensation model, workers who experience lack of job fulfilment at work may seek additional satisfaction outside of work In contrast, the segmentation model claims that working life and life outside work are independent of each other (Kabanoff and O'Brien, 1980)

Time-based struggle happens when role demands coming from the areas of work and family, impose demands on a person's time The individual finds him/her unable to satisfy both demands, such as working certain hours that conflict with family obligations Role-strain-based conflict occurs when the pressures experienced in one area interfere with the effective carrying out of activities in the other domain This could occur when a person's family concerns may lead to him or her being preoccupied at work Behaviour-based conflict occurs when a woman may be expected to affirm herself at work and be docile at home (Greenhaus and Bantell, 1985) Many studies have shown the close link between individual family life and performance at work Certain conflicts can arise such as absenteeism, negative mental and physical health (MacEwan and Barling, 1994, Frone et al , 1997)

Frone's theory claims that families at times conflict with work and vice versa In a study of married adults and/or parents, results show that family to work engagement was unfavourably related to work effectiveness, whereas work to family opposition was negatively related to family functioning This finding demonstrates the interdependence of work and family The results are in keeping with MacEwan and Barling's (1994) discovery that family to work commitment was certainly tied to work withdrawal and work to family conflict was encouragingly related to family retraction

Greenhaus and Powell (2006) have proposed a model of work-family improvement There has been a focus on conflict and stress in relation to work-life balance issues They argue for a more stable approach that recognises the conclusive elements in blending work and family roles

In a workforce there are those who commence full-time permanent roles and those who take on contract, short-term and periodic employment The question arises To what extent do family-friendly policies fit in with these changing working patterns?

Evidence of the diversity of employees' needs have demonstrated a case for an extended work-life passage to employment policies, in order to allow employees to appreciate their full capacity at work and to overcome conflict between work and life outside work. This is in contrast to some earlier research which stated that there was no relationship between work and family.

The literature in relation to the psychological contract deals with transactional and relational contracts. Work flexibility is part of this contract. The psychological contract refers to the expectations that the individual has of the organisation and vice versa. It goes beyond the unspoken terms of an employment contract and includes joint trust, honesty and an obligation of care. This reflects more the relational contract which establishes an ongoing relationship between the person and the organisation (Schein, 1965, 1970; Rousseau, 1990; Mirvis & Hall 1996; Stredwick and Ellis, 1998). In the past, there was more of an emphasis on the transactional contract. Workers conformed to the dictates of the employer with prospects. They in turn felt secure, cared for and appreciated. It is an issue for debate whether the current contract is somewhere between a transactional and relational one. There is some evidence that temporary work dominates the job scene (Bridges, 1994). It is questionable what worth employers and employees are giving to the employment relationship (Hall and Associates 1996).

The ability to be a continuous learner and to redirect one's life and career is termed the Protean Career. In fact, it is precisely the excitement that comes from this continuous learning that is the major source of motivation in today's workplace. This sentiment is echoed in the recent McLaughlin and Cullen (2003) study, where many participants reported that employees are increasingly stating their requirements for a life outside work. There is a demand for more flexible arrangements on a constant basis.

In relation to the psychological contract, there is evidence of changing expectations between employees and employers. From one perspective, the literature highlights the insecure nature of the contract, whereas from another perspective the employee is being more motivated by the fulfilment of his/her values and goals.

The benefits of work-life balance policies have been documented (Department of Trade and Industry (UK) and the Scotland Office 2001, Withers 2001, Glynn et al , 2002) in terms of increased productivity, stress reduction and better physical and material well-being

Other studies show that employers and employees interests in flexible work arrangements may vary. Consequently, employers may develop flexible working arrangements relative to their own business strategy, which may or may not work to the benefit of the employees. Whether the small to medium enterprises (SMEs) differ from large companies in this respect has not been studied (Casey et al , 1997, Purcell, 1997, Dex and Sheibl, 2001). In this regard, it is interesting that Fisher (2000) found that all firms operating family-friendly working arrangements found them to be successful and a majority of them would recommend these flexible arrangements to other companies.

Similarly, Glass and Finley's (2002) findings are inconclusive regarding the effectiveness of family workplace policies. The findings show that policies such as flexible timetables, employer support including parental leave and has a positive effect on both the firm and employees. Furthermore, they note some disadvantage for employers, where there is government interference in the work/family affiliation. The results being more paperwork, more time, extra expense and increased benefits to employees.

In a study including data from the annual survey of working mother magazine (UK), they found that not all programmes have the same, or even a positive effect on profits, in fact some lead to losses. The study had limitations such as not being a random sample and the fact that it cannot be generalised for all firms (Meyer et al , 2001).

There is limited research on the benefits of work-life balance policies for employers and employees. Consequently, there is a lack of consensus in the literature on this question. There is also some evidence of a dearth of research on the topic of work-life balance (Meyer et al , 2001). Some studies also show negative effects from management and employees'

perspectives The following question arises Are work-life balance policies operating to the benefit of the employer or the employee?

3.8 Organisational Characteristics

There are a number of factors which can affect work-life balance in a significant way These are a tight labour market, number of female employees, whether the business is a family firm, size of organisation and work environment

➤ A Tight Labour Market

The challenge of work-family balance is an area that remains understudied (Goodstein 1994, Nord et al , 2002, Poelmans and Sahibzada, 2004) Non-representative samples (Lewin and Mitchell, 1991) and poor response rates have been a problem (Morgan and Milliken, 1992)

Certain context factors increase the probability that companies will address work-life balance/family-friendly issues It is possible that work-family conflict is linked to the environment in which a firm operates

➤ Female Employees

The general pattern across the EU is that women are the focus of family-friendly work arrangements Proportions of men availing of such arrangements are quite low The organisation's female employees are a sector that has been identified as important in driving responsiveness to work/family problems Firms that have a high proportion of female workers generally make the strongest demands for work/family facilities They should, therefore, be more responsive The proportion of women in management positions may increase the demand for work-life balance as these individuals have more say in the organisation

➤ **Family Firm**

There is some literature about the importance of family firms in the economy. Despite the rising innovation of large organisations, functionally, family companies are assuming greater value in the economy. Research conducted by Westhead and Cowling (1997) showed that family businesses are not just about maximising the profit and are more inclined to emphasise non-economic goals than non-family companies.

In view of rising recognition of the magnitude of human resource management in companies and their impact on organisational performance, it could be presumed that companies which have a human resource manager would be more flexible about working arrangements.

➤ **Size of Organisation**

In an analysis of Washington US companies, Ingram and Simons (1995) said that they found bigger companies to be more receptive to work/family reservations. They also highlight that the view that the number of female employees raises responsiveness is not supported. However, the theory that female managers increase reaction is (Blum et al., 1994, Osterman, 1995, Glass and Fujimoto, 1995).

When Milliken et al., (1998) conducted a survey of 1000 HR US officials they found that, when results highlighted finance companies respondents they were more inclined to come from large firms.

➤ **Work Environment**

The literature highlights organisational practices and policies with regard to process related issues which impact improving employees' well being and performance. Some researchers discovered that the support of managers is vital for bringing about management alteration. Assessments of a sympathetic work/family ethos were related to employee's use of work/family assistance. Weakness in providing an increased work/family balanced life for employees means organisations are adding to strains in employees' personal lives. This has a knock on effect in influencing the quality of their work. Managerial daily support may be the

most significant cultural factor on an employee's decision to use family-friendly options. Also, companies with work-life balance policies have better commitment from staff, less work/family conflict and lower turnover of staff.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the interdependence between work and non-work life. There is a convergence of opinion regarding the relevance of future work-life balance policies. The various drivers of work-life balance policies were identified. The onus is on employers to implement new flexible work practices. The literature also highlights the concerns of employers and employees. Also featured are the obstacles to implementation and the conflict that can arise between work and life outside work. Evidence is mixed regarding benefits and, on the whole, there is a dearth of research on the topic of flexibility and work-life balance linkages. There is limited evidence regarding who is benefiting from /work-life balance/family-friendly policies. The literature suggests there is a relationship between a tight labour market, the number of female employees, size of organisation, support from management and the existence of work-life balance policies. This study seeks to contribute to the theoretical and empirical literature by conducting a theoretically informed investigation of the various perspectives in the context of the Irish employment market. The next chapter on research methodology will state the hypotheses and outline a research framework. It will also elaborate on the suitability of the survey method for investigating the issues and explain the rationale behind the choice.

Chapter 4 – Research Methodology

The Literature review highlights growing support for an interest in flexible working practices. It also highlights problems that employers face for organisations due to this provision.

This chapter details the research methodology employed in the study and includes a description of the data collection and analysis method, which was used to address the research question. The adopted research methodology was chosen so as to best satisfy the aims and objectives of this dissertation bearing in mind the scope, available data sources and imposed time constraints for the completion of the study. The areas covered in this chapter will include the chosen research method and general conduct of the study including research and data analysis techniques.

The aim of the research is to look at different individual experiences with regard to working practices and the repercussion costs on the organisation as well as challenges in meeting the demands of staff. The objective to be formed is to identify the main differences between men and woman focusing on employability and work-life balance.

4.1 Research Design

The author of this dissertation decided to carry out Quantitative research in the form of a structured survey as the research was descriptive and analytic (Brannick 1997). The purpose was to describe the picture of a phenomenon, namely work flexibility, as it naturally occurs. To give voice to the key stakeholders both employers and employees were surveyed. There are three factors determining the survey approach: (a) the existing body of relevant knowledge, (b) the researcher's philosophical assumptions regarding what constitutes warranted knowledge, and (c) the purpose of the study.

The literature highlighted a dearth of research on work flexibility. Therefore the authors view was that a properly structured survey was the most appropriate in order to provide broad coverage of an integrated study of work flexibility. Furthermore as Brannick (1997, pp 11-13) points out, the accuracy of data collected by a survey is very good also time and costs are

favourable. In the same vein and in keeping with the resources available to the author at the particular time. The disadvantage of a poor response rate was overcome by personalising the cover letter and having follow up phone calls. This all served to generate a response rate above average. In order to overcome some other disadvantages of a quantitative study, triangulation was used (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Qualitative interviews were used to provide clarification of areas of the research setting. A structured online survey to employees and a postal one to employers were conducted. It consisted of a cross-sectional survey of companies in Ireland.

The questionnaire was designed following the content, format, style and structure. Since people's participation in surveys is voluntary, a questionnaire has to help in getting participants interested in the study, obtaining their co-operation, and obtaining truthful responses (Davidson 1970).

In order to complement the findings and to clarify issues relating to part-time employees interviews were carried out with human resource managers in 5 randomly chosen companies. These interviews showed and demonstrated that workers not only required a job to provide primary needs but also a job providing family time and social interests outside of work.

4.2 Pilot run and full distribution

Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, a pilot run was investigated to discover any weaknesses that may have existed in the format, sequence and question wording of the survey. It also provided an opportunity to test if the data collection method in itself would deliver the information required for this study. To this end, six individuals completed the survey and inadequacies uncovered were amended. The individuals selected for the pilot run had comparable education, demographics and occupational backgrounds to the target questionnaire population, however they were not actually part of the survey so as to avoid the introduction of biases during the data collection process. This also served to strengthen validity and reliability as did the sampling procedure. Furthermore, most of the questions had been used before (Industrial Statistics Unit, 2002).

4 3 Employee survey

After 3 weeks, 105 questionnaires had been returned and a first reminder was sent out. The number of responses increased to 127 and a second reminder was sent out together with a copy of the online link to the questionnaire. In total 188 responses were received which included 11 unusable questionnaires.

According to Punch (1998) the researcher must very often take whatever sample is available, and the incidence convenience samples are increasing. The sample size decision, like most other design decision, must be made on a case-by-case basis. The researcher should consider the variety of objectives to be achieved by a particular study and other aspects of the research design (Fowler, 1993). The question of sample size is of concern to researchers. One view is that the correct sample size should relate to the aim of the study and the type of population being examined (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

4 4 Survey procedure

The survey was developed by the author using “fluidsurveys.com”. The main aim of the survey was to establish if working persons (predominantly mothers) were happy with their work life balance in 2012. The aim was also to fully represent the views of women on these issues. The survey was applied to working parents (male and female). The initial target group was randomly chosen to reflect obstacles in paths of working parents and, and was then passed to others via social networks Facebook and Twitter. In order to participate you needed to be a parent of at least one child and be employed at any level either full or part time. A geographical spread was chosen to avoid any bias.

A full copy of the questionnaire can be seen in appendix 2 but the questions included in the questionnaire and the rationale for each question is as follows.

Question 1 – Are you male / female?

This question was asked to determine the sex of those participating in the study and to highlight the differences between men and women with regard to their perceptions of work.

Question 2 – Which of the following age groups do you belong to?

This question was asked to determine the age of those being surveyed

Question 3 – Do you work?

And then respondents were asked if full-time, part-time etc This question was asked to establish if most working mothers were in full time employment and lead to the question 6 asking

Question 4 – What work arrangement would you prefer

The results of this were interesting in so far as the percentage seeking to work part time was greater than those working full time in question 5

Question 5 - Which one of these best describes your job?

The discover the employee level of those answering the questionnaire (manager, supervisor etc)

Question 6 – Do you regularly work longer than standard hours?

This question was asked to establish if most working parents worked 9-5 or other

Question 7 – If yes, how is this paid?

To discover if persons were working overtime for financial reasons or other

Question 8 – Which of the family friendly policies are available to you in your company?

This question was asked to determine what flexible options are available in companies in 2012

Question 9 - Has your view on work-life balance changed since the 2008 Irish economic recession?

Asked to ascertain employee's opinions to work-life balance specifically since the current recession

Question 10 – Have you studied while employed in the past two years?

This question was asked to discover if combining being a mature student as well as work and family was achievable

Question 11 – If yes, did you have support from your employer (this could be financial support, study leave etc?)

This was asked to determine if employers are supportive of their employees returning to further education

Question 12 – If you work less than full time hours (part-time, job-share, flexitime) what are the reasons for this?

This question was asked to highlight the main reasons why persons choose to work less than full time hours

Question 13 – Do your current working arrangements suit your family/personal commitments?

This question was asked to begin to highlight issues surrounding work life balance

Question 14 – How satisfied are you with the balance you have between your work and your personal life?

This question was asked to determine if persons found that their work life balance was suitable and fulfilling

4.5 Employer survey

The employer survey consists of questions which test the various hypotheses generated by the literature. Employer questionnaires were sent out to the relevant manager and a covering letter was included (appendix 3). Managers were given an indication of the time commitment involved and a contact name, email address and phone number was made available to respondents in case they had further questions about the survey. Finally the respondent was thanked and his/her co-operation was acknowledged as vital to the success of the survey. Confidentiality was assured for both the employer and employee survey. Individuals were assured that the survey was anonymous, that individual names were not required. Common

themes were extrapolated and categorised not only so that comparison between data could be achieved but also so that the interpretation of anecdotal evidence could illuminate any interesting quantitative findings. At the inception of this study, it was decided that since the research is concerned with eliciting attitudes and perceptions towards work-life balance, quantitative techniques should be used.

On the whole, a selection of chosen questions was used. The questions were well developed. Also it was appropriate to use them, as the questionnaire could be considered to be long. In response to the literature and pilot survey, as far as possible a full range of replies were listed wherever possible (de Vaus 1993).

A Likert-style rating scale was used for the employer survey. This rating scale involves providing a selection of people with statements. It then asks for them to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree. In certain cases semantic differential formats were used, which required the surveyed to indicate between two extremes of a continuum represented by adjectives. The ranking format system is also used in this survey. As already mentioned the questions on work-life balance were taken from a successful survey conducted by the Industrial Statistics Unit, Trinity College Dublin in 2002.

The reliability of an instrument refers to the consistency that the research tool has in measuring the same attributes over time. It is essential in assessing the quality and adequacy of the resulting data. Validity is an important factor in assuring that the instrument chosen measures what it set out to do (Camines and Zellers, 2002). Content validity assesses whether the items in the measurement instruments measure what they are supposed to measure. In order to ensure maximum validity and reliability in the pilot study, pre-testing was conducted on people who resemble the types of people to whom the questionnaire was given (De Vaus, 1993). These included a sample of Human Resource Managers. The measurement scales were facilitated by the conceptual model (figure 4.1). Items pertaining to the subject areas contained in the conceptual model were generated from the relevant themes emerging from the review of the literature.

To ensure reliability for attitude type questions, a test was conducted which resulted in alpha to be 0.69, this was a significant result of the reliability analysis and showed the questions quality to test out what they were set to test

Table 4.1 Reliability Analysis of Questionnaire

Method 1 (space saver) will be used for this analysis

Reliability Analysis – scale (Alpha)

Item-total Statistics

	Scale mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Corrected item – total correlation	Alpha if item deleted
D2A	9.7128	9.9919	.3705	.6674
D2C	9.8617	9.4888	.5308	.6118
D2D	10.0532	9.8795	.5087	.6118
D2F	9.8883	8.7629	.5138	.6033
D2G	9.5691	9.7225	.3426	.6848

Reliability coefficients work-life balance scale (employee questionnaire)

[Source: de Vaus, 1993]

Chapter 5 – Research Findings

5 1 Employee survey results

Gender and Age Group of Respondents

	Percentage
Male	31
Female	69
16-19	7
20-29	57
30-39	19
40-49	14
50-59	4
Over 60	2
Total	100

The majority of the respondents were female. There has been an upsurge in the amount of women in the labour force over recent years. Women with dependents constitute a large section of this increase. Consequently, the male breadwinner model of household structure is no longer the norm in Europe. This has been replaced by households where both partners work outside the home (if, in these recessionary times they can find the work). The vast majority of employees are under forty. In relation to those who work full-time, the majority are non-managerial employees with the balance in supervisory/management work.

Employee's working time arrangements (WTA) versus employees preferred working time arrangements (WTA)

	Employees' WTA	Employees' preferred WTA
Full-time	77%	67%
Part-time	20%	21%
Job-share	2%	11%
Flexi-time	1%	1%

With regards to full-time staff about 1/10 would have a preference to job share. Those working part time are content to continue to do so. This is an important finding.

accompanying the investigation that it is the satisfaction of one’s own personal goals and purpose that is influencing each employee instead of income, job security and/or power

Job Description of Employees

Job description of employee	Percentage
Management	22
Supervisor	14
Employee	64

Have you studied while employed in the past 2 years?

	Percentage
Yes	38
No	62

More full-time employees are pursuing further education. Employers stated that employees seek working time arrangements so as to have additional free time for education. One third of employees reviewed voiced the same view. This reflects that part-time employees are improving their education level. The majority of employees surveyed were working in non-managerial roles.

Has your view on work-life balance changed since the 2008 Irish economic recession?

	Percentage
Yes	62
No	38

Interestingly, this result showed a high percentage of employers who felt that the current economic recession changed their view of work-life balance. It could be argued that the effects of the recession are that while work flexibility options are favourable and welcomed for employees, the choice of work in the current environment is limited and therefore the priority for people could be seen as getting any type of work and not pushing the boundaries in terms of what could be offered.

Employers views on working longer hours

	Yes	No
Full-time	38	39

Part-time	5	16
Job-share	1	1

Compensation that employees receive for working longer hours

	Percentage
Overtime	12
Time off	16
Both overtime and time off	4
Neither overtime or time off	68

Regarding surveyed employees surveyed, around half work longer than average hours. Only one quarter receive compensation in the form of overtime or time off. Also, half of all employees are of the view that working longer hours helps career prospects. It has been found that both women and men work a longer amount of hours in Ireland than the EU average.

Reasons why Employees take up part time working arrangements

	Percentage
To combine work with the care of children	24
More leisure time	21
To have more time for vocational or education	29
Reasons of Health	10
Because employee could not find a full-time job	2
Other	14

According to employees when asked why they took up working time arrangements they cited more time for education or vocational training as the main reason followed by childcare and more time for leisure. This could reflect the fact that many students and non-nationals are working whilst pursuing further educational qualifications in the hope that they will be better skilled once the recession ends. A significant number of mature students are men in comparison with women are pursuing educational qualifications. This may reflect the fact that women carry the responsibility for domestic roles as well as working outside the home and consequently they may not have the same possibilities as men for pursuing educational qualifications.

Employees Perspective on the availability of different leave arrangements

	Percentage
Paternity leave	29
Adoptive leave	20
Parental leave	24
Leave for family reasons	14
Childcare facilities	22
Job-sharing	17
Flexitime	9
Employee career break	12
Term-time working	19

Employee's perspective on working arrangements

	Percentage
Very suitable	30
Quite suitable	46
Unsure	10
Not very suitable	12
Not suitable at all	3

From the employee's perspective, the following observations reflect a change in employee's life styles and priorities. The majority of respondents consider their current working arrangements as suitable. Nearly 0.5 of those respondents are also of the belief that work-life balance is very important. A majority of employees who find their current work arrangements suitable for their family/personal commitments also agree that they have been able to balance home and work-life without hindering their career progression.

Employee satisfaction to family-friendly/work-life balance issues

	Percentage
Very satisfied	10
Satisfied	19
Neither	17
Dissatisfied	40
Very dissatisfied	14

5.2 Employer survey results

A full copy of the questionnaire sent to employers can be found in appendix 4

Q3 Employees working time arrangements according to employees

	Percentage
Flexi-time	48
Shift work	10
Permanent part-time	40
Temporary part-time	35
Job sharing	36
Annualised hours	35
Casual hours	41

In response to this question in the region of 0.5 of all employers have 0.25 of their staff on flexitime. Flexitime can permit staff to off-set work and non-work commitments. This can result in improved attendance and reduced staff turnover. There is evidence that the vast bulk of employees who currently work part-time are not looking for full-time work. Women tend to pursue job-sharing for reasons of family responsibility. Men avail of this option for better quality of life.

Q4 Employer's reasons for introducing working time arrangements

	Percentage
Labour cost saving	50
Work-life balance issues	44
To improve productivity	43
Employee demand	40
Difficulty in finding full-time staff	15
To reduce the number of full-time employees	24
To improve reputation	21
Changes in organisational design	16

According to employers the main reasons for the introduction of working time arrangements include improved productivity and employee demand, and family-friendly/work-life balance issues. When they work well, family-friendly/work-life balance arrangements can provide

significant business benefits as well as raising staff enthusiasm, loyalty to the company and job satisfaction. The question of whether employers are promoting work-life balance, or merely reacting in an ad hoc manner to staff requests, is one which needs to be considered. There is also a perspective that family-friendly/work-life balance is a feature of a wider human resource strategy which gives employers a competitive edge. In this perspective, employees are treated as a valuable asset.

Q5 Availability of organisational supports to promote family-friendly/work-life balance arrangements according to employers

	Percentage
Employee assistance programmes	18
Pre-retirement advice and support	10
Staff counselling service	20
Stress management course	9
Continuing professional development	46
Career planning guidance	45

According to employers, the following organisational backing for family – friendly/work-life balance arrangements exist: continuing professional development, career planning guidance, staff counselling service, employee assistance programmes, pre-retirement advice and support and stress management courses. There could be a number of facts why companies provide privileges that go above the statutory minimum including enhancing the reputation as a good employer or economic reasons.

Q6 The most important principle identified by employers for family-friendly/work-life balance

	Percentage
a) Everybody should be able to balance home and work life in the way they want	17
b) The employers first responsibility has to be to ensure that the organisation achieves its goals	31
c) Employees must not expect to change their working pattern if it results in disrupting business	2
d) It is not the employers' responsibility to help people to balance their work and the other aspects of their	2

lives	
e) People work best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their lives	49
f) Policies that help some staff balance work with other interests are often unfair to other employees	-

The achievement of an effective work-life balance is a significant issue for the good of society. There is a spill-over between work and life outside work. Employers need to acknowledge this and to plan accordingly. Also, there is evidence that flexible work programmes play an important role in the achievement of work-life balance. The most significant principle of work-life balance identified by employers is that employees perform best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their lives.

Q7 How important would you consider family-friendly/work-life balance arrangements are for your organisation?

	Percentage
Irrelevant	1
Not important	5
Important	56
Very important	38
No view	5

Information was sought in both the employers' survey and the employee's survey on the perception of their organisation in terms of the availability of family-friendly/work-life balance policies. Furthermore, two thirds of all employers claim to provide employee support however for employees there are considerable barriers to taking up family-friendly/work-life balance arrangements such as financial consequences, obstacles presented by excessive workloads and attitudes from managers and colleagues.

Q8 Employer's perspective on the availability of different leave arrangements for employees

	Percentage
Paternity leave	53
Compassionate leave	74
Career breaks	33
Bereavement leave	81
Study/exam leave	64
Parental leave	66
Carer leave	52
Adoptive leave	57
Maternity leave	76
Emergency leave	76

To what degree are employers aware of statutory entitlements? This was the reason for asking this question. The authors also wanted to highlight what facilities were or were not available outside of these entitlements including bereavement leave, paternity leave, study leave etc

Q's 9, 10 & 11 Employers views on effects of part-time work

	Yes %
External effects	
Helps overcome competition	33
Improves service quality	67
Internal effects	
Improved employee productivity	63
Improved employee satisfaction	77
Improved business results	64
Human resource effects	
Less absenteeism/sick leave	58
Reduced labour turnover	67
Helps retain key employees	85
Employee effects	
Lack of respect	8
Lack of job security	42
Heavy workload	10

Lack of promotional prospects	36
Hourly wages are lower than for comparable full-time jobs	25
Lack of employee fringe benefits employed by full-timers	31
Cost effects	
Increases cost savings	76
Has some advantages	75
Lower national insurance contributions	20
Lower employer fringe benefits	14

Part-time work, according to the survey undertaken in this dissertation results in the following benefits, greater employee satisfaction, less labour turnover, improved employee productivity, improves business results, helps retain key employees, less absenteeism/sick leave, increased cost savings and improved service quality. In Dublin, part-time work results in less absenteeism than full-time work. Opinion is divided on whether part-time work helps overcome competition with equal proportions saying yes and no. In relation to job security, almost half of employers are of the opinion that part-time work leads to lack of job security. Similarly, a further one third of employees think that part-time work also leads to lack of promotional opportunities. Job security and exclusion is connected to flexible contracts, i.e. atypical forms of work. This is always a concern for employees who do not have permanent employment.

Q12 What are the reasons why employees in your company take up working time arrangements (part-time, job-share, annualised hours, flexitime)?

	Percentage
To combine work with the care of children or dependents	81
To have more leisure time	31
To have more time for education or vocational training	50
For health reasons	22
Because employee could not find a full-time job	30
Working hours were reduced in order to avoid redundancies	17

A source of supplementary income	47
For reasons of sociability	16

According to employers, the main reason given by employees for wanting family-friendly allowances was to be able to combine work with the care of children. Some research says that this allowance has proved to be the most favourable in terms of the impact on the employee.

Q13 Employers views on changing workloads

Substantial changes of workload	Yes percentage
Within the same day	62
From day to day	83
Within a year	81

Changing workload is a constant feature and results in staff fluctuations, reflecting the volatile nature of the current economic recession.

Q14 Frequency with which part-time staff have to work longer hours according to employers

	Percentage
Very often	1
Frequently	10
Occasionally	64
Very seldom	23
Never	2

Q15 Part-time staff are more likely than full-time staff in comparable jobs to have to work additional hours

	Yes Percentage
More likely	23
Less likely	19
No difference	59

It was found that part-time work does not lead to a heavy workload. In addition, approximately half of full-time staff regularly work longer than standard hours. In relation to

the employees surveyed approximately half of the full time employees work longer than standard hours as compared to a minimal number of part-time employees. Full-time staff are not usually compensated for this work whereas part-time staff employees are usually paid by the hour.

5.3 Conclusion

The extent of numerical and functional flexibility is correlated with the extent of work-life balance supports. Employees concur with the employer. There is no relation between the extent of numerical flexibility and the extent of functional flexibility. This finding is in keeping with the notion of the flexible firm which states that functional flexibility will be developed with core workers. In addition, more company benefits and more work-life balance supports coexist in the same companies. Company benefits are not linked to numerical flexibility, but in both surveys they are consistently associated with functional flexibility and work-life balance supports. This would suggest an integrated approach to human resource management whereby some companies engage in a modern, employee-focused approach, whereas other companies tend to be more traditional.

As the research shows, there are challenges to be faced by both employers and employees in achieving work-life balance. However there are mutual gains for both parties. There are various forces operating which will increase the pressure towards work-life balance. It will be necessary to extend practices from family-friendly to work-life balance. Apart from family considerations, it will also be necessary to plan for educational development, leisure and health options. It is obvious that more work-life balance supports and more information about what is already available are required.

Much debate on work flexibility has centred on whether the core-periphery model is an accurate representation of how employers organise their man power. The interplay between functional and numerical flexibility requires clarification. There has been considerable development in the human resource area and in particular, in the consideration of people as a very valuable asset.

Most research in this area has been conducted in the manufacturing and little has been done in the services sector. Furthermore the literature identified the need to research the small firm. Also the literature highlighted the need for more human resource research in Ireland. Few studies have provided an integrated analysis of the various forms of labour flexibility. Many studies of work flexibility concentrate on the employer's perspective. This study examines work flexibility from both an employer and an employee perspective.

The question arises: Has anything changed since Ireland's recession in 2008? Are the benefits to employers of flexible work systems shared with employees in a mutual gains enterprise or are there disadvantages to one or more parties attaining functional flexibility? What is the impact of numerically flexible staffing arrangements on organisational core workers? A further question arises in relation to the impact of trade unions on work flexibility. Does having a human resource manager on the staff lead to more work flexibility? Family-friendly/work-life balance arrangements are now becoming part of the workplace and the question of employer and employee benefit arises here.

There have been changes in attitudes to work in society at large. We are witnessing a demand for more leisure time, time to pursue educational qualifications, more family friendly time and a desire for a shorter working week. This demand for change is being driven by the EU, national governments and by a variety of organisations and businesses. Positive steps are being taken in legislation and in human resource practices with *recognise the interdependent* nature of work and family. Many people with a caring role are keen to work flexibly in order to achieve a balance between work and non-work life. If they have access to work-life balance arrangements, they will stay with the organisation. This benefits the establishment in terms of reduced staff turnover. There is some evidence that lack of flexible working arrangements does lead to staff turnover. Employers then have the expense, which is considerable, in terms of time and money of finding a qualified replacement. With the change in family structure, employees have more responsibility for care. There are changing expectations regarding work and this is reflected in the psychological contract. The notion of care and balance is coming more to the fore. There are three focuses in this study: flexibility benefits, work-life balance benefits and the interrelationship between them. The main

contributions and implications in the context of government policy, industrial relations, employees, and management practice

Today's business environment is complex and uncertain, due to continuous changes in particular with the current economy also the political, technological and socio-cultural sectors. Society has become more automated, and the indications are that the human touch will be more valued. The onus is on the employers to train employees to deliver optimum service. Some authors claim that it is debatable whether part-time employees have positive benefits for firms' core competencies (Pfeffer, 1994a). Many benefits of part-time work were found and these are in keeping with the literature, part-time work leads to an increase in service quality. There is also some evidence that work-life balance policies increase productivity (Foster, 2001).

The improvement in human resources in the area of work flexibility is in contrast to the view that there is low commitment to HR management in Ireland. Unlike the UK, the evidence of flexible work practices would not support a hard model of HRM. The hard approach would imply a calculating approach to people and it would view employees as a cost to be reduced as much as possible. It seems that the increase in human resources has seen a change for the better in the employee's position.

There is also evidence that human capital management does improve profits. Due to the fact that processes, procedures and technology can be replicated quite easily, employers are looking more to employees as a source of competitive advantage. If HR is to realise its full potential, it is essential that it becomes a priority for management rather than a specialist function. It needs to be integrated with the strategic business planning function. By recruiting well qualified employees, employers are ensuring that they keep this talent in their firm.

In summary, work flexibility seems to be a mutual gains enterprise for employers and employees. Employers need people who can respond quickly and easily to changes. In order to compete it is necessary to achieve organisational flexibility and high quality service. Good

human resource policies are necessary, to achieve employee commitment and quality and to get employees to feel responsible for the service encounter

Furthermore the evidence presented here shows that both full-time and part-time employees are involved in functional flexibility. In relation to functional flexibility, there is no difference for full-time employees and part-time employees. The main types of functional flexibility found were multi skilling and team working. The findings show that there is no difference between full-time and part-time workers for team working, multi skilling, problem solving groups, quality circles and job rotation. This reinforces the point that full-time and part-time employees can perform key tasks and work side by side in delivery service.

The traditional view of HR emphasised the importance of work demands and does not always consider the needs of the employees. There is now a focus on the quality of work life. Employers are being asked to provide a supportive environment for employees. There is increasing evidence that life outside work and the working environment are interrelated. They both influence one another. Some research shows that there can be a spill over of negative effects from non-work life into the working environment. The interdependent relationship between work and family needs to be taken into consideration. People work best when there is work-life balance. The problems of the staff are of concern to management. Family-friendly work policies can have a positive effect on morale. All work-life balance initiatives do not cost money. A good work-life balance is very important for a happy, healthy workforce. This will influence job retention and will result in increased employee loyalty.

Chapter 6 - Summary & Conclusions

This chapter will revisit the objectives of this study and generally draw together the findings from this research. Recommendations will then be made that could be used to potentially improve the quality of work-life balance opportunities, bearing in mind the issues raised in this study. Finally proposals for further research in this field will be outlined.

The debate about working flexibility is no longer limited to family-friendly working arrangements but to achievement of work-life balance. It is accepted now that it is no longer the case that employers manage work and employees manage life outside the workplace. This is in keeping with a changing psychological contract which involves a *care* consideration (Rousseau, 1990, Stredwick and Ellis, 1998). There seems to be a connection between the work-family interface and employee performance in the workplace. Childcare concerns were the main reasons given by employers for the demand by employees for work-life balance arrangements. This reflects the view that family relationships are a high priority for Irish people (Clinch et al., 2002). There is a consensus of opinion among both employers and employees that work-life balance is a significant aspect of the human resource agenda. In the case of employers this has to be compatible with business targets (Poelmans and Sahibzada, 2004). Linked to this notion that an investment in human resources is a cost rather than an investment. One does need to consider that work-life balance has a strong impact on HR Management. Managing people presents the organisation with great challenges. People are the most important asset of the organisation. The case for improved HR programmes in the work flexibility area needs to be put forward by HR managers.

Contrary to the prevailing view, the findings show that most companies can facilitate a work-life balance. This is a contribution to the work-life balance literature. In industries where there are long working days employees can work certain shifts to suit family and personal concerns for example, women can work mornings while their children are at school or perhaps an older worker can work shorter hours.

The findings demonstrate that employees working part time are content with this status. It can be seen here working part time was an optimal choice for certain employees. This could be

due to work-life balance issues. A majority of employers stated that family considerations were the main reason for take-up of work-life balance programmes. Employees cited study as the first reason followed by family relationships.

There is evidence that the demand for work-life balance arrangements is very diverse. People are finding it difficult to meet both personal and work commitments. There is a demand for shorter hours and more personal time. Also, some people are just not happy to put work before family. This approach has to be reconciled with employer productivity and profitability. As the findings show, the majority of employers support a work/home life balance for their employee's. However, this needs to be traded off and balanced with the goals of the business as it's the employer's responsibility to achieve this and that employees shouldn't expect changes that result in disruption to the business. Work-life balance represents a new departure in some workplaces. Creating a positive organisation structure which recognises the importance of work-life balance programmes for all is a challenge. Issues have been raised relating to the commitment of people who take up work-life balance programmes. Employers were found to be more concerned about work-life balance policies being perceived as unfair by employees not availing of them. It was less of a difficulty for employees (Faludi, 1992, WFD/Management Today, 1998). There is a perception among some people that those with family/caring commitments should not be treated more favourably than others without these commitments. Moreover, they think that the personal needs of some workers, be they related to health, education advancement or otherwise, should not be supported by employers.

The extent of company numerical and functional flexibility is complemented to the extent of its work-life balance supporting activities. Companies which have a high degree of both functional and numerical flexibility also provide work-life balance policies. Employees concur with the employer in this regard. It has been observed that much of the family-friendly research has tended to focus on conflict, stress and negative effects on peoples' well being (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). This study advances the literature on the flexible firm by incorporating the family-friendly/work-life balance dimension.

Company benefits are not linked to numerical flexibility, but in the surveys it is consistently

associated with functional flexibility and work-life balance supports. This would suggest that an integrated approach to human resource management in some organisations, whereby some companies engage in a modern employee focused approach, whereas other companies tend to be more traditional.

There are changes in employment legislation. New family-friendly initiatives have been driven by the EU and national governments. These are changing the working climate. Now there are greater expectations the employers will provide some support arrangements for employees.

The literature signals interdependence between work and non-work life. Employers know that employees work best when there is a healthy balance between work and non-work life. There is a connection between work flexibility and work-life balance. Increased productivity and increased well-being of employees are consequences of work-life balance.

Employees not only require a job to provide primary needs but also require a job that provides family time and social interests and they are definitely interested in a work-life balance. Women working has increased over the years and findings show that women carry most of the caring responsibilities. This will lead to acceleration for the need for work-life balance supporting arrangements from employers.

With the decline in the traditional family of male breadwinner, the issue of care will come to the fore more and more. Less and less support is available from the extended family. Furthermore, there is an aging of the population and this will bring with it new circumstances. On one hand, people may wish to remain in the work-force longer on some kind of flexible work arrangement. On the other hand, there is the issue of care of the elderly. More people have caring responsibility. Facilitating employees' work arrangements to enable them to care for their families is a very practical and economical way of dealing with the issue of care. People themselves are the best ones to care for their families.

With the decline in the traditional family of male breadwinner, the issue of care will come to the fore more and more. Less and less support is available from the extended family.

Furthermore, there is an aging of the population and this will bring with it new circumstances. On one hand, people may wish to remain in the work-force longer on some kind of flexible work arrangement. On the other hand, there is the issue of care of the elderly. More people have caring responsibility. Facilitating employees' work arrangements to enable them to care for their families is a very practical and economical way of dealing with the issue of care. People themselves are the best ones to care for their families.

There are changing expectations about work. Women are more likely to factor in working time arrangements so that they can both work and the care of children. According to employees, a lot of companies do not have work-life balance supports, although the figure for employers is slightly more optimistic. Employers claim work-life balance is an important issue, employees are not as convinced. It could be argued that management lack awareness on the importance of the balance between work and non-work life.

During this recession, there is greater intensification of work. Employees are under increasing pressure to work longer hours and to provide a higher standard of service to the customer. There are lots of person's unemployed and queuing up to take the positions of those in employment. Concern about the effect of flexible work practices on job security and promotion is an issue for employees. It could be an opportunity for employees to demonstrate to employers their commitment to their work.

Family relationships are high priority. There is an increase in the number of people combining family care and employment such as women, more dual earning couples as well as more single parents seeking employment. There are incidences of negative career consequences due to uptake of work-family benefits. There are challenges in organisations that support a long hour's culture. There is a backlash and resentment among employees not availing of these policies. The culture of presenteeism presents challenges. A conflict of interest and tension may arise if family friendly policies are presented by a firm, yet the same firm are aware or expect by assumption in some cases, that dedicated employees work long hours.

An organisation's Human Resources perform an important part in deciding if flexibility can improve and optimise a firm's resources productivity and contribution in general. Recently organisations have changed their HR culture and policies to accommodate a work life balance, where both employer and employee's interests are mutually acknowledged, so that the outcome benefits both parties. Maybe it should be asked can an organisation afford not to be flexible.

It could be argued that the pros and cons in terms of an organisation's costs, whether they are flexible or not, show that by not being flexible is a higher cost, take for example to replace an employee, besides lost talent, the total cost in the recruitment and selection process with further training and a lengthy under optimised learning curve. Compare this with considering the flexibility needs of an employee's work life balance.

As mentioned earlier HR play an important role here, HR policies should be part of the corporate and business strategies. Flexible work practices need be part of these strategies with an eye on the business profitability as per findings and cascaded down from the corporate level driven by top management through the organisation structure to the functional level.

To effectively sustain and implement work life policies, literature shows that support is required from top management. A positive culture is also recommended by managers, in terms of positive and negative opinions of employees whom avail or apply for flexibility policies. The organisation and its managers should encourage and promote the benefits of such work life policies, in relation for example that working long hours may have its advantages and disadvantages.

Organisations must be more accommodating to the quality of an employee's work-life balance. The issue is important to everyone as it promotes and motivates people, leading to a sustained labour market. Flexible working practices are now increasingly being demanded by the labour market that see it as a very important factor in the quality of their working life.

Concern about the effects of flexible work practices on job security is an issue for employees. Work-life balance programmes need to be set up so that employees still have job security and promotion prospects. Their need for more flexible working day needs to be recognised and

addressed. Some employees would find it helpful to be able to vary their working day. This would facilitate employees being able to deal with the unexpected events or pressures that arise outside work.

All the programmes necessitate a change of perspective in the way management views its employees. Organisations and their managers should be aware that life issues can impact on work quality, as workers only naturally can't leave family issues behind at the employer's front door. Training is required for organisations and managers, so they are able to deal and are aware of this extra aspect within an employee's working life.

Work-life balance policies and practices are important for an organisation's corporate social responsibility. The image of an organisation promoting its employees' welfare, by implementing and maintaining flexible programmes, not only enhances the reputation to its employees primarily but also within the community. Such an image will be paramount when the current recession is over and companies are buoyant once more.

6.1 Recommendations

The issues raised by this research form the basis of potential recommendations that are hoped will be beneficial to both managers and employees. It is clear that management commitment towards equality of opportunity in general for women are more specifically for work-life balance which must be more visible within the organisation. Without this commitment the scheme will continue to be seen as a token gesture towards minority female employees, ensuring they will not be allowed to have the full status they deserve. In conjunction with this, there must be an assessment of managerial stereotypes, prejudices and attitudes as individual managers determine suitability of both posts and individuals and therefore may act as barriers to the creation of work-life balance arrangements. The lack of clearly defined and strictly regulated guidelines can influence manager's perceptions and give rise to either conscious or unconscious bias in judgements about eligibility. The following measures are proposed in order to improve the operation of work-life balance and encourage more employees to apply for more flexible working arrangements.

- 1 A formal consistent procedure needs to be designed so that flexible working applications are dealt with on an equally basis to ensure that equal opportunities is translated into practice
- 2 More information needs to be given to managers with reference to clarifying flexible working arrangement policy guidelines on how to judge suitability of posts and individuals
- 3 The Human Resources Department should strengthen its position as a consultative and regulatory body to circulate good practice information whilst monitoring all job share applications to ensure that discriminatory practices are eradicated
- 4 A proactive publicity programme throughout the organisation should be taken so that all employees are aware of the job sharing scheme and the procedures which it operates by
- 5 A central database should be created that stores relevant information on potential requests for flexible working arrangements, which could be used more effectively
This initiative seeks to help eliminate the perennial problems of finding the right skills and capabilities for the job
- 6 Training courses for managers and feedback sessions should be organised so that all management staff fully understand the need for equal opportunity initiatives
- 7 More specifically, awareness programmes focusing on dismantling stereotypical attitudes assigned to say part-time staff, so that employees can have the same access to training, development and career progression as full-time workers
- 8 Include where relevant, trade union representatives in a systematic periodical assessment and evaluation of flexible working arrangements

6 2 Proposals for further research

- 1 Investigate local barriers inherent within management structures and informal practices which inhibit women's progression into senior management positions A survey covering such areas as cultural attitudes to the role of women, the need for in-house childcare facilities and positive action in terms of single-sex training and

development courses Exploration methods to overcome these barriers with a view to increasing numbers of women in senior positions could then take place

- 2 Re-evaluation of the exclusion of part-time working as a formal working arrangement by conducting job content analyzes to find out if lower level posts would be better suited to conventional part-time rather than full-time working or job sharing



APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Work Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements

Annualised hours

Flexitime

Reduced working time

Work sharing

Fixed part-time working

Voluntary reduced work-time

Job sharing

Flexible leave arrangements

Compassionate leave

Sabbaticals

Study leave

Non-statutory leave arrangements

Employment or career breaks

Statutory leave arrangements

Maternity leave

Parental leave

Adoptive leave

Career breaks

Force majeure leave

Carer's leave

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire to employees (taken from fluidsurveys.com)

Work Life Balance

Are you?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

Which of the following age groups do you belong to?

- ☐ 16-19
- ☐ 20-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ Over 60

Do you work?

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time
- ☐ Job-share
- ☐ Flexitime

What work arrangement would you prefer?

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time
- ☐ Job-share
- ☐ Flexitime

Which one of these best describes your job?

- ☐ Management

- ☐ Supervisor
- ☐ Employee

Do you regularly work longer than standard hours?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, how is this usually paid?

- ☐ Overtime pay
- ☐ Time off
- ☐ Both
- ☐ Neither

Which of the following family friendly policies are available to you in your company?

- ☐ Paternity leave
- ☐ Adoptive leave
- ☐ Parental leave
- ☐ Leave for family reasons
- ☐ Childcare facilities
- ☐ Job-sharing
- ☐ Flexitime
- ☐ Employee career break
- ☐ Term-time working

Has your view on work-life balance changed since the 2008 Irish economic recession?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Have you studied while employed in the past 2 years?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, did you have support from your employer (this could include financial support, study leave etc)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you work less than full time hours (part-time, job share, flexitime) what are the reasons for this?

- ☐ To combine work with the care of children
- ☐ To have more leisure time
- ☐ To have time for education or vocational training
- ☐ Health reasons
- ☐ Because I could not find a full-time job
- ☐ Other

Do your current working arrangements suit your family/personal commitments?

- ☐ Very suitable
- ☐ Quite suitable
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Not very suitable
- ☐ Not suitable at all

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

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied

- ☐ Neither
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied

Appendix 3 – Letter to employers

Charlotte Kemmis

Address XXX

Address of Employer

July 2012

Dear Mr / Mrs X

I am a mature student of National College of Ireland, Dublin currently completing a BA (Hons) in Human Resource Management. As part of my studies there I am undertaking a study of companies with regard to the subject of “work-life balance”. The survey is designed to gather information on the extent of work flexibility in companies today. It is hoped that the results of the survey will give a broad view of the extent of current work flexibility practices, the attitudes of companies to work flexibility and the level of costs involved. I am particularly interested in the opinion changes of organisations to work-life balance in Ireland since the economic recession hit in 2008.

I would be very grateful if you would participate in this project by completing the enclosed questionnaire. Your company was selected to participate in the survey as part of a random sample selected of different sized companies, in different industries and locations. The questionnaire should take no more than 20 minutes to complete. A reply paid envelope is provided for your convenience.

The information collected in this survey will be treated in the strictest confidence, and will only be used to produce statistical tables. It will not be possible to identify the responses of any individual company from the results produced.

I would very much appreciate your cooperation in this survey. If you have any queries, or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at the following email: charlottethomas@eircom.net or telephone me on 087 6951827.

Thanking you in advance

Yours sincerely

Charlotte Kemmis

Appendix 4 – Questionnaire to Employers

1) What is your title?

General Manager Human Resources Manager Operations Other
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

2) What type of staff work in your company? (You may tick more than one answer)

Full-time Part-time Permanent Temporary Fixed term Trainees
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3) Please indicate approximately what percentage of staff are currently working the following working time arrangements (tick the relevant boxes for each category)

	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
Flexi-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shift work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Permanent part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Temporary part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job sharing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Annualised hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Casual hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4) Why were working time practices introduced in your organisation?

Labour cost savings	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work-life balance issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
To improve productivity	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employee demand	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulty in finding full-time staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
To reduce the number of full-time employees	<input type="checkbox"/>
To improve reputation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in organisational design	<input type="checkbox"/>

5) Does your organisation provide employees with support for work-life balance issues?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what form does this support take? (Please indicate where relevant)

Employee assistance programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-retirement advice and support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff counselling service	<input type="checkbox"/>

Stress management course
Continuing professional development
Career planning guidance

☐
☐
☐

6) Please give your opinion on the following statements

	Agree strongly	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Disagree strongly
a) Everybody should be able to balance home and work life in the way they want					
b) The employers first responsibility has to be to ensure that the organisation achieves its goals					
c) Employees must not expect to change their working pattern if it results in disrupting business					
d) It is not the employers' responsibility to help people to balance their work and the other aspects of their lives					
e) People work best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their lives					
f) Policies that help some staff balance work with other interests are often unfair to other employees					

6b) Of the factors identified in question 6 which is the most important principle? Please tick one box

a

b

c

d

e

f

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

7) How important would you consider family-friendly/work-life balance arrangements are for your organisation? (1 = irrelevant, 4 = very important) (Please tick one box only)

Irrelevant

Not important

Important

Very important

No view

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

- 8) Which, if any, of the following work-life balance arrangements are provided in your organisation for employees? (Tick as many as appropriate)

	Not available to staff	Available to all staff	Available to full-time staff	Percentage
Paternity leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Compassionate leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Career break	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Bereavement leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Study/exam leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Parental leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Carer leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Adoptive leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Maternity leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Force majeure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

- 9) Does part time work result in any of the following benefits to your organisation?

	Yes	No	don't know
Improved employee productivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved employee satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less absenteeism/sick leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced labour turnover	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helps overcome competition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved business results	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helps retain key employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving your service quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased cost savings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 10) Would you say that part-time arrangements have any cost advantages to your establishment?

Yes ☐ No ☐

(If yes, please tick as applicable)

Lower hourly wages for part-time workers than full-time staff in comparable jobs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lower national insurance contributions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lower employer provided fringe benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lower cost advantages (please give details) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>

11) Please identify factors where employees may not benefit from part time working arrangements

Hourly wages are lower than for comparable full-time jobs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of respect	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of employer provided fringe benefits enjoyed by full timers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of job security	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heavy workload	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of promotion prospects	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is difficult to get flexible workers to participate in trade union activities	<input type="checkbox"/>

12) What are the reasons why employees in your company take up working time arrangements (part-time, job-share, annualised hours, flexitime)?

To combine work the care of children or other dependent	<input type="checkbox"/>
To have more leisure time	<input type="checkbox"/>
To have more time for educational or vocational training	<input type="checkbox"/>
For health reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employee could not find a full-time job	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working hours were reduced in order to avoid redundancies	<input type="checkbox"/>
A source of supplementary income	<input type="checkbox"/>
For reasons of sociability	<input type="checkbox"/>

13) Do you have to deal with the following problems when you organise work within your company?

	Yes	No
Substantial changes of workload within the same day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Substantial changes of workload from day to day (within a week or month)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Substantial changes of workload within a year (seasonal changes)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14) How often do the part-timers in your establishment with agreed working hours have to work more hours than agreed?

Very often	frequently	occasionally	Very seldom	never
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15) Are part-timers in your company more or less likely than full-timers in comparable jobs to have to work additional hours?

More likely	less likely	No difference
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please return questionnaire to

Charlotte Kemmis, 90 Carysfort Park, Blackrock, Co Dublin

Email charlottethomas@eircom.net - phone 087 6951827

**The information enclosed is strictly confidential and will only be used for
research purposes**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

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