Work-Life Balance:
The Role of the Manager

by

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Foreword
Linda Holbeche, Director of Research

When Roffey Park first began investigating issues relating to work-life balance in 1998, the phrase was not common currency. So deeply ingrained were notions that having a career meant inevitable sacrifice that even contemplating 'having it all' seemed far-fetched. Indeed the main discussion seemed to be about how flexible working – largely part-time - was the answer for hard pressed working parents. Those who sought flexibility knew that it would come at a personal price.

Then came the War for Talent at the end of the last century. Fuelling growth in high technology and other sectors employing knowledge workers meant that employers had to revisit their assumptions about how such employees should be treated. As this report explores, employers started to experiment for the first time with variations on the work-life theme as more and more valued employees started to exercise their negotiating muscle and demand a better employee proposition. Experiments abounded along the lines of making workloads more manageable, enabling people to work from home and keeping employee hours within reasonable levels. The Government initiative to reinforce work-life balance in the workplace builds on earlier encouragement of family-friendly policies. It reflects a desire to reduce the negative effects on people's relationships and health which are thought to be a consequence of work-life imbalance and their knock-on effects on the nation's public purse.

And now, with many sectors suffering in the current uncertain economic climate, it will be interesting to see how embedded such policies and practices really are and whether they will be maintained during a period of restructuring, cost-cutting and downsizing. In a sense this report is very timely, since it suggests that in reality, the main arbiters of whether work-life balance policies become a reality are line managers, both by their attitudes and management practices. The various cases in the report demonstrate how managers can enable or prevent balance for others. In general, our findings suggest that cost is not the only reason that employees are prevented from achieving balance, but that this is compounded by lack of leadership and clarity about what work really needs to be done.

The report also suggests the various interdependencies which need to be aligned if work-life balance policies are to be really effective. Yet above all, the role of managers is pivotal. In at least one example, work-life balance is made possible for employees in the complete absence of organisational policies to this effect. This is achieved simply by managers demonstrating appropriate behaviours and expectations in a culture characterised by mutual trust and respect.

This third phase of research builds on the work carried out by Caroline Glynn. In the first stage of her research, Caroline identified that balance is defined by individuals in many different ways. What most people in her surveys wanted however was not to have to choose between work and the rest of their lives, but to have a blend of the two which was right for them at that stage of their lives. The factors which affected the perception of achieving balance were not the number of hours worked, but whether the individual felt in control of the workload and of the hours worked.

In the second stage of research Caroline explored the changing psychological contract, in particular the extent to which employees are seeking balance as a key element of career success. She found that most people, but especially those entering the world of work, are very clear about their desire for balance in a way unheard of only a few years ago. A parallel

study of the views of 14 year-olds in Sussex schools (Glynn 2000) found that children expected to have balance when they started work and respected their parents if they managed to achieve balance.

The current phase has been spearheaded by a team – Caroline, Ingrid Steinberg and Claire McCartney. We are grateful to all those who took part in the research and who gave us access to their organisations' practices. While none of the organisations would claim to have a blueprint of success on the work-life balance debate, their interesting and thoughtful initiatives described in this report will offer practical insights to this important area. If you know of interesting practices which could form part of our ongoing research into work-life balance, Claire McCartney or I will be pleased to hear from you.

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Introduction

Why work-life balance?

The issue of work-life balance, rarely discussed as an organisational concern before the mid-1990s, has recently risen up many corporate agendas as a critical area for action. This follows the immense changes that have been occurring within both organisations and wider society.

In terms of organisational change we have lived through a decade where the gurus have been declaring that 'change is the only constant'. This follows the advent of the technology age, the move towards globalisation, the trend towards mergers, acquisitions and more recently strategic alliances and the increasingly common tendency towards organisational restructuring and downsizing. All of these changes have put added pressures on employees, both in terms of adjusting to the change itself and coping with its resulting effects – more often than not increased workloads and a need to develop new skills. Alongside these added pressures, employees are also wizening up to the new employment deal, whereby they no longer have the luxury of job security and any loyalty they may feel towards the organisation is likely to be very one-sided.

This environment has tended to create a slightly confused workforce. On the one hand employees feel that there is a constant pressure to prove their worth to the organisation so that they are not included in the next downsizing initiative. Yet on the other hand, the end of the 'job for life' era has alerted many to the freedom they have to make choices about the type of employer they want to work for.

So we end up with a situation where a large percentage of the workforce are working longer hours than their contracted working week and yet at the same time are crying out for a better balance between work and life. We also see a growing minority who are acting on the power they hold as talented individuals and who are leaving those organisations that are making excessive demands for little return, and moving to those who recognise the importance of having a fulfilling life outside of work.

Alongside these organisational drivers, we are also witnessing huge societal changes. An increasing number of working age women are now playing an active role in the workforce which puts added pressure on the family unit. Additionally, we are seeing the growth of the sandwich generation – those with both child-care and eldercare responsibilities. It is estimated that the number of elderly dependants will out-number young dependants in the UK during the next 20 years (Office of National Statistics) and the EU population over 80, the age group needing most care, could reach 25m by 2020, up from just under 15m in 1997 (Eurostat). The newspapers are also continually decrying the breakdown of the family unit, with an escalating number of divorces and a rapid increase in the number of single parent families. All of this puts added pressures on individuals and increases the demand for organisations to recognise their employees as people with responsibilities that require time and energy outside of work.

Over the last few years the business case for addressing work-life balance has become increasingly obvious and critical. If organisations are to attract and retain the best talent, motivate their workforce and increase productivity, they need to be seen to actively respect individuals' rights to a fulfilling life outside of work.

The Role of Managers in Enabling Balance

Previous research into work-life balance has demonstrated the importance of the organisational culture in enabling balance[1]. The sense employees have of the effect that work-life balance policies will have on their career, is critical in determining whether the policies are used and therefore have any impact at all. In many organisations, part-time workers are still passed over for promotion and individuals who alter their working patterns to fit in outside commitments or who simply cannot put in the long hours expected, are viewed as being less committed to the organisation than those who do put in the long hours.

For many employees the organisational culture is embodied in the attitudes and behaviours of their immediate line manager. Therefore whether an individual feels able to discuss issues outside of work, request different ways of working and believe that the organisation genuinely enables balance, will depend considerably on the skills of the manager in creating an open communication culture of trust and respect.

Managers themselves are also having to work within the huge constraints which have resulted from the changes previously highlighted[2]. Not only are they having to take on more responsibilities with the culling of management in many organisations, they are also faced with delivering to ever tighter deadlines as the pace of business increases, often with fewer staff. And to top it all, those employees that are left are now demanding a better work-life balance.

This research therefore aims to look at the extent to which managers feel able to provide work-life balance for their staff, identifying the challenges they face and the areas in which they have succeeded in making a difference. It is hoped that by focusing on this very practical angle, organisations will be able to identify important areas for action following the introduction of work-life balance policies – the first step in what is often a long process of culture change and management development.

The Work Environment and Work-Life Balance

What is work-life balance?

Work-life balance refers to the growing recognition that individuals require a satisfactory balance between the demands of work and those of the rest of life. Increasingly employers are being asked to consider the business benefits of enabling their employees to achieve and maintain a better balance between work and other aspects of their lives. The emphasis on work-life balance is therefore shifting from being merely the concern of employees to one of joint responsibility between employer and employee. Work-life balance is about employers identifying with their workforce, how both can benefit from a more imaginative approach to working practices.

One of the difficulties with addressing work-life balance issues is that there is no 'one size fits all' solution. Rather, what is balance for one individual may not be the same for another, and additionally an individual's needs in relation to balance are highly likely to change over time. Work-life balance is therefore about adopting working arrangements so that everyone - regardless of age, race, or gender – can find a balance that enables them more easily to combine work with their other responsibilities or aspirations. The aim of work-life balance is to offer a wide range of options so that people can have more control and have the freedom to choose what they believe is best for them within the constraints of the business.

The key themes of the Government's campaign into work-life balance are:

- Personal choice – individuals should be free to decide for themselves, in consultation with their employer, what balance they wish to strike between work and other aspects of their lives.
- Fully inclusive – this is an issue for all employers and employees irrespective of their family or personal circumstances.
- Benefits everyone – employers, employees, families and the wider community.
- Re-affirms the value of work – work is important, necessary and, for many, enjoyable. There is no one right balance, but there is a place for both work and other activities.

Additionally, work-life balance is not just about working fewer hours. It includes:

- How long people work (Flexibility in the number of hours worked)
- When people work (Flexibility in the arrangement of hours)
- Where people work (Flexibility in the place of work)
- Developing people through training so that they can manage the balance better
- Providing back-up support
- Breaks from work

A growing theme is therefore emerging in relation to balance termed 'time sovereignty'. This reflects the fact that many workers don't necessarily want to work part-time or even work fewer hours, they are merely seeking control over when and where they work.

Any successful work-life balance initiative therefore requires a fundamental re-think about the way in which work needs to be done within an organisation and the way in which people need to be managed. It has moved way beyond enabling individuals to work part-time and is about real flexibility to meet both the individual and the organisational needs.

Why has work-life balance risen up the corporate agenda?

As highlighted in the Introduction, the emphasis being placed on the provision of work-life balance has increased noticeably over the last few years. In many organisations work-life balance policies are no longer seen as peripheral 'nice-to-haves' but are viewed as key elements of a strategic recruitment and retention initiative. As organisations have adjusted to the knowledge economy so they have realised that their success relies heavily on attracting and retaining talent that is much in demand and is increasingly aware of its marketability.

There are a number of reasons why the issue of work-life balance has grown in importance for organisations over recent years. These are discussed below.

Stress and the length of the working week

The concentration on cost cutting within today's organisations has had an inevitable knock-on effect on the workloads of those who remain employed. The Roffey Park Management Agenda, 2002[3] reported that half of respondents felt that the organisation made excessive demands on them in terms of workload including demands for both increased quantity and increased quality of output. To manage these workloads, individuals are having to put in longer hours at work, which then leads to feelings of stress and loss of control. In another survey conducted by Ceridian Performance Partners[4], 4 in 10 respondents said that they sometimes felt crushed by their workload, with the young being particularly affected. A third of respondents to a recent CIPD survey[5] reported however that a lot of time is spent re-doing work or solving problems that have arisen because their organisation is disorganised or inefficient. This suggests that there is plenty of scope for organisations and individual employees to find ways of 'working smarter rather than harder' in order to alleviate workload pressures.

58% of respondents to The Management Agenda 2002 agreed that there was a culture of presenteeism within the organisation where individuals feel pressured to be present in the office considerably longer than their contracted hours. Flatter structures with greater competition for reduced promotion opportunities may also lead to a need to demonstrate visible commitment to the organisation in order to gain an advantage over others (Clark, 1994)[6]. In The Agenda, 88% of respondents admitted that they consistently work longer than their contracted working week. The average number of extra hours worked per week is striking as although 45% worked between 5 and 10 extra hours, 25% worked an extra 11-15 hours and 20% worked an average of more than 15 hours extra per week. These results are consistent with the Agenda 2001 findings, showing no improvement over the last year.

The pressures put on individuals' time by the organisation then has a negative impact on individuals' personal lives which in turn increases the feelings of stress and dissatisfaction and creates a never-ending circle. 71% of respondents to The Management Agenda reported that they experienced stress as a direct result of work. When asked to define what they meant by stress some of the key words used were anxiety, overload, loss of control, pressure and long hours at work with insufficient time for personal activities. Stress was summed up by one respondent as *"the feeling that you are working at your limit and that something is about to happen to cause the house of cards to collapse."*

Stress is by no means confined to the UK however. In Japan, overwork is cited by doctors and lawyers as the main reason for a doubling in the number of suicides since 1970[7]. Stress at work is also the biggest problem in European companies, according to research cited in the Work-Life Forum's recent report[8]. When asked to rate the level of morale within their organisation, 30% of respondents rated it as low against only 11% who felt it was high[9]. This

negative picture was then reinforced by 70% of respondents stating that they feel work is becoming less enjoyable today.

The research is showing that the lack of balance resulting from these organisational demands is having negative effects on individuals' home and work lives. Reinforcing the Agenda findings, The Quality of Working Life Survey (2000)[10] found that 69% of respondents felt that the excessive hours adversely affected their morale This effect appears to be getting more pronounced, having risen from 56% in 1998. The survey also found long hours have an adverse effect on productivity, with 59% feeling that their productivity was negatively impacted. The effects on home life are equally worrying with 72% reporting that the hours were having a negative impact on their relationship with their partner/spouse and 77% reported a negative effect on their relationship with their children. The long hours culture is also seen to contribute towards the breakdown in family life. This breakdown was reported in The BT Forum's report on the Cost of Communication Breakdown (Walker, 1996)[11] which found that the proportion of people living in one-parent families in the UK increased fourfold between 1961 and 1991.

Sacrifices made

Over three quarters of respondents to The Roffey Park Management Agenda, 2002[12] agreed with the statement '*To achieve career success it is necessary to make sacrifices in other areas of your life*'. It is therefore not surprising that 81% of respondents reported that they have made sacrifices for their career in the past. 56% had missed out on time with their children, while 45% reported that their physical health had suffered. A quarter of respondents reported that they had suffered a broken relationship although there were also a number who indicated that although the relationship hadn't broken down it had come under severe pressure. Other sacrifices noted included not having children at all or having them very late on in life, missing out on any form of social/leisure activities, spending a lot of time away from family and friends due to work, and the negative social consequences of relocating for work. [13]

As in previous years, respondents felt that the reasons why it was necessary to make these sacrifices were linked to the organisational culture. 48% stated that the culture expected it and a further 51% (up 9% from last year) stated that it was necessary to attain a desired promotion – a telling reflection of what is recognised and rewarded within organisations. Furthermore 28% of respondents made sacrifices simply as a way of keeping their existing job. However a number of respondents noted that they chose to make these sacrifices out of enjoyment for the job and because of the personal standards that they set for themselves.

Although the majority of respondents had sacrificed their personal life for their career, 41% of respondents also indicated that they had sacrificed their career for their personal life. This has increased from a third of respondents in 2001, showing a growing trend towards prioritising personal goals over career aspirations.

There was a mixed response as to whether respondents would be prepared to make personal sacrifices for their career now if requested with 45% refusing to do so and 29% (7% less than in 2001) indicating that they would make sacrifices for their career.

Attracting and retaining talent in the knowledge economy

A recent survey conducted by William M. Mercer in the US[14], explored the prevalence of, and motivations for, corporate investments in work-life programs. The results confirmed the difficulties organisations are facing in keeping their key employees, with 71% of respondents stating that retention was the primary reason for implementing

work-life balance. This was almost twice the number who indicated recruitment which came in at third with employee morale ranked second, again a factor related to retaining and motivating staff. In addition, 55% of respondents considered work-life balance as part of an overall employer of choice strategy. In a UK study, 72% of workplaces reported that work-life balance practices fostered good employment relations[15]. This emphasis on using balance to achieve recruitment and retention goals is supported by a further study in the US, the American Graduate Survey 1998[16], conducted by Universum, which found that MBA students' top priority was to balance their personal lives and careers.

Research suggests that increasingly employees have adjusted to the insecure employment environment and are meeting the need to manage their own careers[17]. They are reporting a high degree of confidence in their employability and are actively considering leaving their current organisation in favour of one that better meets their needs. Increasingly the need for balance is emerging as a key factor driving this movement. Research published in 2000 by Roffey Park emphasises this shift quite dramatically[18]. Following telephone interviews with 50 MBA and MSc students, the research concluded that a key criterion being used by individuals to select potential employers, was the organisation's values. These were important both in terms of the way the organisation values its employees and its values in relation to the wider society. This moves the focus of organisational action from the implementation of family-friendly policies towards not just the creation of a supportive culture around balance but also an external image and profile that reflect this. It also widens the debate from one concerning only employees and organisations to one that is inclusive of society as a whole and which recognises the role which organisations play within their local communities.

Additionally, there are emerging definitions of careers, which centre on not only work life but also personal life. Increasingly individuals are defining a successful career as one that does not take over the rest of life, with failure in career terms characterised by a lack of time and energy for activities outside of work. This changing definition of what constitutes a career suggests the need for a fundamental change in the organisation of work. Previously employees have worked long and hard in order to achieve career success as defined by progression up a hierarchy and financial reward. Today, however, if career success is being defined in relation to balance then it follows that employees will be considerably less willing to put in long hours, given that by doing so they are failing to achieve both career success and personal fulfilment.

These changing needs are being reported throughout the global marketplace. In a survey of over 1,000 young international high flyers, work-life balance was rated the second most important career value for men and women in North America, Western Europe and Asia[19]. Meanwhile Futures on Hold[20] – a survey of 18-30 year olds in five European countries – showed the convergence between the expectations of young men and young women with both expecting to share both home and work lives. A decade ago, executives going through the leadership programme at Ashridge Business School put technical and functional competence at the top of their list of career motivations[21]. Today, top place goes to having a balanced lifestyle.

Growing numbers of women in the workforce
One of the primary drivers for the current emphasis on work-life balance is the growing number of women in the workforce, who traditionally have to juggle multiple roles and therefore require additional flexibility. The employment rate for women in the UK is currently at its highest-ever level, standing at 69.6% of working-age women in spring 2001 – compared with 79.7% of men – according to recent Labour Force Survey statistics. The employment rate for women with dependent children is also on an upward trend.

Given this surge in the number of women in the workforce coupled with the labour shortages currently experienced by UK organisations, it is clearly essential that in order to retain these women, working practices conducive to a life outside of work are available.

Changing needs of both men and women

It is important to note that the number of ambitious, highly career orientated women is also increasing. Many women are not at work solely as a means of supporting their family but are rather actively committed to progressing their careers and succeeding in the workplace. This is not to say that women are no longer interested in being part of a happy, thriving family unit as well – they are. It just means that they want both. And this is also true of men who are increasingly voicing a desire to have the time and space for fulfilment outside of the boundaries of the organisation, whether this represents spending more time with their families, having time for sport and exercise or just time to relax from the stresses and strains of work.

The focus of reconciling work and life has traditionally been concentrated on women and in particular working mothers. However this ignores the changing role of men in society, recently highlighted in the final report of the Commission on the Family, which stated that:

> '*expectations are changing about what it is to be a good father. It is no longer presumed that the father is the sole breadwinner or that his role is simply to provide the weekly wage packet. There is a presumption that today's fathers will want to be present at the birth of their children, to be emotionally involved with them and subsequently to take an interest in their schooling and to share the housework*'.

Such changes highlight the need for organisations to offer work environments that enable work-life balance and to target any related policies at male employees as well as female employees. This also requires a change of mindset for many managers who traditionally view the take-up of such policies by men as a sign of a lack of commitment.

Productivity

A report at the Davos World Economic Forum 1999 highlighted the impact that lack of balance is having on the effectiveness of CEOs. It concluded that 'CEOs are increasingly suffering from stress, sleep deprivation, heart disease, loneliness, failed marriages and depression, among other problems. And these woes are taking a toll on the bottom line - CEOs must avoid workaholism'.

This raises another difficulty in relation to balance – not only are individuals experiencing increased pressure from organisations to work harder and produce ever better results, they are also putting increasing pressure on themselves to succeed. This ambition, combined with organisational pressures means that many employees are putting in longer and longer hours and making ever-greater sacrifices for the sake of their careers. Doing so however, often proves unproductive – both for the individual and for the organisation.

This is supported in a survey conducted by Austin Knight, which found that 90% of managers felt that long hours actually led to a loss of productivity and expressed concern about workers' effectiveness.

Globalisation and the 24 hour society

The pace with which organisations have been embracing the opportunities offered by an accessible global market, has greatly intensified over the last decade. This move towards globalisation creates additional drivers for work-life balance. Firstly, globalisation is adding fuel to the imbalance experience by employees. For those who are co-ordinating with foreign markets, the situation will often arise where they have to extend their working day to accommodate the different time zones of the other markets. Secondly, organisations need to develop more flexible processes and structures that enable them to respond quickly and effectively to the demands of international clients, customers and colleagues. The advent of the 24-hour society requires services that are able to respond to customers around the clock, seven days a week. This creates a need for workers to be on call to supply these services, 24 hours a day. As a result the traditional definitions of the 'working week' and 'weekend' have gone.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Promoting work, family and community integration is an important part of corporate social responsibility – an overarching umbrella that is gaining prominence in many organisations as businesses are having to recognise their impact and their force for change in much wider spheres than were previously their concern. Work-life balance is a critical element of corporate social responsibility as not only does it impact on important organisational issues such as workforce diversity, it also has obvious linkages with the wider society. Employees are more than just valuable members of an organisation, they also often have a multitude of roles within the community that are threatened when the organisation puts unreasonable demands on their time. This was emphasised in previous research conducted by Roffey Park into work-life balance in which respondents reported that not only did they want more time for family and friends but they also wanted to be able to commit to roles as school governor or to volunteer for a charity. It is likely that as the emphasis on corporate social responsibility increases, so demand for organisations to free up employees' time will also increase.

The role of culture in enabling balance

The conclusions of previous research into the role of culture in enabling balance conducted by Roffey Park[22], stated that it is the organisational culture that holds the key to enabling balance. Despite the presence of family-friendly policies within organisations, the organisational culture sent counter messages about what was valued by the organisation. These perceived organisational values emphasised the need to work long hours in order to demonstrate commitment and created a culture where, in order to achieve success within the organisation, employees had to make big sacrifices in their personal lives. These values serve not only to conspire against employees taking up the policies but also ensure that even if taken up, the policies cannot enable balance due to the detrimental effect they will have on the individuals' career success.

In a recent study of the intensification of work[23], respondents were asked if they experienced pressure at work and if so from whom. The results confirmed that employees are under increased pressure, particularly from colleagues. The number of workers reporting pressure from this source had increased from 29% in 1986 to almost double the number, 57%, in 1997. In comparison, although pressure from supervisor or boss had increased over the years as well, the figure for 1997 was still considerably lower than that for colleague pressure, at 41%. It appears therefore that peer pressure has come into its own as a source of labour intensification despite this being the age of team working. This

reflects the fact that not only is the organisational culture set in the actions and beliefs of the leaders of the organisation, it is actually powerfully reflected in the behaviour of every individual within the organisation.

The prevalence of different ways of working

The growth of part-time working represents one of the most dramatic structural changes in the British labour market in recent decades. Almost 7 million people in Great Britain worked part-time in autumn 2001, according to figures from the Labour Force Survey. This compares with 5.5 million in 1990. This growth has been driven by employers' desire to achieve flexibility but is increasingly fuelled by a need to meet the demand for this type of work from mothers returning to work. The current labour market shortages are also reflected in the fact that at least some employers acknowledge that they use part-timers because insufficient full-time workers are available.

Increasingly the demand for part-time work is coming from outside of the traditional employee group of working mothers. In an IRS survey conducted in 2001[24], a total of 10 employers of the 94 questioned, reported that they provided part-time working opportunities partly in response to the demand from fathers for this type of work. Nine organisations also mentioned the demand for less than full hours from 'portfolio' workers as a reason for offering part-time opportunities.

The 'Work-Life Balance 2000' baseline study[25], commissioned by the DfEE reported that 24% of employees now work flexitime with 12% working only during school terms. 60% of employers are now allowing their workers to vary their hours and over half of employers would allow staff to switch to part-time working in some cases.

Despite these signs that things are changing towards greater flexibility in working hours, the study also finds that one in nine full-time employees work more than 60 hours a week and two thirds of male employees believe that part-time working would damage their career prospects. 80% of workplaces have employees who work more than their standard hours, and 39% of those employees who work extra hours do so without extra pay.

Flexible working improves performance

Research presented at the 2001 British Psychological Society conference demonstrated that senior executives who can work flexibly perform better than full-time managers[26]. Commissioned by The Resource Connection, a flexible work company and The Industrial Society, the study was carried out in conjunction with the assessment and development specialists, SHL. The study found that managers rated 70% of flexible workers higher than full-time colleagues and their own output in previous full-time work. Job sharers were also rated very positively whereby 70% of job sharing executives were perceived to have 30% increased output over one person doing the same job.

This research is valuable in that it not only lends support to the improved productivity aspect of the business case for different ways of working, it also focuses on breaking down the barriers that still exist around senior people working flexibly. As well as opening up the options for everyone within the organisation, the power of having senior role models is also a huge benefit in bringing about cultural change in this area.

The EU perspective

The issue of work-life balance has also emerged as an issue for EU involvement. As a central element of their employment policies, all EU Member States have undertaken to support employees in reconciling work and family life. This commits them to design, implement and promote family-friendly policies, including the provision of care services for children and other dependants and parental and other leave schemes.

This commitment has been driven by a number of factors that are common across the European states:

- The overall demographic trend in Europe is for fewer children and more older people. The European Commission predicts that 'older people will soon make up 45.3% of dependants in comparison with 35.4% in 1995'. This clearly indicates that the issue of eldercare is going to rise in importance.

- Over the last thirty years, female employment and women's share of overall employment has been growing. However, in the 20-39 years age group, women with children have lower employment rates than those with no children.

- Nearly all employed fathers throughout Member States work on a full-time basis and on average work longer hours than employed mothers.

Managers and work-life balance

Organisations attempting to bring about change in relation to work-life balance, still face the same problems that have dogged the introduction of family-friendly policies since new ways of working were introduced in the early 1980's – the prejudice of managers and those working full-time. The refrain of 'good idea but it couldn't possibly work in my area of the business' is still all too common. Managers are also often caught in the middle of pressure from above to improve productivity and pressure from below for greater understanding and flexibility. In a recent survey, this pressure on managers was highlighted, with 51 per cent of workplaces reporting that work-life balance practices increased managerial workloads[27].

It is still all too common for organisational leaders to deny their role in enabling balance for employees. This was demonstrated in a study conducted into the Family Friendly Work Arrangements in small and medium sized enterprises in Ireland[28], which reflected a number of managers' views that it is the employer's responsibility to provide a job and the employees' responsibility to manage their own lives. Despite these views however such managers also admitted that they were having to consider addressing work-life balance issues due to the difficulties in recruiting and retaining key talent.

In a recent survey conducted by Gateshead Council, questionnaires were sent out to 300 employees to explore their views about the Council's policies and practices in relation to work-life balance. The role of managers in enabling balance was identified as being critical with 60% of the 141 respondents reporting that the attitude of managers was an obstacle to attaining satisfactory balance. The importance of management support was further corroborated in research published by the Career Innovation Research Group[29] in 1999 which concluded that the factor most significantly affecting workforce commitment is management's recognition of the importance of home and family life.

Without management support, the need for balance can by subverted with employees phoning in sick rather than admit their child is ill and needs their care. Partly this perceived need to hide other responsibilities can be driven by a lack of policies to cover these unplanned situations but in many cases it is down to a fear of reprisals if other commitments are seen to be put ahead of the job. This was reflected in a recent study conducted by the IES with eleven SMEs[30]. The key business benefits of family-friendly employment practices

identified in the study included reduced casual sickness absence with most employers reporting that sickness absence due to caring responsibilities had been reduced. Employees who felt more able to be honest about absence due to dependants' illness reinforced this.

Another recent research report which explored the role managers play in work-life balance in Canada[31] concluded that good managers are key to helping employees cope with the daily struggle of trying to balance the demands of work and home. The research, conducted by The Conference Board of Canada, highlighted the role of managers as the translators of the corporate culture and as gatekeepers to flexible work options and innovative family-friendly policies. In the Conference Board study, Canadian workers who reported having a supervisor who was sensitive to their personal/family needs had significantly higher levels of job satisfaction. They also reported missing fewer days of work than those whose supervisors were not sensitive.

The experiences of managers who are managing work-life balance issues for staff

In the Roffey Park Management Agenda 2002[32], managers were asked whether they actively supported their staff in relation to work-life balance issues, to which 93% reported that they did. When asked in what way they offered support, respondents reported that they actively encourage staff to leave on time each day and ensure that staff take their full holiday entitlement. They also offered staff time off in lieu for extra hours worked. A number of respondents made an effort to manage workloads and carried out regular reviews to help prioritise work into manageable chunks.

A lot of emphasis was placed on the role of communication with a considerable number of managers highlighting the importance they placed on having open and honest discussions with staff, which enabled them to engage with members of their team on a personal as well as a work basis. Respondents therefore reported that they actively discussed issues about work-life balance with their team and were kept in the loop when a team member faced difficulties at home. Respondents also indicated that they were very open to flexible working arrangements, with a number being happy for staff to work from home and others adopting a measurement by results approach rather than measuring attendance. A limited number referred to the role they played in setting the tone for what is acceptable by actively managing their own work-life balance, with one respondent noting that they '*refuse to succumb to pressure themselves and ensure that this is visible*'. [33]

When asked whether they experienced any difficulties in enabling their team to achieve balance, the majority (56%)[34] said no. For those who did have difficulties however, these were heavily centred around the fact that the pressure of workloads often made it very difficult for people to work hours which enabled balance. One respondent noted that '*we sometimes have deliverables thrust upon the team along with impossible delivery dates, the consequences of which are additional hours at work*', while another highlighted the dilemma that '*by being flexible to help one member of staff, you may end up having to ask/expect another to work long hours – especially if there is pressure from above to meet tight deadlines*'. There was a general sense that meeting deadlines over-rides everything else and that policies don't actually mean very much when faced with doing the job. [35]

Perceptions of others within the organisation were also noted as problematic. This was noted both in terms of other people perceiving that an individual was skiving if they weren't physically at their desk, but also respondents referred to being pressurised by other managers not to do too much in relation to balance, as they would then be expected to offer the same options to their team members. Finally, the diversity of needs around balance was highlighted as an issue with one respondent admitting that they didn't really know what balance meant to each individual within the team. [36]

Respondents were then asked what would help them better manage the work-life balance needs of their team members. Again, the issue of workloads was raised consistently with a number of respondents reporting that having more reasonable workloads and better management/prioritisation of work would be of considerable help. Similarly the provision of more resources was perceived to be something that would greatly help managers in this area. Others highlighted the need for cultural change where more respect is given to the contracted hours rather than the number of extra hours worked. Respondents also noted that achieving a better balance for themselves would help them to help their staff and they also indicated that they could help themselves by being more assertive about what can be achieved by when. The need for training in relation to work-life balance issues was a repeated request although a lot of respondents also indicated that if the staff they had were more skilled, then the workloads would be more achievable. [37]

One of the biggest challenges surrounding the management of people working different patterns is the challenge of managing performance. The evidence suggests that managers don't set objectives and measure outcomes adequately under existing arrangements. Given the obvious added challenge involved in monitoring people who are working at a distance, this clearly presents a problematic area for managers and a potential development area for many.

The importance of evaluating work-life balance procedures

Within organisations that are actively addressing issues of work-life balance, it is essential that the process is not perceived to be dealt with once policies have been introduced. As highlighted above, the willingness of managers to apply these policies and the willingness of employees to take up the policies within the organisational culture, will need evaluating to determine whether the policies themselves are having the desired effect. Monitoring workplace policies or practices, provides management with the means to assess them and, depending on the means used to monitor them, gather information from employees about their experiences. From a formal perspective, there can be little objective knowledge of the effectiveness or fairness of policies unless there is some means of monitoring them, and yet in a recent survey it was concluded that in the majority of organisations, there were no mechanisms in place to monitor work-life balance practices.

Summary

Clearly there is a strong business case for addressing issues of work-life balance. There is considerable research to draw on which provides us with ample knowledge about the organisational context in which change needs to happen, societal drivers and the types of policies and procedures that employees are searching for. It is felt however that a powerful factor in enabling balance rests with management support and currently this is an area in which our knowledge could be valuably enhanced.

The following research has therefore attempted to determine managers views about work-life balance, the challenges they are facing in enabling balance for others while struggling with achieving it for themselves and the ways in which organisations can provide support to help maximise the effectiveness of managers.

The Research

As discussed previously, the research was designed to elicit the views of managers in relation to their role in enabling work-life balance. The aim was to explore the challenges managers were facing, the areas in which they were succeeding in making a difference and the ways in which organisations could better support managers help others to achieve a satisfactory balance.

The research was conducted through organisational case studies within 5 organisations. The main benefit of this was being able to tap into the views of a management team and therefore being able to build up a picture of the organisational context within which the managers were working.

Organisations were selected to cover a range of different organisational structures and business environments, in order to achieve a broad understanding of the variety of issues facing managers in different contexts. In each organisation, a selection of 10-20 managers was interviewed and in two of the case studies, managers' direct reports (in some cases managers themselves) were also interviewed. Where appropriate, an understanding of the organisational context was derived from initial discussions with Human Resources representatives.

The sectors covered are outlined below:

SECTOR	COMPANY
Retail...	ASDA
Education...	A Further Education College (Anonymous)
Sales and Marketing	Allied Domecq
Professional Services/Consulting..	Penna Consulting
Manufacturing....................................	Napp Pharmaceuticals

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in most instances, but there were also some telephone interviews. The interviews were in-depth and qualitative in nature, and followed a loosely structured discussion guide. The interview guide evolved over the course of the case studies, being modified to take into account the organisation's specific situation and incorporating issues that emerged during prior case interviews.

Interview Question Areas Included

- How do you perceive the organisational context in relation to enabling balance? Do you think the organisation is fully committed to it or is it just another fad? What makes you think this?
- Are you committed to enabling your team members to achieve a satisfactory balance between their work and personal lives? *Do the managers believe in the value of work-life balance?*

- Do you perceive work-life balance to be beneficial to the business? Does it have benefits for your team?
- What are the work-life balance issues for your team? *Is it about managing workloads, working differently, manning the office, covering shifts etc*
- What are the challenges you face in terms of helping your team achieve a satisfactory balance?
- What does the organisation offer you as a manager to help you enable balance for your team members?
- What processes have you set up yourself within the team to enable work-life balance? *Is there an open door policy in relation to talking about work-life balance issues, does the team address issues as a whole?*
- Do you have the confidence to encourage staff to take responsibility for work-life balance solutions?
- Do you try to work around individual work-life balance needs or do team members tend to meet their needs through using the policies on offer? *Are they innovative about the ways in which they manage requests or do they slot people into policies?*
- Do you feel able to manage team members' expectations about work-life balance? If so, how do you do this?
- Do you effectively manage others' perceptions of what your team can realistically deliver? Do you manage workloads effectively and say no when necessary?
- Do you think the performance management process is in line with enabling work-life balance? Why?
- What positive outcomes have you experienced as a result of the organisations focus on work-life balance issues? What negative outcomes have you experienced?
- Are you conscious of your status as a role model with regard to work-life balance? Do you have a satisfactory balance between your work life and personal life? If no, what prevents this?

Key Learning from the Case Studies

This section of the report aims to give a synthesised account of the key issues and areas of common ground raised by the case studies. The case studies are included in full at the back of the report.

Introduction

Organisations show a growing recognition of the benefits of a good work-life balance environment for their business. In this research we found that the business case for work-life balance was understood to be the improvement of staff retention, and a reduction in staff absences. In addition, most managers recognise that they have a social or moral responsibility to ensure that their staff have a reasonable quality of life – both in the workplace and outside. Not surprisingly, companies are most likely to embrace changes that improve work-life balance when the changes also have additional tangible business benefits – for example, evidence of increased productivity as a result of introducing work-life balance enabling policies.

Within organisations, change to embrace practices that encourage work-life balance is often evolutionary in nature: it is a slow process where, on the basis that one or two test cases seemed to have worked, a practice gradually becomes acceptable within an organisation. For example, there is now a job-share at the store manager level at one of ASDA's stores. Now that the arrangement is in place and working, it is likely that other, similar arrangements will be supported in the future.

There is a symbiotic relationship between the organisation and its managers and employees in terms of how the work-life balance environment develops and evolves. Policies certainly play a role as does senior management in setting the cultural tone within the organisation. But managers and employees also make a substantial contribution to the way work-life balance policies, practices and culture develops within the organisation. Regardless of company policies, managers are likely to have the most direct effect on the work-life balance of employees. Even in cases where managers cannot force an employee to work longer hours, the environment they create will affect the stress levels of the employee and the extent to which they are happy about being at work, rather than spending time worrying or feeling negative about work when they are at home.

For the managers and employees interviewed, work-life balance is understood in fairly straightforward terms as the amount of time and energy one is able to devote to one's work on the one hand, and one's personal life on the other. As with our past research, being in control of one's working hours emerged as a key requirement for feeling one had achieved balance. Balance is widely understood to be a personal matter – it is not about an absolute number of hours worked, or not having to work later than 6pm. It is about being able to devote energy to both work and personal pursuits, and in combinations that meet one's own preferences, and it is about having flexibility that allows one to be away from work at times when it is important to be focusing on personal issues.

The case studies revealed that in general, both managers and their reports tend to view work-life balance as a joint manager-employee responsibility. It is understood that managers should ensure open lines of communication and an environment where employees feel comfortable coming forward with their work-life balance needs. Employees, in turn, should

take responsibility for voicing their needs and working with their managers to develop viable solutions.

What makes a good work-life balance manager?

A range of factors influences how well mangers enable balance both for themselves and their subordinates. The organisational context, the nature of the employee base and the personal characteristics and skills of the manager all play a key role, as illustrated by the model below:
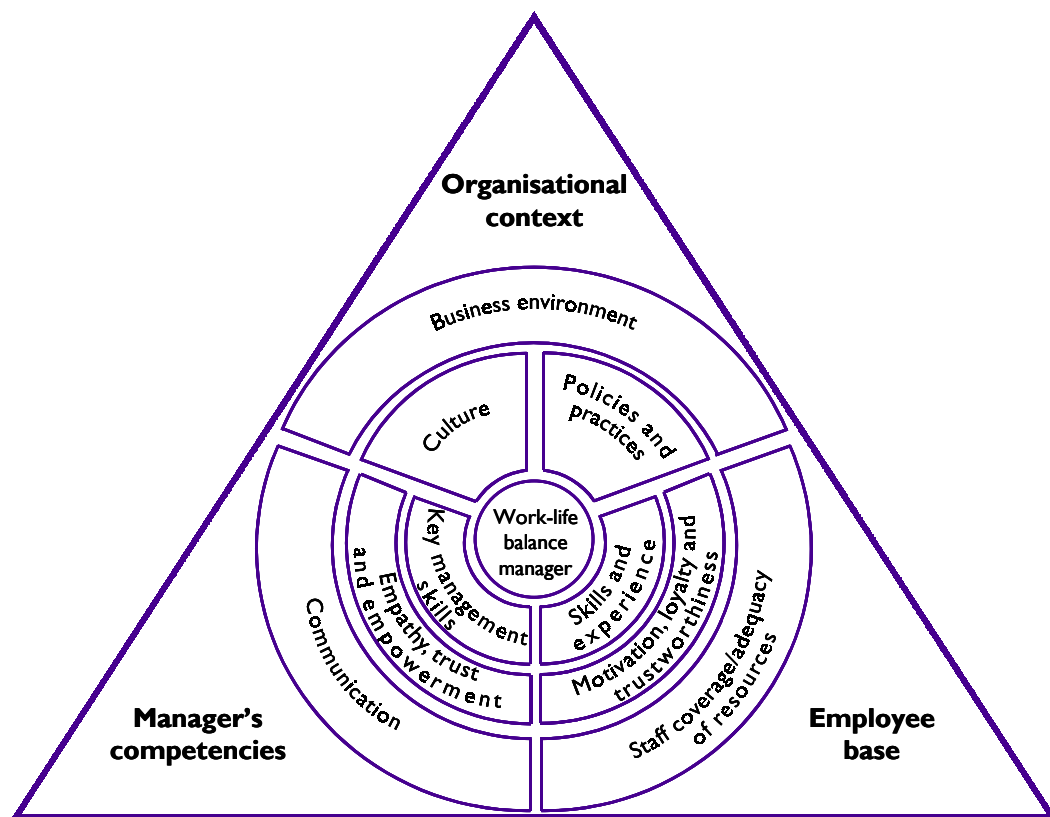
The Makings of a Work-Life Balance Manager

Organisational Context

The parameters within which a manager is empowered to enable and support balance are circumscribed by the organisational context, which includes the nature of the business environment, the organisation's culture and the company's policies and practices, including specific organisational support for managers, such as training.

The business environment

The business sector and a company's objectives, revenue structure and area of business, provide the setting within which a manager and an organisation must function. So, for example, a retail environment requires shift work and set hours for certain employees to ensure coverage, whereas a consultant might be able to do a large amount of the work required at any time of the day or night.

The business environment factors that are important in determining work-life balance can be divided into four main categories, namely the working pattern, the work location, the hours required or expected, and the level of control the individual has over when and for how long she/he works.

The working pattern (the times one is expected to be present at work)

Retail and manufacturing environments require a significant portion of employees to cover the workplace at all times of operation, which can go beyond a traditional 9-5 environment. As a result, shift patterns develop. Consultants often have to be present at the convenience of the client organisation, so must adapt their basic hours to the hours of their client, and in addition often work beyond those hours. At Allied Domecq, a Spirits and Wine company, some employees must be present during the key hours when consumers buy alcohol – that is, in the evenings and on weekends – affecting the hours they must work. Educators have fixed times for giving classes, and in addition often find themselves taking marking and other work home with them. The requirement to work certain specified hours can significantly impact work-life balance. The key areas of impact are summarised in the table below.

Working Patterns Implications for Work-Life Balance

	+ve	**-ve**
Shifts	▪ *Ability to swap shifts with others can increase flexibility*	▪ *Some employees must work unsociable hours (evening shifts/weekends), making it difficult to spend time with friends and family* ▪ *Meetings may be arranged outside of shift times, requiring the manager or employee's presence beyond the standard shift*
Regular Hours (9-5)	▪ *Predictable, sociable hours* ▪ *If purely hours-based, no need to work additional hours* ▪ *A sense of control*	▪ *Possible inflexibility – inability to attend important life events during working hours* ▪ *9-5 doesn't suit everyone (some people function best late at night, getting to work by 9am can be difficult for those with children, etc.)*
Unusual hours	▪ *May suit the lifestyle, personal circumstances or temperament of some*	▪ *Unsociable hours* ▪ *Often goes hand in hand with unpredictability of hours*
Flexible hours	▪ *Allows the employee to choose when they work, giving control*	▪ *Requires self-discipline not to work too much or too little*

The work location

If employees are expected to be present at a specific work location(s), some can be negatively impacted by long commute times, especially for people who work in the city but cannot afford to live in the city area.

Examples

- Allied Domecq offers home-based contracts to some of its employees. This not only eliminates the commute time, but also offers a range of other benefits, such as increased flexibility, increased productivity due to the absence of workplace distractions – as well as some negatives, such as feelings of isolation and an absence of a team feeling.

- At Penna Consulting a manager allows a consultant who lives some distance from the office to work from home one day a week.

- Many of ASDA's London store employees commute from less expensive living areas outside the city. ASDA is working on placing managers in stores closer to where they live.

The hours required (the average length of a working day)

In some industries, such as consulting, it is the norm to work long hours. Employees at the managerial level are the most likely to work beyond contracted full-time hours. Long hours is a problem faced by the vast majority of managers: Roffey Park's 2002 Management Agenda research showed that over 90% of managers surveyed work 5 or more hours per week beyond their contracted hours, with 46% working over 10 hours extra each week. Long hours has a serious impact on work-life balance because it reduces the amount of time one can spend on personal goals. While long hours is usually attributed to a "*long hours culture*", the issue is also strongly sector driven: an organisation's culture may have to pit itself against a prevailing sector culture in order to move away from a long hours norm.

A sense of control over when and for how long one works

The constraints of a given business sector can lead to a lack of control over when and for how long one works, so that, for example, it can be difficult for a consultant to make evening plans during the week, or for a retail manager to be certain they won't have to fill in for a weekend shift. As our past research has shown, even when actual hours are not excessive, feeling that one is unable to control when one works can lead to intense feelings of imbalance.

Culture

Perhaps the single most important ingredient in developing and sustaining a culture supportive of work-life balance is support from the top of the organisation – the chief executive and senior management. An environment where staff are reluctant to walk in front of the CEO's occupied office when they leave work for the day before a certain hour, is clearly one that is not fully supportive of work-life balance. The voiced opinions of senior managers in favour of work-life balance, if they are perceived to be sincere, carry a great deal of weight and empower more junior managers to support work-life balance for their reports. Verbal support does, however, need to be backed up with evidence and action. Often the notion that the culture supports work-life balance is achieved through seemingly indirect and trivial actions of senior management. For example, one manager (himself single and without children) said he knew his company supported work-life balance because every year at the Christmas Party the MD announces new babies born to staff members. This, he felt, showed a real and sincere commitment to the value the company places on individuals' family lives.

Role modelling from the top

It is interesting to note that while role modelling by one's immediate manager does play an important role in setting the tone of what is expected from an employee, the role modelling behaviour of the most senior executives within the organisation has a far more powerful

impact on creating a culture where work-life balance needs are acknowledged and respected. Where there are examples of senior executives who balance work and life and yet have still reached high levels within the organisation, the employee receives a strong message that progress is possible within the organisation even when one does make choices that support balance. As such, the behaviour of one's own manager, while obviously a strong influence, is not seen as the only way – and an employee may take his or her cues from other managers within the organisation.

> *At Napp pharmaceuticals some managers work longer hours, but it is universally stressed that this is a personal choice and that it is not intended to encourage others to do the same. One manager spoke of the fact that his direct superior often works weekends, but that this does not lead him to feel obliged to do the same. At Napp, it is stressed, there is no stigma attached to leaving one's desk on time at the end of the day, and it is repeatedly noted that this is because work-life balance is clearly supported from the top of the organisation, the owners and directors down. Because of the senior level support for balance, the activities of individual managers do not set the cultural tone.*

> *At the Further Education College, where managers struggled to achieve work-life balance both for themselves and for their subordinates, it was noted that when one left the college late in the evenings, the principal's car was always still there. Managers saw this as a signal that they were expected to put in excessive hours as well.*

Empowerment

When managers feel empowered by the organisation to allow their reports flexibility, they tend to encourage their staff to work in such a way as to achieve personal as well as work goals. However, managers who feel the organisation does not give them the autonomy to make decisions about how and when their reports can work, are likely to be uneasy about allowing unusual arrangements, even if the organisation might be open to it, because they are simply not confident enough to make the call. Managers who do not feel empowered, communicate this to their team through their uncertainty, and even when they do allow time off or flexible arrangements the team are likely to feel uncomfortable, as if they are breaking rules albeit with the approval of their manager.

> *One manager allows his team to take time off in the morning after working a late night, but asks them not to advertise this fact within the company. While enabling flexibility, the manager is also sending a mixed message to his reports.*

Policies and Practices

Policies and practices are important in allowing specific work-life balance advantages to employees, and also in underpinning and supporting the culture of work-life balance within an organisation. Family friendly and flexible working policies are directly associated with work-life balance, but in addition, managers associate a range of other policies with supporting work-life balance – including casual dress, employee assistance programs, and assistance with studies.

Time off for personal events and activities

Policies that allow time off for a range of family and personal reasons are most effective in organisations with fixed hours cultures, where people work 9-5 or fixed shifts, and where there is not a culture of long hours.

> *ASDA has a range of unpaid time-off policies ranging from the option to take 3 months off as an older employee, to taking a half-day off for one's child's first day at school. These policies have been effective in reducing absence. Where employees have options that allow them to legitimately take time off for life events, they are less likely to take "sickness" absence at the last minute. Given effective policies in a retail environment, time off or shift swaps are therefore more likely to be scheduled well ahead of time – resulting in smoother scheduling, easier replacements and as a result, better work-life balance for managers, who are less likely to find themselves filling in for absent staff members.*

Long-hours environments

In companies where it is hours rather than specific times that dominate the culture, such as a consulting environment, it is not so much hard and fast policies that will help managers and their reports have balance. Instead, a flexible environment is needed, which allows a manager to take time off and yet to complete the work that needs to be done at other times. As such it makes sense to equip staff in these more fluid environments with the facility to work from home and on the road. Ultimately, though, where there is a long hours culture, work-life balance will be difficult to achieve. However, every measure of control that can be introduced so that staff can plan ahead with regard to both the work and the personal realm, will improve the sense of work-life balance enjoyed by employees.

Policies are not always practically available to managers

In some cases, policies can be made as if to apply to all, but in reality many people just can't take them up given their responsibilities. It does not necessarily follow that having across the board policies will ensure equal opportunities for work-life balance across an organisation. Looking at the individual requirements of different constituencies is important, and policies should be formulated and adapted so that they can achieve their objectives across the board.

Policies require a receptive culture in order to work

It is pointless having policies that encourage work-life balance if the culture discourages take-up of the policies. For example, flexible or part-time working options may be seen as career limiting. Furthermore, where managers see policies as restrictive and intrusive, interfering with their autonomy, they are likely to resist implementing them.

> *At Penna, where managers have considerable autonomy in how they manage the work-life balance of their teams, there are currently no formal work-life balance polices. When asked if they would like to see such policies in place, managers expressed a need for general guidelines but were wary about possible policies that would be prescriptive and therefore limit their freedom to make their own, situation specific, decisions.*

Training and process support for the manager

In addition to policies which managers can implement to enable balance for themselves and their reports, the organisation can provide support specifically aimed at helping managers to enable work-life balance. Such support could consist of training and development programmes, instituting formal processes that encourage managers to think about work-life balance, and providing support on an ad-hoc basis.

Training and development

In the organisations we researched, training specifically dealing with work-life balance had not been introduced. However, managers feel that general people management training, and training in communications and other "soft" skills directly impacts their abilities to enable balance. For managers, enabling balance is really a logical extension of managing well. In addition, in some companies managers feel it is up to them to approach HR with specific requests around their training needs – so that the support is there, but it is up to the manager to specify in what areas training is required. It is unlikely though that managers would directly request work-life balance training – they're more likely to request related training more obviously linked to improving performance, such as time management, people management, or communications training.

Performance management process

None of the organisations we studied overtly addresses work-life balance during performance management reviews. One human resources manager felt that in their high-performance culture, it was possible that work-life balance discussion would be avoided because the person being evaluated was trying to appear at their best, and achieving work-life balance needs might be perceived as a performance inhibitor. However, most managers did not share this view, tending to feel that whereas it would be appropriate for someone to raise work-life balance at a performance review, they as good managers should pre-empt the issue, and deal with work-life balance on a day-to-day basis, in this way circumventing the need to discuss this at performance reviews. Ironically, organisations that support work-life balance are likely to have an environment where employees feel comfortable raising their issues at performance reviews. Conversely, employees in organisations with long hours cultures may feel uncomfortable raising work-life balance issues during a performance review. As such it might be advisable to formalise the process in organisations with particular problems – however, not unless there is additional culture change support that enables reportees to feel safe admitting to work-life balance needs.

Human Resources

Human Resources plays a vital role in communicating policies, and also in giving managers somebody to turn to when they feel they need support.

> *One manager mentioned the case of a person who had suffered from depression who returned to work. She felt human resources needed to play a critical role in this process because she had no experience of the situation and needed help.*

If faced with work-life balance challenges that they felt unable to solve on an individual basis, most managers indicated that they would look to HR to provide advice on how to proceed, and to work with them to identify appropriate training and development opportunities.

The role of the manager

Communication

Two-way communication is the building block that allows a manager to enable balance. Managers recognise that in order to enable balance, they must understand the personal situations of their subordinates, and the subordinate must feel comfortable letting the manager know about personal needs. Good work-life balance managers believe that they need to manage employees on an individual basis, making concessions in a case-by-case way.

At Napp Pharmaceuticals, senior management makes it clear to production managers that they are expected to know the names of all the workers on the production floor, the names of their partners and their personal situations. In this way, it follows naturally that managers are in a position to grasp when an employee has a genuine need, and address the problem accordingly.

The importance of creating an open-door environment where employees feel free to discuss their personal needs and approach their manager when they need to take time off, cannot be overestimated. Without a clear and unthreatening communication channel, employees will not express their needs, and as such, managers will not be able to ensure balance.

Role modelling

Although, as mentioned earlier, the most powerful, culture-setting role modelling takes place at the senior management levels, role modelling is an effective tool by which a manager can communicate a commitment to work-life balance. Where managers verbally support work-life balance but do not themselves practice it, employees may view the verbal support with some suspicion, fearing that they may jeopardise their career prospects by taking the words to heart. However, managers with good team relationships by being open and sincere, should be able to diminish this obstacle, even if their own choice is to make personal sacrifices for work.

One high achieving manager at Allied Domecq, who typically works very long hours, has in-depth goal setting meetings with his team, where he explicitly outlines what deliverables and performance levels will result in promotion. He stresses that it is not hours, but rather the end product that matters, and by being very clear about what the end product will look like, he feels that his team are empowered to choose how they want to work to reach their goals. That said, the performance goals are difficult, and a natural tendency of team members may be to put in extra hours to try to reach them.

Role modelling is not only about showing that one has work-life balance as a manager, but also about exuding a sense of personal control and calm. A manager who is calm at all times instils in their staff a sense of confidence and security. As such the staff member is more likely to approach their own work in a measured and controlled way, and feel encouraged to approach the manager when they feel they need help in maintaining control. As mentioned earlier, as much as actual hours worked, feeling in control of one's work and one's life is a key factor in feeling one has work-life balance. Simply operating in an atmosphere where people seem calm and controlled can contribute to this feeling.

Empathy, Trust and Empowerment

Good communication between managers and their subordinates facilitates an empathetic and caring approach by the manager – who can only exhibit concern when he or she knows there is a problem. A good work-life balance manager will affirm the importance of employees' balance needs, and exhibit a sincere attitude of caring towards the employee. Such a manager will have the capacity to empathise with employees, and will recognise that having personal needs does not necessarily prohibit an employee from having strong loyalty to the organisation and being motivated to perform well.

Employees tend to respond to caring managers with considerable loyalty and a willingness to put in extra effort and time when required. There is a clear payoff for managers who exhibit a caring attitude. However, employees are quick to spot insincerity – and an insincere display of caring is likely to do more harm than good.

The extent to which a manager trusts and empowers employees to make decisions both relating to work responsibilities and work-life balance needs, is heavily influenced by the extent to which the manager herself feels empowered, and the degree to which the culture within the organisation supports employee empowerment. In addition, some managers are by nature more controlling than others, and need help in learning how to let go.

> *One manager interviewed admitted to being more controlling than she would like – which has led her to overreact when employees take it on themselves to work unconventional hours. As a newly promoted manager, she has difficulty knowing when to trust employees and when it is important to monitor their activities closely. The manager expressed a desire for some form of training and/or mentoring support to help her develop into a more confident and therefore more empowering manager.*

Key Management Skills

A manager with good management and people management skills is likely to make a good work-life balance manager. An essential requirement is the ability to manage workloads, (including effective planning, scheduling and delegation).

Last minute, unpredictable tasks and excessive workloads are the biggest challenge to work-life balance in a long hours culture. The ability to plan ahead and to factor time into one's schedule for the unexpected, was cited by managers as a key requirement for keeping workloads predictable and manageable. For middle managers, keeping workloads under control is a matter of managing and delegating upward as well as downward.

Pushing back

Good managers recognise that sometimes keeping the workloads of their direct reports under control means pushing back up the chain of command – and telling a superior that a requested piece of work cannot be done. This can take courage, as a manager risks her own reputation in doing so – once again the organisational culture and the view expressed from the top is likely to determine the extent to which managers push back on unrealistic requests.

Planning and scheduling

It is widely recognised that planning and scheduling has a trickle-down effect on company employees – broad overarching company targets directly affect the planning of each department, which in turn affects the parameters within which individual managers must operate. It is important that top-level decisions of this nature are only made after considering their impact down the chain, and consulting with the relevant parties to make sure objectives and targets are realistic and achievable given current resources.

> *One manager recognised the importance of obtaining employee input before setting targets and output objectives for his team. He had employees themselves create their performance targets. He felt that his reports had a good idea of what was achievable and he believed that they would be more motivated to reach goals that they themselves had set, than targets that were simply handed down from on high.*

Delegating

A good manager will maintain control when workloads increase by delegating in a fair and equitable way. This involves having a good understanding of the current workloads of employees, feeling empowered to alter deadlines to allow employees time to complete tasks, and allocating additional work in such a way that employees feel motivated to

complete the tasks rather than simply feeling overwhelmed. Good managers will create an environment where an employee who feels they are not coping with their workload will not be afraid to approach the manager in search of an alternative solution.

In addition to managing workloads, a good work-life balance manager will have an excellent understanding of the capacity, skills and workloads of direct reports, good communication skills, the ability to create supportive teams and the skill to handle staff as individuals, responding harshly to abuses of trust on an individual basis, without needing to crack down across the board.

The Employee Base

A fundamental condition of a manager feeling in control of their workload and able to complete tasks effectively without requiring excessive hours from subordinates, is having sufficient staff to support the work required. As several managers noted, where a department is understaffed, work-life balance simply cannot be supported.

Having sufficient staff is both a recruitment and a retention issue, and leads to work-life balance in a chain-effect relationship. While it is the responsibility of the organisation to adequately staff departments in the first instance, keeping departments fully staffed becomes a challenge when there is high turnover. One of the causes of high turnover is a lack of work-life balance, which gets worse for the remaining staff members as team members are lost. As such, poor work-life balance can lead to a chain reaction where it becomes difficult to enable balance for anyone.

Negative chain reaction

Insufficient Staff (in number and skill / experience)

High Turnover

Increased Workloads

Poor Work – Life Balance
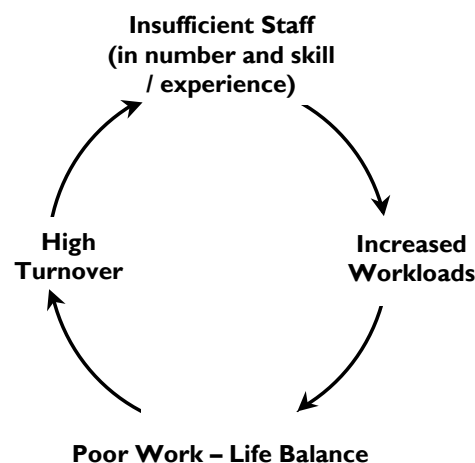
The chain reaction can also be a very positive one, though. If work-life balance is achieved, through initially adequate staffing, good management and retention, turnover is less likely. As staff members become more skilled and longer serving, they perform better in their jobs and crises are less likely to take place. A fully staffed, experienced department is more likely to achieve work-life balance, which in turn supports retention.

Positive chain reaction

Adequate Staff (in number and skill / experience)

Low Turnover

Manageable Workloads

Good Work – Life Balance
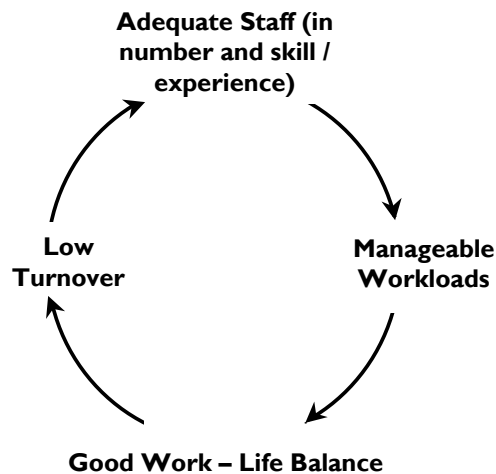
The employee-manager relationship is reciprocal: managers' trust must be repaid by high motivation and performance on the part of the employee, or the trust will be broken. When the trust relationship breaks down, a manager will be forced to reduce flexibility and impose constraints. Fortunately, our interviews revealed that among those managers who routinely empower employees, managers observed that a breakdown in trust rarely occurs. In their experience, employees naturally respond positively when they are trusted and empowered by the manager.

Conclusion

As we have seen, for managers to enable work-life balance for themselves and others, a three-way relationship between the organisation, the manager and the employee base must be obtained.

The organisation must support the manager by adequately staffing departments, by providing appropriate training and policies, and most importantly by helping to create a culture where individuals are respected and work-life balance is encouraged. In addition, the organisation must take into consideration the business context and try to come up with innovative ways to maximise work-life balance within the constraints of the business environment.

The manager must utilise the organisation's support, and by developing open lines of communication with staff, have a good understanding of the issues faced by each individual employee. The manager must exhibit genuine concern and have an ability to empathise with employees – recognising their needs and having the vision to come up with alternative and possibly untried solutions. Most importantly a manager must show trust in employees, empowering them to make decisions about how and when to complete tasks. Where trust is broken, a good work-life balance manager will address the issue on an individual basis, rather than suspending trust across the board. Managers must recognise their own weaknesses, and the weaknesses of employees, and seek training and development opportunities to improve on these areas.

Employees in turn must respond to managers' confidence and trust by being loyal and trustworthy in return – and should expect a harsh response where trust is broken. As our research has shown, it is a natural reaction of employees to respond with high levels of motivation and loyalty when they perceive the organisation and manager respects them,

cares about them as individuals, and empowers them to do their jobs and make decisions themselves. As such a strong organisational support mechanism, together with good employee recruitment and a strong management team, should automatically lead to a strong and loyal employee base, which in turn facilitates work-life balance across the board.

The Case Studies

1. ASDA

2. Further Education College

3. Allied Domecq

4. Penna Consulting

5. Napp Pharmaceuticals

ASDA Case Study

Introduction

ASDA is a British food and clothing superstore, with an "every day low prices" proposition, which was acquired by Wal-Mart in 1999. The company now has 245 stores and 19 depots across the UK. ASDA has 109,000 employees, approximately 74,000 of whom work part time. Employees are termed "colleagues" within the organisation.

ASDA is a member of the Work-Life Balance Alliance and has demonstrated a commitment to work-life balance through a range of policies and innovative working practices, including job share for managers and a number of flexible working and family friendly policies.

Method

Following an hour-long in-depth interview with a human resources manager at ASDA's head office in Leeds, a series of in-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted at three ASDA stores during October/November 2001. The stores were part of the company's South East division, and were situated in Wembley, Roehampton and Eastbourne. A total of 14 managers were interviewed at the three stores. Managers at all levels were interviewed, from deputy department managers to the store manager. Interviews were in person and typically lasted 20-40 minutes. In addition, one focus group per store was conducted with non-managerial colleagues, lasting 20-30 minutes. Interviews were based on a structured discussion guide and focused on the role of the manager in enabling work-life balance.

Background

At ASDA, policies play a powerful role in determining the behaviours of managers in relation to enabling work-life balance. Store practices, because they are led from head office and to ensure consistency throughout the branches, are strongly policy based, with policies providing a framework to drive the culture of the store environments.

> "ASDA policy will dictate that you have holiday schedules, you have rotas…Individual circumstances normally only arise through some kind of issue or problem, whereby you have to deal with that on an ad hoc basis. But making sure that people clock in and out so that we can see a true reflection of the hours that they work… behavioural skill reviews and training – all of that's policy. It's about following the policy." – General Store Manager

Work-life balance has been on ASDA's human resources agenda since 1996. It is regarded as a fulfilment of a social responsibility towards employees, and also as serving a business need of increasing staff retention and reducing absence.

> "It's about retaining people and reducing absence while benefiting our people."
> – Human Resources

Guidelines are designed to be relevant, fit for their purpose and simple. They are evolved based on an ongoing understanding of the needs of store colleagues.

An understanding of colleagues' needs is derived from a comprehensive program of annual pay and benefits listening groups (focus groups with store colleagues) within stores, ongoing attitude surveys, an incentivised suggestion scheme, and colleague circles held monthly within stores, where colleague representatives meet to ensure the store runs smoothly and colleague issues are addressed. These store based colleague circles feed into quarterly divisional colleague circles, with a representative from every store present, and then a yearly national colleague circle with one colleague representing each division.

> *"See that box on the table? That's ASDA We're Listening. It's a survey to see how you feel. It's very good because the feedback actually comes back and we have a colleague circle. I was the customer service rep on the colleague circle last year and … we had a department meeting to address a few of the issues that came up, so it is good, things do get done from it." – Colleague*

ASDA's Policies

Colleagues are currently able to take advantage of a range of mostly unpaid flexible and family friendly working and leave options, including:

General
- Shift swap for domestic reasons
- Career breaks for colleagues with more than 3 years' service
- Religious festival leave of up to two days unpaid leave for religious festivals
- Up to 3 months unpaid leave for those with long-term care responsibilities

Family focused
- Maternity leave
- Up to 5 days paid and 3 months unpaid paternity leave
- Adoption support
- Emergency family leave
- School starter leave: half a day's unpaid leave for child's first day at school
- Parental leave, which allows parents to stop work for a period of one to four weeks per year, or an extended leave of up to 8 weeks during the Summer holidays

Older colleagues
- Benidorm leave – up to 3 months unpaid leave between January and March for colleagues over 50
- Grandparents leave

Students
- Store swap available for students to work at an ASDA store near the place where they study, and one near the place where they live during the holidays
- Study leave to enable students to work more hours during holidays and less hours during term time, or to take time off to prepare for exams

In addition, in 1999 ASDA introduced its first job share at the store manager level.

Recent Improvement

Over recent years, managers and colleagues have noticed a considerable improvement in the store culture with regards to work-life balance. This is in line with the increased focus on the issue since 1996, and the change is also understood to be influenced by recent legislation and the recognition of how beneficial flexibility is to the business. ASDA's managers are encouraged to work less hours through family friendly guidelines and monitoring working hours.

> *"Over the last couple of years things have changed and we're given a lot of support…the thing that's come through is putting people first."*

> *"The company has put more emphasis on flexible working in the last 5 years. This coincides with the regulations which have come along. Also, because businesses are open longer hours now, there has to be more emphasis on work-life balance, because otherwise people would work silly hours."*

> *"I have a little boy from my first marriage, and a lot of times I can plan to have him because I know which weekend I'm off. Now we have rotas 4 weeks in advance so you know exactly where you stand, whereas years ago, from day to day you never knew what you were doing."*

It is recognised that the culture can take time to change, with managers who have been with ASDA a long time being the most likely to continue working long hours as they always have.

> *"As the newer managers come in they tend to have a more open approach, whereas people who have worked here for a long time retain a 'here till it's done' attitude. People who have been here longer are still fixed back in the past."*

Perceptions of "Work-life balance"

Both managers and colleagues define work-life balance as a question of the amount of time one has to devote to one's personal life as opposed to one's working life. Given the shift based nature of the working environment, colleagues think mainly in terms of hours and time, while managers may also refer to energy levels one is able to put into home life as well as work.

Achieving work-life balance: Challenges faced

Most days, except Sundays where opening hours tend to be shorter, the Roehampton store is open for 24 hours, Wembley is open until midnight or 10pm and Eastbourne is open until 10pm. The retail environment, with long opening hours and heavy weekend traffic, poses a challenge for ASDA managers, who are sole managers of their department, and must rely on colleagues and managers from other departments when they are absent.

Managers and colleagues work shifts on a rota basis. Colleague shifts are arranged to ensure department coverage. Colleagues are contracted to work a set number of hours each week, at pre-set times. Many of the colleagues are part-time. Managers work on rotas at a storewide level, to ensure sufficient management coverage across the store at any given time. They are currently expected to work a 45-hour week.

Managers are encouraged to keep their hours in line with the European Working Time Directive, that is, within 45 hours per week over a 17-week period. While monitoring of hours has led to a perceived reduction in hours worked by managers, and a conscious effort to keep their hours under control, many managers continue to work beyond 45 hours. Unlike traditional 9-5 businesses where at the end of the day the business stops running, at ASDA, when a manager leaves their department the department continues operating. When there are issues within the department, such as absent colleagues or unforeseen events, managers can find it difficult to leave.

Different challenges for managers vs. colleagues

There is a sharp divide between managers and colleagues in terms of work-life balance needs. Colleagues only work beyond their set hours on a voluntary basis and for overtime pay. In addition colleagues are easily able to change shifts and adjust hours as domestic conditions require. Managers are responsible for the smooth running of their department and where necessary they work beyond their shifts to ensure the department remains in good order. Managers also have a more difficult time changing their rotas, adjusting their working hours to suit their domestic situations, or taking off time for personal events, even though the policies allowing time off do apply across the board.

> *"It's different for colleagues because they have set hours, and if you ask them to do a late shift and they refuse, you're not going to put pressure on them to do it, but with us we have to change our shift sometimes with only 24 hours notice." -- Manager*

Common challenges

Despite the differences, there are some common retail environment challenges faced by both managers and colleagues, the biggest being the need to work unsociable hours, with commuting time being a key issue for London stores.

Unsociable hours
All managers and most colleagues are required to work the busiest shifts, i.e. weekends, and this naturally impacts on family and social lives.

> *"Our trade tends to peak at weekends, so when individuals go home on a Friday or Saturday, a lot of people they know don't work the weekends. It can be that the time you have off is mid-week when everybody else is at work, and the time that you work everybody else is off. It's the supermarket business…it is a different pattern." -- Manager*

A recent initiative in the stores surveyed, namely that managers and colleagues are guaranteed one full weekend off a month, is recognised and appreciated. Nevertheless, working the remaining weekends still takes its toll. As one manager noted, Saturday night is the normal social night for an evening out with friends. But if he works Saturday (as he usually does), because it is so busy even if he gets home in time for an evening outing, he is often very tired and has to "pick himself up" for the sake of his wife.

Non-managerial colleagues who normally work weekend shifts, must deal with the missed weekend time with family:

> *"I have three young children, and it's difficult not being able to go to their football every Sunday" -- Colleague*

Some colleagues are, however, able to work out advantageous hours.

> *"My hours are brilliant, 9:30 till 2 Tuesday to Friday and 8-12 on a Saturday. They're perfect for me…on a Saturday, by the time I get home they're all probably getting up anyway." – Colleague*

Travelling time

Commuting time is a key challenge, especially for London stores, with many colleagues living at some distance from the store. One manager feels that the only ultimate solution is to work harder at having colleagues work in stores closer to where they live. However given the high expense of living in London, this is likely to remain an ongoing issue for some stores, with colleagues forced to live further afield.

> *"I live a long way away, 3 hours travel time a day, so I try to balance my long shift at work in with my driving time – imagine how my wife feels. The company is working to try to get people closer to home." – Manager*

Challenges for managers

Events that are unexpected or unplanned, such as staff absence or equipment breakdown, happen frequently in the complex retail environment, and on certain days managers increase their hours to cope with these occurrences. On other days, a store meeting or managers' meeting scheduled outside of a manager's rota hours might keep a manager late at a store, or a manager may stay late to help out with another area of a store that needs assistance.

> *"We are supposed to do maximum 45 hours, but that's hard to do in retail, because something may happen on a daily basis … so you have to adjust and maybe do extra hours."*

> *"Sometimes your department is looking good, and you could go home, but there are other things, like a meeting at 5pm or 6pm and you have to stay for it. Sometimes you go and help out with some other department that needs your help."*

When managers have worked longer shifts, they cannot easily make up the time by working a shorter shift later in the week, because this would disrupt the manager rota scheme.

> *"We don't have the facility at the moment to recuperate hours, because we have to work to a rota so it's difficult to cater for that."*

One store manager acknowledges that the problem of managers working long hours is partly the result of needing to train managers to better manager their own time and their departments.

> *"We need to focus on the capability of individuals and coaching of individuals to deliver the required standards within their contracted hours."*

How managers enable work-life balance

By implementing the available policies, enabling balance for non-managerial colleagues is a fairly straightforward process. Enabling balance for subordinate managers can be more difficult.

Managers: Enabling balance for non-managerial colleagues

Finding replacement colleagues for those who request time off, and accommodating shift swapping is usually quite easily achieved. This is due to the wide demographic mix of store colleagues, with students and single colleagues most willing to work overtime or swap shifts as they are less tied down to family commitments.

> *"You will always get colleagues who don't mind changing their shift so you can always work it out within the department… I've never come across a situation where I couldn't accommodate a change of schedule or rota."*

Most managers work hard to ensure open relationships with their colleagues, and will go out of their way not only to allow colleagues the time they need, but also to change contracted hours and times as colleagues' domestic situations evolve.

> *"I try to be open, any issue, come to me, we'll try and work it through together. … I go out of my way to accommodate colleagues with a change of shift patterns, work balance. On short notice we do give time off."*

Managers' commitment to enabling balance and implementing policies is confirmed by colleagues: none of the colleagues interviewed would anticipate any problem with asking for time off or to swap a shift.

One manager stressed that enabling balance for colleagues should begin right at the first interview:

> *"I think about the social pattern first before commencing the interview. You have to look at how someone will get to work, and how that fits in with the shift time. It's important that they make the journey safe, and that they're comfortable with it and with the shift."*

Managers show flexibility when colleagues arrive late, recognising that it is pointless to add to commuter stress by having staff excessively worried when their transport is delayed.

> *"People travel far to get to this store. I don't react negatively to someone being occasionally late for work … If I jumped on them, it would put unnecessary pressure on them next time their transport was delayed."*

While policies play a central role in how managers enable balance, to ensure balance, managers do go beyond the policy level, and plan ahead to take into account the needs of the colleagues they manage:

> *"….when I was on the tills I made sure we put in a lot of students over the holidays so that the women could all have their holidays with their husbands or families."*

Unplanned absences, usually due to the illness of a colleague or their child provide the biggest challenge for managers, who must then find replacements at the last minute, request colleagues to work overtime, or take up the slack themselves. As mentioned, although finding replacements

is usually possible, where this is difficult, it is more likely that a manager will stay longer than that a colleague will be pressurised to stay against their will.

> "Sometimes if there is absence then I myself will have to serve, or I request one of my colleagues to do overtime. If it's a situation we know about, we try to plan for it the previous week."

Managers: Enabling balance for subordinate managers

Because of the complexities involved in changing rotas, and because managers are responsible for their departments, it can be difficult for managers to enable balance for subordinate managers.

> "If anything, the people who do not have the luxury to chop and change, to be flexible, are the management team. Any colleague who came to me with an issue, I reckon I could sort out, but I would struggle to do the same for a management colleague, because everything would then have to be swapped around." – Personnel Manager

However, those managers who have actually attempted to take time off when needed, report a positive and supportive response from their superiors:

> "I took off leave for an operation, and nobody said anything to make me feel uncomfortable, everyone was very supportive…The company has been very good to me. I've been to all my kids' open days, I've been to the Parents' Association. For me being with the kids is the most important thing, and ASDA has helped me achieve my aim." – Manager

One GSM notes that he tries to enable balance for his managers by:

> "Firstly, doing the working time directive completion, in terms of the tracking of the hours over 17 weeks. Secondly, making sure that everyone in the store, including the management team are clocking in. Those are the "let's get the evidence right" things, then let's find the cause of why certain individuals are working longer hours."

Managers: Enabling balance for themselves

Several managers commented that they are getting better at managing their own balance, key activities in this regard being taking one's day off (showing a tendency of managers in the past to work on days that had been allocated as days off), and logging one's hours, with some awareness of the working time directive constraints.

However, some managers are self-confessed workaholics, who choose to work long hours and admit that they could reduce their hours with better time management. This type of manager tends to be regarded poorly by more senior managers, who see this as contributing to a lack of efficiency in the department as a whole.

> "I think people working ridiculous hours is purely bad management in a number of cases." – General Store Manager

Balance for managers is largely enabled by having a well-trained, motivated and committed force of colleagues and more junior managers. This ensures work gets done properly and efficiently, and that managers can leave at the end of their shift with the confidence that their department is running as desired.

"There's a lot of effort put in to get a base within your department of key colleagues who are able to take responsibility in my absence so that the department runs smoothly."

"To take a weekend off you need to have the key colleagues in place who can run things while you're away."

This represents something of a reversal – that is, it seems that the issue is not so much what managers can do to enable balance for their teams, but what colleagues can do to enable balance for their managers. Ultimately, though, a team of strong, long-standing colleagues is at least in part the result of the manager building good relationships with colleagues, exhibiting strong managerial skills and implementing the policies that enable balance for colleagues.

Role modelling

Because managers and colleagues have different structures of working, with the colleagues working fixed hours regardless of how the managers behave, managers of colleagues do not see themselves as functioning as work-life balance role models. However, those managers in charge of other managers do see themselves as role models to some extent, and work on their own balance both for personal reasons and as role models.

Some managers noted that their own work-life balance or lack of it could lead to them becoming stressed, which could in turn negatively impact those that they manage, including colleagues.

"It's important that I get my work-life balance right, otherwise I'd get stressed, you then take that out on others - which leads to absence and dissatisfied colleagues. If a team leader is working to a nice happy process the team will work well."

Managerial staff express the need for good role modelling from their superiors, which they see as setting a culture of family friendliness/work-life balance among the managers within the store.

"Our GSM [General Store Manager] is very good… has a family and is very understanding, so it's very important – I've worked with GSM's before who didn't understand family life, which made it more difficult for me." – Manager

ASDA: support to help managers enable balance

In addition to the range of flexible and family friendly policies, managers recognise that ASDA supports them in other ways to enable balance. Firstly, by offering training and development in people management, and secondly, by putting in place programs and systems that support the formulation of a strong and stable colleague base, which will in turn support the work-life balance of managers.

"It offers me personal development, if my development need is to manage people, then there is training that would be available."

"We have 'So you want to be a supervisor?' [training programme]. You can get colleagues onto that scheme, so they are prepared [to help manage the department]. Training gives you an extra key colleague."

Performance reviews

Although there is not a specific focus on work-life balance issues during performance reviews, it is felt that there is significant attention paid to people skills and behaviours, which should impact balance.

> *"In terms of coaching people to deliver, we have a review process in the stores, around performance targets… we don't just look at levels of performance in terms of facts and figures, we always look at people's skills and behaviours and how they can be adjusted in terms of being able to deliver more slickly on their goals. Planning and organisational techniques, time management, those would be things we would discuss at the quarterly reviews." – General Store Manager*

Managers believe that if a colleague did have a work-life balance issue, they would bring it up during a performance review. There is clearly not an atmosphere in performance reviews which prohibits a manager or colleague admitting to work-life balance concerns.

> *"If somebody was particularly unhappy with the hours that they were working and the impact it was having on their home life as well, I'm pretty sure that they would raise it." – General Store Manager*

Policy communications

Both managers and colleagues acknowledge the many ways in which ASDA's policies which affect work-life balance are communicated: during induction, in the colleague handbook, and numerous leaflets and other printed materials. Any new policies would be communicated with colleagues and managers in daily "huddle" meetings. Despite this, there is a widespread perception that awareness and take-up of many of the policies is low, and that, even among some managers, a precise understanding of what is on offer may be missing.

> *"The policies are all good. I don't think they get used very often, except shift swap. Managers are aware of the policies, but the colleagues are less aware. We should huddle it out more often." -- Manager*

> *"Generally I think awareness of those options is fairly low within stores, and for that reason probably doesn't tend to get used. And maybe it's also seen as complex and difficult to administer by the departmental managers." -- Manager*

The most powerful manner in which policies are communicated is via word-of-mouth and stories about others who have taken up an option, which suggests increased take-up would in turn fuel higher awareness, as colleagues discuss the activities of their co-workers.

> *"I know one colleague who has gone abroad for her one year placement and her job has been held open for when she returns." -- Colleague*

Ideas and suggestions

There is a strong perception among ASDA managers and colleagues that ongoing suggestions are acted upon.

> *"Every October they have a group of managers and colleagues get together and talk about benefits people receive that year, also listening groups – so when people review the benefits, usually they improve on it."*

During this research, most of the suggestions given centred around the need for some changes to the management structure to improve the work-life balance of managers. Some managers find that a 45 hour basic requirement is too much – and suggest reducing the number of required hours, with additional hours being worked at the managers' discretion. Others would like to see more part-time working options for managers: if such options are available, managers seem unaware of them.

> *"Each department should have a manager but also a deputy. Not just a supervisor, who is generally a good key colleague, but should have a deputy manager running alongside."*

> *"I think they need to look at having part-time managers."*

In addition, even though the many avenues through which policies are communicated are acknowledged, it is felt that continued low awareness and takeup of balance options should be addressed.

> *"They could tell us more, about the benefits. There are still people who don't know even though there are pamphlets everywhere, and they get told at induction, sometimes it goes in one ear and out the other. They could make people more aware of it."*

Lastly, given the shift-based nature of the business, some colleagues would like to see a more comprehensive Personnel presence in the store, to reflect the fact that some colleagues work outside of normal office hours. Currently, colleagues say, Personnel staff are only present during the day, and can be difficult to get hold of, especially if one works a night shift, for example.

Conclusion

ASDA's comprehensive range of policies that enable work-life balance has resulted in a highly satisfied group of colleagues, and has contributed to the retention of colleagues and a reduction in absence. While the policies apply across the board, they are more difficult for managerial colleagues to take up, although a steady improvement in the balance of managers has been noted, driven by a monitoring of hours, the introduction of free weekends once a month for managers and a general shift in culture where long hours are now seen as a sign of poor management skills, rather than of high commitment.

The introduction of a job share at the store manager level should pave the way for more job share and part time arrangements for managers. By continuing to focus on work-life balance as a priority, both as a social responsibility and as serving a business purpose, ASDA is likely to continue to foster an improved culture among both managerial and non-managerial colleagues. Management training and development around people management, a culture increasingly committed to balance, and evolving policies that are beginning to address the needs of managers as well as colleagues, will all contribute to better work-life balance for ASDA colleagues at all levels.

Further Education College

The Further Education College is a very large college with a student body mainly aged 16-18. There are 1,500 members of staff working with a student population of about 25,000 students. The College has recently been through a merger, which has created a huge amount of upheaval for the staff. Currently the new organisation is still in the process of integrating two different cultures with different working practices. The College has recently appointed a new Principal who appears to be well respected by all of the managers who were interviewed for the research.

The management structure of the College consists of the Principal who is at Tier 1, a small number of Directors at Tier 2, Faculty and Service Heads at Tier 3 and the School Managers at Tier 4. The research was conducted through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 19 managers from levels 2,3 and 4. The management group included representatives from both of the merged organisations and included a diverse range of faculties and responsibilities.

The College and Work-Life Balance

The College is at the initial stages of developing a policy around Work-life balance and a working party has been established to explore what is needed to enable employees to have a better balance between work and home. This research is perceived to be an important step in determining the extent to which needs were currently being met and where the gaps are for action.

There are a number of reasons why the organisation has decided that work-life balance is an issue that needs addressing. Evidence from internal feedback questionnaires has shown that staff at the College are unhappy about their working conditions and alongside this, there is growing concern at the increasing number of stress-related disorders reported by employees. This is coupled with a large number of vacancies, which have occurred as a result of the fall-out of the merger, and which are proving very difficult to fill. The key business drivers therefore centre on needing to boost morale within the College, reduce the number of stress-related illnesses and promote the College as an attractive employer.

Currently there is no explicit policy on Work-life balance and very few related policies linked to different ways of working. There are the standard maternity and paternity leave arrangements and staff are entitled to a number of paid days leave when their child is sick, but little else is written down as a formal policy. Despite this lack of formal policies, there was a belief that some flexibility does occur, including flexi-time and a limited amount of term-time working. There are a considerable number of part-time staff and there is the possibility of job share arrangements although again no formal policy exists. A limited amount of informal flexibility also occurs with a number of people on secondments and one individual working reduced hours to complete a novel, which is due for publication. It is also the norm within the College for mothers to return from maternity leave on a part-time contract.

This flexibility tends to occur in pockets however and appears to be driven by HR rather than by the managers themselves. This lack of initiative by managers was recognised by a member of

HR as being related to a general lack of awareness of the degree of flexibility that was acceptable within the College and therefore indicated a need for better communication around the organisations' practices.

Is work-life balance currently addressed within the College?

A very mixed response

When asked whether they felt that the College actively tried to enable balance for employees, there was a mixed response. A number of managers felt that the organisation merely paid lip service to the issue and that when it came down to it, there were other priorities, such as getting the work done, which would come above the need for balance. In other cases there was a belief that the College was supportive but that currently, there was so much to be done to integrate the Colleges following the merger that immediate pressures prevented work-life balance. For other managers there was a belief that although little had changed as yet, the fact that the organisation had set up working parties to look into the issue, was a positive step and a good sign that the College was committed to addressing the problem. One manager stood out in believing that the College was very committed to enabling work-life balance. Having only recently joined the College she clearly felt that it was much further ahead in terms of flexibility than her previous employer.

In general however it was felt that there was little consistency around the College in relation to work-life balance. A number of managers felt that the organisations approach to issues of work-life balance lacked any strategic thinking and was instead based around fire fighting. One manager illustrated this by commenting that a situation is dealt with only when it reaches breaking point, and that while people are managing (albeit under tremendous pressure) nothing gets done.

These mixed views were also highlighted by a member of the Executive who stated that the College was committed to the principle of work-life balance but doesn't know what to do about it. He admitted that this was a self-critical statement given his power within the College, but acknowledged that there was no comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem. He felt that the College was into the culture of just doing more things and that people lack the confidence to admit that too much is being asked of them.

Lack of balance at managerial levels

One manager reported that when she had worked at a more junior level she had found the College to be very flexible to her in relation to her needs as a mum. However she felt that this had shifted since she had taken a more senior management role and the expectation was now that she would do what was needed to be done, regardless of any implications this may have. She perceived that it was not acceptable for someone in her position to raise personal issues as it demonstrated a lack of commitment.

Initial action being taken

Recently the College has created a forum for school managers to discuss the pressures that they are under and identify potential ways of addressing these pressures. There was some scepticism however about whether this would actually bring about change, although it was recognised that

the forums do provide Tier 4 managers with a voice. Out of this forum the School Managers Advocacy Group had been set up which gave elected members of the school managers' group the capacity to negotiate an interface with other parts of the organisation. This is still in its early days but it is hoped that it will prove a very valuable way of opening up communication about work-life balance issues.

For those at the other tiers of management it was felt that very little was being done to enable work-life balance.

Delivering to deadlines

A recurring theme during the interviews was the pressure that was created from working to deadlines. Consistently the message came across that deadlines are set up which are too tight to deliver and this is exacerbated by delays up the chain, which have a huge knock-on effect on those further down the line.

Managers at Tier 4 felt that although sometimes they had an input into the setting of deadlines, this was not always the case and also deadlines often shifted for reasons that were out of their control.

One manager related an incident where a deadline had shifted forward by a couple of months which meant that critical work needed to be done over Christmas when he had booked a skiing holiday. Although he had done everything he could to meet the deadline, his manager had asked him to come in as soon as his plane landed to help with the bid. This example had reinforced for him the message that when it comes to the crunch, work-life balance goes out of the window.

Is the organisation able to think innovatively about issues of balance?

Recently a questionnaire had gone out to staff to find a solution to the lack of car parking space around the College. One of the suggestions was that staff worked a four-day week where this was possible, but worked longer hours on those four days so that the same number of hours per week was being worked. Alternatively it was suggested that some members of staff worked four days in the office and one day at home. The manager who discussed this example felt that these solutions would have been very effective, but that the College had dismissed them without proper consideration. The solutions that were put into practice focused on prioritising the car parking spaces rather than recognising that more innovative solutions could address a number of issues rather than just the presenting problem.

The manager who discussed this example felt that the College had failed to seize this opportunity out of a fear of thinking innovatively. There was a belief that senior managers within the College were too set in their traditional ways of solving problems. The issue of fairness was also perceived to be a big hurdle whereby if new ways of working couldn't be universally applied, there was a reluctance to apply them at all.

Are employees ready to accept innovative ways of working?

Alongside this reluctance by senior managers to think innovatively, a number of managers raised concerns about the readiness of the workforce to accept different ways of working. These concerns were primarily related to a lack of trust that changes would be introduced for the benefit of the individual and not just for the benefit of the organisation.

This had been demonstrated when the previous year, the College had tried to introduce new flexible contracts for lecturers. Due to a high degree of scepticism and mistrust the lecturers and the Unions decided to stick to the old contracts rather than move towards more flexible arrangements. Currently people's expectation is that flexible working policies are biased towards the needs of the organisation rather than the individual. This stems from the experience of many managers currently who are working long hours and not feeling able to take time off.

The experiences of those who were currently working differently were also highlighted as contributing to this negative attitude. One manager recalled a conversation he had had with a member of staff that week, who worked on Saturdays but was in on what should have been their day off in the week because of work pressure. The popular belief therefore was that all flexible working did was extend people's working week.

Is there a long hours culture within the organisation?

There was a consistent belief that there was a long hours culture within the organisation. Most of the managers who were interviewed felt that this applied to all levels of the organisation except for perhaps the very bottom levels. For lecturers and teachers this was driven by the demands of the job, whereby it is commonplace to take marking and preparation home. For administrators, long hours were driven by a desire to be effective at the job and therefore they would work extra when they needed to, to get the job done.

For managers however, it was felt that a big time commitment was expected of them and that even without this expectation the workload was such that a big time commitment was necessary. One manager commented that '*there is always such a lot to do that it's easy every evening to say 'I'll just do this' and then something else crops up and you end up consistently staying late'*. Another manager reported that he took about 4 hours of work home every evening and worked one day at the weekend and although he was trying to cut this down, it was proving impossible. He was aware that he could succumb to stress but was actively trying to prevent this by running regularly. In his view the pressure was unlikely to ease up because the culture was locked into doing more rather than less, and he felt that there was nothing built into the system to reduce the pressure people were under.

Pressure of work

The pressure of work was a common theme amongst the managers where it was felt that taking work home was becoming the norm rather than the exception. There was a recurrent theme that everything is needed yesterday and a belief that there is real repetition in the information that is needed so that rather than having to produce information once, it is repeatedly asked for by different people. One manager reported feeling that he was constantly fire fighting as he was constantly snowed under with work.

The long hours were felt to be a mixture of feeling pressure to put in long hours and a need to do so because of the demands of the job. One manager noted that he didn't feel under pressure to work long hours, he just did it – it wasn't an option. Taking work home was an important element of self preservation- if you don't take the work home then you simply can't do your job. For others however, there was a sense that, despite the workload pressures, there are cultural pressures that reinforce the need to work long hours.

The culture within the College was described as being one where people were expected to work harder and harder and pull together but one manager felt that in fact people were becoming less and less effective because of the pressures they were under. It was felt that a strong message needed to come from the top that taking time and space is OK.

Cultural pressures

Cultural pressures were reflected in the comments made by a number of managers who reported a huge sense of guilt about taking time off or working from home. They described themselves as being paranoid about being seen to work hard and being seen to put in not only their contracted hours but considerably more than their contracted hours. One senior manager noted that in her past role she would quite happily have taken an extended lunch every now and then to meet with a friend, but that within the College, she would feel extremely guilty about doing this, even though she always had time owing.

On reflection, a number of managers felt that the long hours culture was influenced by the modelling of the Principal whereby it was noted that you could leave at 9pm and still see the Principals car in the car park. This was also true of members of the Executive and senior management team.

Fear of taking legitimate leave

Another manager recalled a conversation she had had with a colleague the previous evening where the individual had been chastised for having a couple of days off that week, which happened to be during half term. The individual had children and wanted to spend time with them. Increasingly however, half term was being filled up with events that staff were expected to attend, whereas traditionally it had been a good period for staff to take leave. In the current half term one day had been taken up with team building events and another day was set aside for talks with the Principal. Managers felt that if there were breaks in the system then these should be real breaks and that at present there seemed to be very few convenient times to take leave.

Lack of trust and uncertainty

There was a unanimous belief that the system was overly bureaucratic. This created an enormous amount of paperwork with managers logging every meeting from the belief that someone, somewhere is going to want evidence that the meeting took place. This need for everything to be written down is driven out of a system of mistrust with individuals feeling that the organisation doesn't trust them to do their job and the individuals in turn mistrusting the motives of the organisation. People are also frightened of making mistakes, particularly in this integration period where people are still sussing each other out and getting to know each other.

Work overload

The impact of the merger

The workloads are exacerbated at the moment by the impact of the recent merger, which has created additional work while new policies and procedures are developed. This is further aggravated by the fact that parts of the College are still doing their own thing, which creates further confusion.

The merger process was criticised by a number of managers because of the amount of extra work it had created. The merger had been managed with an over-riding concern that neither College felt it to be a take-over. This meant that rather than keeping the best of both Colleges and recreating only those practices that were ineffective in both, the policy had been to build the new organisation from scratch with all new policies and procedures. This created a lot of vacuums where nothing was yet in place, as well as a lot of extra work.

Additionally, following change, people have been expected to take on new responsibilities without actually being able to drop any of the things that they were doing before. The workloads have also been intensified by the staff shortages, which have created additional pressures on both managers and staff with people constantly running on the spot just to keep still.

Sense of powerlessness

The management group as a whole had very little sense of their power to influence the workload pressures. This was specifically highlighted by one manager, who commented that the management team as a whole, fail to stand up and say that things aren't working, let alone suggest different ways of working. Managers at Tier 4 particularly, didn't feel that they had the clout to bring about a change in procedures or to pull others into line.   Additionally, although some of them did feed the problems upwards they didn't always feel that their manager, who does have the clout, did enough to address the problems. For many there was a sense that these problems are inherent within the education system as a whole and some felt that even the Principal had little power to really bring about change.

There was also a belief that there is not enough communication between the Executive and Tier 4 when strategic decisions are made. This results in decisions, which are based on very little knowledge of the actual impact they will have to those people on the ground that are implementing them.

Some managers however felt that gradually more people are speaking up about the excessive workloads and making the issue known. One senior manager noted that she had told her manager that she was finding it increasingly difficult to *'see the wood for the trees'* as she had so many deadlines to meet.

As highlighted previously, the management group as a whole felt very little ownership of the organisations' processes and failed to recognise their potential power in bringing about new ways of working. It was felt that a key reason why managers may be so reluctant to use their influence, is due to the fact that many of them lack even the basic management training. They are therefore struggling to move from a teaching role to a management role, with very little support to help them cope with their new responsibilities. A lot of the managers don't therefore have the tools for day-to-day management let alone the management of change.

Desire to prove your worth

There was a real sense that some of the pressures experienced by managers were internally driven. One manager stated, that she felt a considerable amount of the perceived work overload was driven by managers themselves out of a need to prove their worth now that they were no longer teaching. This fear was then added to by the restructuring, and the sense that it was a key time to prove the value you brought to the organisation. For a lot of managers, the main way to do this was to show how hard you were working.

The job as a vocation

Another aspect of people's reluctance to challenge the demands that were being made of them, was the nature of the job and the sense that for many, working at the College was a vocation. Ensuring that the College is successful is therefore, very important to them – perhaps to a higher degree than would be true for people in industry. It was felt that people had always been willing to do more than was expected of them but that this had currently got out of control. There is a sense that from the very top of the organisation there is a belief that even more has to be delivered and therefore the pressure has to keep on going down.

No let up down through the organisation

One manager highlighted a recent experience where in a 360-degree appraisal he had been marked down by his manager for not delegating enough. He felt that although he did delegate, his manager needed to understand that he was delegating to people who were already up to their eyeballs in work and who are also taking work home etc. Sometimes therefore, he deliberately chooses not to delegate in recognition of the pressure they were under. This was true of managers at Tier 3 and 4 and suggests that while pressure can go down through an organisation, it may then reach a stage where it starts going back up through the system.

This picture of work piling up in managers' in-trays, was added to by the fact that many people at lower levels within the organisation don't feel confident or empowered to take decisions themselves. This puts added pressure on managers who are constantly being asked to provide unnecessary clarification.

A short-term focus

This lack of confidence is likely to be related to the fact that a number of managers admitted spending very little time on coaching and developing their staff, as the vast majority of their time is taken up with fire-fighting and dealing with day-to-day issues. It was recognised however that if this was reversed individuals lower down the organisation would be empowered to do their jobs more effectively which would relieve a lot of pressure from managers and enable them some space to think and act more strategically.

One manager criticised her colleagues for falling into the trap of the 'meetings culture'. This, she felt, created a situation where the majority of time was spent either in meetings or rushing from one to the next, leaving very little time to action the points which emerged from the meetings and creating a lot of unproductive work with minimal development.

Managing work-life balance for staff

Perpetuating a long hours culture

Although managers were aware that their staff would perceive them as working very hard, a number of them clearly hadn't thought through the implications of this in terms of perpetuating a long hours culture down through the team.

Management based on trust

One manager noted that she liked to meet people halfway as she felt that if people do have concerns about life outside of work, this impacts on the work and is unproductive for everyone. She felt that she automatically trusted all of her staff and only lost this when the trust was abused.

Where it is applicable, a number of managers are happy for staff to work from home, despite the culture of mistrust. One manager highlighted the importance of trust saying that if she knew that people weren't short changing her she would be very flexible. However if she thinks this trust is being abused, she reverts to monitoring the individual very closely.

Other managers were less in favour of home-working because they did have issues around trust and were happier when they could see what people were doing and the hours they were working. One manager felt home-working was problematic as not only was it very difficult to manage poor timekeeping it was also very difficult for managers to pre-empt problems around stress and overwork.

The difficulty with trust however, is that in order to be able to have a trusting relationship with staff, managers need to be skilled at dealing with those individuals who have proved themselves to be 'untrustworthy'. The culture within the College however is one where poor performance is not actually addressed directly. Instead it is much more based around the welfare state model and therefore monitoring has to be high.

Flexibility in managing others

A number of managers felt that they did consciously strive to manage the work-life balance needs of their staff and a number of examples were given to support this:

- Rotas were developed with individual commitments in mind so that they fitted in around childcare or study time etc. One manager made a commitment to staff that she would try and accommodate their needs 80% of the time but needed this flexibility to be two-way.
- A member of staff had been allowed the time to sort out a few personal problems over a number of weeks.
- Another had severe back problems and had been given time for physiotherapy and rest.
- One manager had come to an arrangement with a member of staff, which enabled her to take an afternoon off in the week to attend a course and make up the time on Saturday mornings.
- Another example was given where a valuable member of the team had been struggling to find the time to complete her dissertation. The manager was very keen to work something out as she didn't want to lose the individual concerned and they had sat down and worked out a solution together which had resulted in the individual working a 4-day week for a limited period.

- One manager stated that she would do whatever it takes to meet the needs of the individual as long as the job gets done in a way that meets the needs of the students and the College as well. She felt that there is always a way to find a win-win solution.
- One manager highlighted a case where a member of staff had requested some unpaid time off coming up to Christmas and the manager was able to deliver on this.

There were often conditions to this flexibility whereby it wasn't applied to everyone and in most cases would only be a short-term measure rather than a long-term change in working pattern.

Difficulties in enabling balance

For one manager, the desire to enable staff to have an appropriate balance was felt to have gone too far to the extent that he felt that he was too protective of his staff. In order to help his staff have better balance he takes on the problem himself rather than encouraging staff to take control of the issue. He recognised that this was an ineffective way of tackling the problem and that perhaps helping the team to communicate more realistic expectations of what they can achieve would be a more effective strategy. The issue varied however from some team members having too high expectations made of them to others who were struggling from development needs rather than because of unrealistic work demands. For those who had development needs, he did feel that the College had a very comprehensive training and development programme and a confidential counselling service. However alongside these, there was still the problem of the organisation continually piling on the pressure.

Managers felt that there were peak times when staff did need to work very hard in certain areas. However alongside this there were traditionally slacker times. Recently however, these slacker times were becoming less and less and therefore there was less time to be flexible with.

In a number of parts of the organisation however it was felt that it was also becoming increasingly difficult to accommodate individuals' needs due to staff shortages and the time it took to fill vacant positions. Managers were also aware that many staff were having to take on extra work in the period before vacancies were filled. Shortages in management staff are creating additional difficulties with people feeling inadequately managed and reporting low morale and feeling undervalued. In these situations it is very difficult for the remaining managers to find the time to keep interpersonal relationships going with their team members, which as highlighted previously, are critical to enabling balance.

The importance of communication

One manager felt that he was open with staff that if there was a quiet time he was happy for them to go as he did not want to manage by clock-watching. However against this he recognised that he was perhaps not systematic enough in making this flexibility clear and relied too heavily on his personality communicating to people rather than making it explicit.

Communication was also highlighted as an issue by another manager who admitted to being unsure as to whether his staff took work home, although he had a sense that they all did work outside of office hours.

The difficulty of finding the time

One manager noted that because of the pressure he is under, the people management side of the job gets lost. He just doesn't feel he has the time to have conversations with his staff on a regular basis, let alone coach and develop them or support their work-life balance needs. He would love to have the time to talk to his staff and do some team building but currently he recognised that he was reactive rather than proactive due to the pressures he was under to deliver personally. There was a sense however that time spent on coaching, mentoring, developing etc, cannot be measured whereas dealing with paper work can.

Thinking innovatively about work-life balance

In terms of managers thinking innovatively about the work-life balance needs of their team and providing solutions outside of the formal policies that are available, it was felt that this only happens in pockets around the College. A number of managers found it difficult to look at the issue of balance as something more than needing to leave work on time. One manager therefore felt that balance wasn't a problem for her as her team worked set hours and that was all they were required to do most of the time. For others there was a recognition that it takes time to be flexible with staff and that it's much easier to ignore work-life balance needs. At present there is little time to give to this, although the question was also raised as to whether there was actually a willingness within the management team to make changes to enable balance.

Managing the workload of the team

Negotiating realistic targets for the team

When asked whether they actively managed the workloads of their team by being firm with others in the organisation as to what the team can and cannot realistically deliver, there was a mixed response. A number of managers felt that they tried to do this but that they didn't always do it very well, taking on work which had a much bigger impact than they had estimated. Others felt helpless to influence the deadlines and expectations. For others it depended on the deadline, who had imposed it etc, and for some deadlines it had to be recognised that they were non-negotiable. Much of this was felt to come back to the confidence of managers in negotiating a realistic deadline. There appeared to be a lack of confidence at the moment and so the worst scenario often occurred where deadlines were just ignored and not delivered.

Regular workload reviews

One manager stated that although she tried to have regular workload reviews with her team about what they had on and whether they could deliver what was expected of them, she felt that there '*was not a lot I can do about it if they can't*'. She had the maximum number of staff that she was allowed and felt therefore that they just needed to get their heads down and get on with it. Although she will discuss ways round the workload with the team, the manager herself feels she has very little control. '*There's nothing that I can do that's going to make it any better*' was her response to the current situation where the team is working flat out because they have been given work very late due to hold-ups in the system.

When discussing the management of their team's workload, a common problem highlighted by managers was the fact that workloads are often affected by the efficiency of other teams/departments and the speed with which information and decisions are passed through the

organisation. A consistent message was that managers felt helpless to influence this process and therefore managing the workloads of their team was seen as largely out of their control. Additionally, managers felt that the lack of common procedures across the College means that there is currently little comeback for those who are delaying the process.

There were some examples of good practice however. One manager stated that he had regular fortnightly meetings with his staff to discuss workloads and any other issues around the job. He also has regular one-to-ones and an open door policy where individuals can come and discuss any problems with him. In addition to this, the team has also devised a questionnaire as another way of raising issues, which are then logged and dealt with.

Because of the excessive workloads within the College there was a belief that the focus of workload reviews gets shifted to an emphasis on what isn't delivered rather than what is. This again adds to the pressure people are under and decreases the sense to which they feel valued.

Performance management

Although there is an appraisal system in place, performance management was felt to be poor across the College. Staff get an annual appraisal in the majority of cases, and the College has recently introduced a 360-degree feedback process. It was felt however that there is no systematic culture of performance management and that although there may be isolated pockets where performance is managed well, this is certainly not widespread throughout the organisation.

Performance management training was something that managers highlighted as a development need. One manager noted that although the College had been promising her management training it had not been delivered yet and she commented that '*the thought of having to manage someone's poor performance was quite horrifying*'. She had recently had a situation where a couple of individuals weren't pulling their weight. She had dealt with this in a generic way subjecting all of the team to closer controls, rather than just the individuals concerned. This had seemed the easiest course of action open to her given her uncertainty about managing poor performance on an individual basis.

Another manager felt that her team were very used to having flexibility around their working hours, and that this flexibility was not currently accountable enough. She felt that one member of staff was straying too much into the life side of balance and she was trying to tackle this through setting regular performance targets so that the individual was aware of what was expected within a given timeframe. This also gave the manager something measurable to manage against and ensured that both of them knew the boundaries of what was expected.

This lack of effective performance management not only has an impact on the management of poor performance it also has a negative impact on the management of good performance. This then exacerbates the belief that it is necessary to prove that you've been working which as previously highlighted creates additional work which is of little organisational value. The lack of performance management also leads to people feeling that they are constantly expected to take on more, as there are no clearly defined boundaries to their role.

Ways in which the College could help enable balance

At the end of each interview managers were asked to specify ways in which the College could help them achieve work-life balance as well as help them to enable balance for their team members. A number of factors were highlighted which draw on the points made previously:

- The College needs to develop a more strategic approach to delivery, whereby work is scheduled into a year plan which takes into account the priorities of different departments and enables a more balanced workload. This would also enable teams/departments to plan ahead and would go some way towards tackling the current culture of ignoring unrealistic deadlines, through making them more achievable.

- There is also a need for less complex systems, which provide synergy between the different parts of the organisation and create cross-College liaison. These systems need to provide access to information at a central source to prevent the amount of unnecessary work currently reported.

- Related to the need for better systems there is also a need for improved communication within the organisation which was currently felt to be poor. The development of an Intranet was felt to be one way in which this could be improved.

- The meeting culture needs to be addressed so that meetings are only called when this is absolutely necessary. Where meetings are essential they should be appropriately managed so that they are as short as possible and people are better prepared beforehand.

- The College needs to address the problem of work overload both for managers and for teaching staff. The amount of bureaucracy and administration needs to be looked at and more innovative ways of working developed. It was recognised however that this in itself takes time and that this strategic planning therefore needs to be made a priority if the time is going to be allocated. The College needs to move from a culture of fire fighting to one based around strategic thinking.

- Issues around performance management also need addressing in order for the College to move from a monitoring culture to one of trust and flexibility.

- Managers felt that somehow the College needs to create some slack in the system. In the past everything has been very cost driven and so new staff are only taken on when the situation becomes unmanageable but very quickly the workload grows again and the team are back in the same situation. Support mechanisms such as mentors etc. are being put in place to help individuals but the enormity of the task is overwhelming and human resources are desperately needed. Without adequate support systems, managers recognise that there is little time to develop the strength of interpersonal relationships that are needed to underpin work-life balance.

- There is clearly a need for a sophisticated management development programme to help managers develop the skills to do their job more effectively. Related to this managers felt they had a development need around the development of others and it was felt that in general the College was a long way away from a continuous improvement culture.

- Clearly there are pockets within the College where there is the flexibility to enable balance. These are not communicated widely enough however and to do so would be a quick and easy way of spreading knowledge about what is possible in relation to balance throughout the College.

- Finally, managers felt that there was a need for the organisation to give people permission to have a satisfactory balance between work and home. At present, it was felt that the College is a long way from this and that to move to this will require a radical change programme throughout the organisation, which is driven and supported by the Principle.

Summary

Perhaps the key message that comes out of this case study is the fact that it is incredibly difficult for managers to enable work-life balance for others when they themselves are struggling with excessive workloads and long working hours. It is important to recognise that when the pressure is on, many managers put the people management side of the job to one side. This will clearly have a negative impact on the strength of interpersonal relationships, which are so critical to enabling balance.

Related to this is the emphasis that needs to be placed on developing trust within organisations in order to support work-life balance initiatives. Without a high degree of trust it is doubtful whether managers will support the degree of flexibility required and also whether individuals will trust that any initiatives will benefit them as well as the organisation.

It is also critical that managers within organisations are empowered to bring about change. It is noticeable that despite their level of seniority in the organisational hierarchy, managers within the College felt that they had minimal power to influence organisational processes and there was a definite sense that they felt 'done unto'. As a group however they clearly do have the power to introduce new ways of working and influence the way things are done. It is important however that managers perceive time spent on these strategic activities to be time well spent, as when the pressure is on, there is often a tendency to focus on the here and now and address short term rather than long term priorities.

Different ways of working have implications for management styles and in many cases demand enhanced management skills. It is therefore essential that managers have had appropriate training in the management of people so that they are skilled in areas such as performance management, which require a high degree of skill when managing the performance of flexible workers etc.

The lessons form this case study therefore centre around the need to support managers if work-life balance is going to become a reality throughout an organisation. From providing managers with an appropriate balance, through to helping them acquire the necessary skills to manage different ways of working, and providing them with the time and space to think and act strategically, the support provided to managers is critical if they are to enable others to have balance.

Allied Domecq UK Case Study

Introduction

Allied Domecq is an international Spirits and Wine business. Their core Spirits brands are Ballantine's, Beefeater, Kahlua and Sauza. The company owns or controls distribution of 89% of their sales volume.

The UK branch head office is situated in Horsham, West Sussex, with a smaller office in Leicester. There are 220 employees in the UK division. 60% of the employees are on home-based/mobile contracts. Of the home-based workers, 40% live within reasonable driving distance of the Horsham head office. Home-based employees are primarily sales and marketing focused, with finance, human resources and administrative functions tending to be office based. Home-based workers are stretched across the company hierarchy, with the MD himself being home-based.

Method

19 interviews were conducted with managers and their direct reports across the UK division of Allied Domecq. Interviews were conducted in-person at the Horsham head office, via telephone, and in a few cases in the homes of home-based employees. Respondents represent a wide hierarchy within the organization, and live in locations across the country. In most cases, where we interviewed a manager, we also interviewed one or more of his/her direct reports, who in turn often had people management responsibilities. Four interviews were with employees on office-based contracts, the rest were with home-based employees.

Interviews took place during November 2001. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes, and was based on a structured discussion guide, which explored the role played by managers in enabling work-life balance.

Background

Home-based contracts

While geographically dispersed sales staff have traditionally worked on the road, and alternatively from home, the home-based workforce was officially introduced about 5 years ago, and the option to work from home was offered primarily to sales and marketing staff. Today the relevant jobs are only offered as home-based contracts. Employees are encouraged to "hot desk" in the Horsham or Leicester office at least once a month (and some do so quite frequently). For the rest of the time, when not on the road, they work from home. Home-based workers are equipped with laptop computers and other computing equipment, internet and intranet access, phone lines and mobile phones. The company also purchases office furniture for the home, if desired.

Reasons for introducing the mobile work force included the desire to:
- Create a more empowered organization, by demonstrating trust
- Shift the focus of attention away from the office and towards customers and consumers
- Improve overall efficiency by reducing travel time
- Facilitate effective recruitment and retention by improving the work-life balance of a large proportion of employees, and by having the ability to recruit people throughout the UK, without requiring relocation
- Recognise and utilise the benefits of improvements in technology (such as laptops, mobile phones and the internet)

A secondary advantage of the move was that by releasing office space, it allowed the company to create a more attractive working environment in the office.

The mobile working option has been very well received: not one of the home-based workers we interviewed would choose to return to an office based job, all other things being equal.

The office environment

While the home-based workforce is seen as a revolutionary step that has significant implications for the work-life balance of those who are home-based, the culture for the office workers is more traditional, with staff expected to work fixed office hours. Individual managers may show a flexible attitude, but "flexitime" has not (yet) been introduced, and part-time arrangements, while they do exist, are rare outside of maternity returners. That said, the company is proud of the high percentage of women who return from maternity leave and are successfully accommodated. Because of the large proportion of home-based workers, the office can be fairly quiet at times, especially on Fridays, and this can be somewhat demoralising for office workers, some of whom suspect that home-based workers are having an easy time. This is unfortunate, as our research suggests that while home-based workers do benefit from the flexibility their contracts allow them, they also work extremely hard – and probably longer hours than many of their office based colleagues.

Understanding of "Work-life balance"

"Work-life balance" is understood in a straightforward way as the ability to achieve one's goals at work, and at the same time fulfil one's responsibilities and wants in one's personal life.

> "To me it's about flexibility and trust, about knowing you're getting your job done but you have time to do everything else as well. I feel I have time to set aside for the evenings, to do other things, so that my work isn't adversely affecting my health."

> "I take it to mean juggling things so that I can achieve what I want at work and outside of work"

Employees understand that the balance can swing either way: sometimes one's personal life can affect the way one does one's job.

> "We're assuming that it's always work that intrudes on life but it can happen the other way."

However, among the highly ambitious and motivated workforce at Allied Domecq, the balance tends to shift (somewhat voluntarily) to sacrificing personal goals for work objectives.

Some employees regard balance as more than managing to juggle both work and home successfully – but rather as achieving excellence and fulfilment in both spheres:

"Someone that I would count as a work-life role model would be someone that does an excellent job, in a sensible number of hours (which isn't going to be 35 but it's not going to be 55 either); they put in the extra when it's required, but they also have a really full and fulfilling life outside of work. People say: 'It's amazing what they achieve'."

Satisfaction with own work-life balance

Most managers and their direct reports are satisfied with their level of work-life balance: those that work at the expense of home life usually feel that they have made this choice themselves. Home-based managers tend to feel they have a good balance, even though they may work long hours – because of the flexibility and time-saving that home-based working encourages.

Importance of enabling balance

Managers regard balance as vital for their team, recognising that happy, relatively rested employees are better performers and will be more loyal to the company.

"It's important that people don't get burned out, that they stay fresh and motivated and driven."

Both office and home-based managers, regardless of their own practices, respect that their subordinates have lives outside of work, and in general make it clear that they do not regard long hours or unreasonable levels of response as the key to progressing in the organisation.

"A lot of them are ambitious, but I've sat down with them and told them where I think they need to go, outlined areas in which I feel they need to improve to get to the next step, but none of it ever says, you need to be on your computer at 3am."

Role modelling

Managers are conscious of their status as role models with regard to work-life balance. However, given the high level of ambition and drive among many managers, they are split on whether they regard themselves as role models – some working hard to ensure balance for their teams, yet failing to achieve balance for themselves. These managers do see a trade-off between a rapid career path and work-life balance, and some are willing to sacrifice the latter to achieve career success.

"I'm committed to work, that's why I try not to judge [my team] always by my standards. I don't expect everybody else to follow me, because I tend to let work dominate, which is why I've got where I am."

"I'm a negative role model, because I don't strive personally for work-life balance. How hard you work and the quality and quantity of your output is intimately linked to how quickly you

are able to move upwards and onwards, and a person who pays attention to work-life balance almost definitely takes longer to do something than someone who doesn't pay it the respect that it deserves."

Other managers, however, do prioritise their own work-life balance, and believe they are successful role models.

"Balance is something I strive for, both for myself and for my team."

"I am reasonably balanced. I suppose you could say I am a role model."

It is interesting that even in the case of managers who think that they are not successful work-life balance role models, the people they manage tend to think that they do set a good example. This is probably due to the fact that role modelling works differently for home-based workers – in that it is not the way managers work that impacts staff (for this is largely unseen), but rather the way managers interact with staff, the aura of control over their work that they communicate, and the type of pressure they put on the staff.

Employees recognise that while there is no need to emulate the schedules or hours of their managers, if the manager is not in control, then it will affect their own work-life balance:

"I consider myself fortunate to work for an individual that's temperamentally even handed. If he didn't have his work-life balance right it would cascade down the line."

"He's always calm: people who aren't balanced tend to get more stressed and [my manager] is very calm, methodical, gets everything done – he seems to be getting it right."

Implications of home-based working for work-life balance

Home working enables balance for Allied Domecq employees in a number of ways:

Removes commute

By removing the commute time, employees can either start work earlier or use the time for personal activities, such as exercising or taking the children to school.

"Even though I only live 20 minutes away from the office, having no travel time at all means you're using your time more productively."

"I save at least two hours every day in terms of travel."

Enables flexibility

Employees have the flexibility to work the hours that best suit them. For example, they are able to plan their days so that they can spend time with their families at unconventional times, such as when the children get home in the afternoon, and work later in the evening to compensate.

"Some mornings I can be up really early, and I'll sit there in my nightshirt working, and then I'll stop at eleven and go and have a shower, bath, get lunch, take a couple of hours, go back to it in the afternoon."

"It depends, sometimes I don't do as much work in a working day, but other days I work from 7 to midnight, so I balance that."

"I sometimes take my lunch at 9:30 in the morning. I can go into town, do my banking when it's not busy, and then come home."

Removes office distractions, increasing productivity

The inevitable distractions of the office, for all their value, are removed in the home environment, leaving employees a quiet and relatively undisturbed place in which to work. They also tend to take care of routine tasks, such as checking emails, outside of the time they think of as their working time.

"Sometimes I [check my email] first thing in the morning –so when I sit down to start working at 8:30 I'm really sitting down to work. In the office, you get in at nine, you boot up, get coffee, talk to people, reply to emails and sometimes you realise it's ten o'clock and you haven't done any work."

Reduces negatives effects of working long hours

It doesn't *feel* as onerous to work late at home, compared to staying late in the office – so even if someone is working long hours, the psychological impact is less intense, and home workers are less tired and stressed as a result.

"I've had to work late in the office during winter, and it gets really cold … you're sitting here in the office, there's only you and the security guard, it's bloody cold, you've eaten rubbish from the chocolate machine, whereas at home you can shut off the PC at 6, take an hour or two off and then put in a really good couple of hours from 8-10."

Increases leisure time on weekends

Home working enables weekends to be chore free.

"Weekends are now almost pure leisure time because of the things you can get done during the week. So silly things – you can put the washing machine on – it doesn't all pile up until Saturday morning. If you need somebody to come and measure for a carpet, they're only there fifteen minutes, it's not intrusive. You can fit it around your work and you're still achieving at least twice as much at home as you would do in the office."

Challenges home-working presents for work-life balance

While the benefits are regarded as far outweighing the challenges, there are some key work-life balance challenges for home-based workers.

Isolation

Home working can be isolating, especially for those who live too far to travel into the office on a regular basis. For some this can result in their feeling a lack of solidarity with the company, with one employee saying he felt more like an independent contractor than a part of the organisation. In losing the sense of community and a shared membership of an organisation with a common goal, some employees feel they are missing a fundamental aspect of working life, which in turn negatively impacts the work side of their work-life balance.

"I do sometimes feel isolated… you can't see people when they're telling you something… you feel like you're working for yourself."

"It can feel isolating in terms of your account. There's nobody to share stuff with, to say: what do you think I should do?"

"It has been difficult to develop a relationship with [my manager]. Only three or four times a year do we discuss social things, and over the phone it is not easy to have chit chat."

However, this sense of isolation should not be overstated: all those interviewed would prefer their current situation than to be working in an office, and even though the sense of community is diminished, loyalty is retained, with most of those interviewed recognising that they are unlikely to find the flexibility they currently enjoy at other organisations.

One reason why home working can feel isolating, is that it can be difficult to contact people in the office. Home-based employees find that voicemail messages left by office staff tend to be too generic. If someone is not available, they want to know when they might expect a response:

"Our business is dominated by email and voicemail and it can be infuriating trying to reach people when you need a response quickly. It irritates me that people sit at their desks with their voicemail on. If they need to do that, they should say so on the voicemail, and what time they'll be checking messages."

"Office based staff forget that we're isolated or on the road, and you may be going to a customer and there's something you need to find out and the office based person who's supposed to be there is not available."

The problem appears to be more deeply rooted than simply a frustration with a delayed response, and this could explain why employees feel so strongly about this issue. Contact with people in the office is both the practical and the *psychological* lifeline that employees have with Allied Domecq. It not only gives them the work-related help and information they need, but also allows them to feel connected to the organisation. When home-workers cannot reach someone in the office, and have no idea when their call will be returned, they are not only inconvenienced, they may also feel isolated and distanced from the company.

Perception of 24 hour availability

Home workers feel that they are "on duty" all of the time – as others tend to think that because they work from home, it is OK to contact them at any time.

"For myself, the biggest problem is, your phone is never off."

"If you are looked on as a mobile worker you can get phone calls at all hours."

"We are almost contactable 24 hours a day via email, phone, and I guess the challenge is for people to recognise although you can get messages through via email or mobile not to abuse that."

Home distractions and conflicts

Families can sometimes be disruptive. None of the managers interviewed had any childcare responsibilities while working at home (they recognised this would present an impossible situation). However, there were times when children were in the house while the employee was working and this could cause problems. For example, one manager mentioned that during the holidays when the children were at home, he felt it was difficult to insist that they be quiet all

the time, in their own home. Another sometimes works until 7pm on a deadline, and found it hard to explain to his very young daughter why he was unable to be with her just before bedtime, yet he was still in the house. Home working can take some getting used to on the part of family members:

> "Socially, my wife finds it strange that I'm not in a suit going off to work. I'm at home, so she asks me to do things during the day. At 7pm she wants me to do stuff with the kids, but I'm still working. I'm not sure she sees it as a proper job."

Encourages over-working

Home-working is conducive to over-working, and is an especial danger for those with "workaholic" tendencies. As one manager pointed out, when he worked late in the office, seeing the office empty out in the evening was a sign that he should start thinking about going home – there was a clear differentiation in the feel of the office during working and after hours, and this helped the manager to leave for the day. At home, there are no differentiations, so some employees simply work on into the evening. However, some see this as a distinct advantage: one manager happily described waking up at 3am, unable to sleep, and putting in a good four hours before breakfast.

Guilt and over-compensation

When people have days where they feel they have not worked well (as can happen at home as well as in the office) people at home are more likely to feel guilty about it, and to try to make up the time in the evening, compared with office based workers, who still feel that they have "put in the hours" and might blame their lack of productivity on external office factors. Some home workers solve the problem by hot-desking some days in the office. But this option is only open to those who live close to one of the company's offices.

> "There are some days where I feel a bit sluggish and I know to be at home won't be productive, so I go into the office which energises me. Other days it's home where I need to be, and I've got peace and quiet at home and I can just get on with it".

Implications of the home-based workforce on the office based staff

Just as home-based staff sometimes find they cannot reach office based people, office staff find it can be difficult to reach people in the field – and are equally frustrated. Furthermore, office staff must deal with the added needs of the home-based workers, including the fact that when home workers come into the office, they tend to assume office staff are available to talk to them for as long as they need, on an informal basis, without scheduling a time to meet. This can create difficulties for office workers, who find these interruptions disruptive.

In addition, office workers observe the flexibility enjoyed by the home workers, and can feel unequally treated. While they do not expect to work from home as well, they would like to see more flexible options for office workers, too.

> "Mobile working frustrates my team – if someone is onsite you can get hold of the people you need for information. People see movement of people, people working from home. It always smacks of a long weekend. Then they get frustrated when they try to contact a mobile worker and can't get a response."

How managers enable balance

Perhaps the most important characteristic of a manager that enables balance for employees is an attitude of respect and a recognition that employees have lives outside of work. Managers at Allied Domecq take this as their starting point, showing caring, concerned attitudes towards their staff, and this makes a significant contribution to the sense of balance and well-being enjoyed by their teams.

> "There was a job that needed to be done by Monday. I said I'll do it over the weekend, and he said no, do it next week – he said he didn't want me working over the weekend. I was really pleased that he showed that concern."

The manager's role at Allied Domecq, supported by the company's culture, is seen as one of facilitating rather than enabling balance. The manager's task is to ensure the conditions are in place for an employee to have balance. After that, it is believed, it is up to the employee to manage his or her own balance.

> "They should feel comfortable enough to say they can't do something. The company must provide a non-threatening environment to allow people to do that but ultimately it's the individual's responsibility to take up that option."

Some of the conditions which managers at Allied Domecq set in place to facilitate balance are:

Ensuring manageable workloads

Managers at Allied Domecq endeavour to ensure their teams do not have more work than they are able to do. This involves having a clear and realistic plan to start with, and in addition, it may involve pushing back on other constituencies within the company, shifting workloads among team members, or redefining deadlines as conditions change.

> "In the case of our business group, we have a plan, we know where we are going and we don't fire-fight in terms of that plan."

> "I act as a buffer so that people come through me and I push back if it's going to impact too negatively. It doesn't always make me a popular person with internal stakeholders because I say no."

> "My manager is very good at spreading things out, giving a few short term deadlines, then a longer term deadline. I do feel that he's not just piling things on me. He's good at letting me come back to him and give feedback on workloads."

Most managers and their teams are satisfied with the way workloads are managed. They understand the cyclical nature of the business, and are, however, prepared to put in the extra without pushing back at the peaks of those cycles – knowing that the busiest time will be followed by a lull.

Encouraging open and honest communication

All the managers interviewed work hard to encourage open, honest lines of communication with their team members. They believe that if an employee is feeling overwhelmed, overworked, or if personal circumstances are affecting their work, the employees would communicate this to the manager, who could then take action. Employees confirmed that they feel free to do this.

"As far as my team goes, I try to make sure any email or message I send out with a deadline, I always make a point of putting on it 'got any questions, give me a call. If you can't meet a deadline, let me know."

Enabling balance: home-based managers

In addition, home-based managers enable balance by:

Showing Flexibility

Managers show a great deal of flexibility when employees inform them they will be taking off time for a given personal reason, and will make it up some other time. All employees interviewed felt comfortable with this arrangement, although there are some cultural barriers to extreme levels of flexibility *(see Organisational Context section)*.

"I try not to make it official, where if they work one day extra, they take a day off, but it's a matter of trust, if I know they're working evenings, in the field, I see what they're doing and try to appreciate it. It makes for a better relationship if you have that sort of open door policy, where they're not scared to ask for time back."

Exhibiting trust

As one manager pointed out, simply by allowing staff to work from home, the company was exhibiting an exceptional level of trust in its employees. Managers in turn trust their teams. The reason this is possible, especially for the sales staff, is that sales numbers make it is easy to assess performance. If a team member is producing the expected output, managers are not too concerned how or at what times they do so, or even how long it takes someone to produce the results. Because they feel trusted, both by their managers and by the company as a whole, employees are highly motivated to show that the trust is well earned – by working hard and producing results.

" It's about trust – people either believe you're working hard and you're committed or you're not, and by taking a couple of hours off in the afternoon, you will be trusted, if not you won't get away with it because the evidence will be in the quality of your work."

Holding effective meetings

Monthly or bi-monthly in-person meetings are held for all teams. This gives some opportunity for face-to-face and social time. Managers try to ensure these meetings are effective.

"Our large sales group gets together every second month. About a year ago I decided to have a sub-meeting for certain teams, so we could get the issues out the way at the big meeting and also deal with more specific issues at the same time. [In the smaller group] people could vocalise their concerns and issues which they didn't feel it was appropriate to voice in a bigger environment"

In addition, managers may schedule additional team meetings or one-on-one face time. Some are very cognizant of the location of the team members, and any travel time that might be involved in meeting up. One manager consults with his reports about ongoing meetings – asking them

whether they would prefer to meet each time in a central location or whether they should rotate meetings so that it is close to a given team member on each occasion.

Enabling balance: office based managers

Despite fairly traditional expectations for the office-based staff, managers enable balance by showing a great deal of caring and flexibility within those constraints. They will accommodate employees when they need to take time off, even sometimes working around office policies (such as unofficially taking a day's holiday leave from the following year).

> *"I'm doing a college course at the moment and [my manager] said to me, any time I need to go to a meeting room and do studying, any time I need to take, that's fine – he will let me have that time out of work".*

Managers see this form of accommodation as part of a two-way relationship: they know that in return they can count on team members to deliver extra when needed. One manager takes on the workload of his staff to allow them flexibility when needed. Another has made it clear to her team that it is unnecessary to ask for permission to take an extra long lunch break and that so long as they are getting their work done, she is not watching the clock.

Managers may expect a lot from themselves in terms of hours worked, but they tend to work actively to ensure their staff, especially staff who do not in turn have managerial responsibility, do not have to do the same.

> *If I did need time off, [my manager] would end up taking my workload on himself –I know he would do that. He would never stop me taking time off, but it would probably be at the expense of something else he was doing."*

Organisational Context

As an organisation, Allied Domecq is regarded by its employees as very caring, with implicit cultural, if not policy-driven support for work-life balance. Most respondents did not immediately associate particular policies with supporting work-life balance, but on probing, they identified a number of practices and cultural features that support work-life balance.

Policies and practices

A number of policies and practices were indicated as positively impacting work-life balance. These included:

- Mobile/home-based working
- Casual dress policy
- Flexible holiday benefits, where one can buy or sell three additional holiday days
- Employee Assistance Program
- Health and safety audits for home-based workers
- Study leave and financial support of further studies

> *"I think the whole policy of mobile working actively supports work-life balance. A lot of people have families…mobile working does support that."*

> *"We can flex our holidays up or down… I choose to sell back 3 of my holidays, that suits me, a colleague has 2 sisters overseas, and it suits him to take extra holiday."*

> *"I haven't used the 0845 number [Employee Assistance program], but it's nice to know it's there for support if you need it."*

> *"The company supported me with study leave."*

Work-life balance is not formally raised in performance reviews. Some managers feel there is an opportunity for employees to raise it as one of their "Key Results Area" goals if they have an issue. Others feel that work-life balance issues are not suited to a twice-yearly review – and that issues are dealt with on a day-to-day basis as they arise.

> *"In consultation with your team leader you decide what are your key result areas. Work-life balance could be in there if the individual wanted."*

Culture

The culture of caring is supported and reinforced from the top. As one employee pointed out, not only has the MD said or written somewhere that he understands that home-workers with families may do the school run daily, he also announces new babies born in the last year at the annual Christmas Party. These small acts resonate very loudly with managers, who feel empowered to support work-life balance for their teams, given that they know it is supported from the top of the organisation.

> *"I'm not aware of any hard and fast policies, but I feel very comfortable that Allied Domecq is very caring and supportive, not just in the office but also the events that are put on… I expect if I needed help with my work-life balance I'd get a very supportive hearing."*

> *"There's lots of people who have done things which strictly speaking aren't to do with work but the company has supported them."*

While the culture supports balance, it does so in a very business focused way. Managers and their teams are clear that the first priority is business performance. This is understood and accepted as a business necessity.

> *"It's more important that the job gets done than that there is balance."*

> *"As an employer they are very enlightened and as much as they are able to they do try to be caring. But when push comes to shove you're paid to do a job, and they're not going to be fluffy and nice. It's how it has to be."*

Support for managers

A number of managers noted that the task of enabling balance is made possible for them by the fact that they feel fully resourced, that is, that they have been allocated an adequate number of team members to do the job. One manager noted that this was in extreme contrast to his previous employer, where managing workloads became impossible, given that three people were usually employed to do the work of five.

> "I'm happy that the resources we have on [my account] are sufficient, so my starting point is, all things being equal, we should be able to manage this, without any of us working 80 hours a week."

Areas for organisational improvement

A minority of managers still feel that the flexibility of the mobile home workers is only supported up to a point. One manager noted that if he was not available on a given day, he would sometimes get some "very invasive questions" about his whereabouts. As a result, while he encourages his team to take time off during the day if they have worked late nights, he also tells them not to advertise this fact within the company, and to keep him informed about their whereabouts. In this way he sends a mixed message about flexibility to his team, the same mixed message he feels he has received from others in the organisation.

Other managers, though, do not perceive an obstacle to flexibility within the organisation:

> "I say to my guys: if you want to stop work at 12 on a Friday then do so, but then you may want to do some work on Saturday morning – I think the company recognises that, and are quite flexible in that respect."

While the organization has provided a trusting environment which enables work-life balance, some managers believe the culture could go further in terms of encouraging employees to push back when they are overloaded.

> "The fact that we work remotely demands a lot of trust, so the core is already there, but we just need somehow to communicate that the trust applies not only that we believe you're doing your job but that you're skilled enough in managing your own time as to make the call as to whether or not something can be done in the time frame given to you and have the confidence to be able to say no."

As mentioned previously, office based employees would like to see office flexibility adjusted so that it is more in line with the flexibility home-based employees enjoy.

Human Resources

HR is seen as effective, with clear communication of policies. Employees know where to look for relevant information on the intranet, although some home-based workers find it time consuming to download information from the intranet, and would prefer communications to come in full via email.

Managers see HR as serving a facilitating role – being there to help when they need it. A minority find HR personnel difficult to get hold of when they have a pressing problem – and again, for home-based workers this may lead employees to be more than inconvenienced, but to feel isolated as well.

Future initiatives

Ideas for future initiatives centre around events which bring people together. While it is felt there are a sufficient number of gatherings for business purposes, which do have a social component, a team-building element is strongly desired by employees.

> *"An away day, adventure training, build an egg machine, something that makes you think and pull together as a team, build a raft out of barrels, a charity event, something more positive…"*

> *"Recently, 3 of us went for a weekend away, colleagues. There is a reaction, people would like to do that sort of thing, it was more fun than going to a posh hotel, hiking in the country. It doesn't have to be fancy."*

> *"Just doing a whole day meeting and then an evening's drinks – you're exhausted and don't get a chance to chat with people. If you had some kind of activity in the afternoon…"*

> *"Something away from the office, something that's on a site that's not one of the offices… a trip somewhere, maybe some of the Allied sites. That would encourage more getting to know the team a bit more, which is difficult when you're out-based all the time."*

There is a strong desire for different functions within the business to have opportunities to get together. Events that encourage cross-functional working and the sharing of ideas would be welcomed.

> *"If twice a year different people from the business held dialogue sessions, where you have a facilitator, and lots of people in the room from different areas of the business, and raise questions how we could do things better."*

> *"I think things like cross functional working and working with others, every now and again I'll get to go on a session or workshop which involves other functions in the business, and then you feel quite valued, because you feel, somebody wants your input, you're affecting the business, but there are probably some people that never go on this."*

> *"We should think about doing more than a once a year get together which is more social. Say, we should have a quarterly social/business interaction between the two sides of the business, the on trade and the retail side."*

Conclusion

Mobile working has been a powerful work-life balance enabler for the 60% of Allied Domecq UK employees on home-based contracts. Working within the company's culture of trust and empowerment, managers enable balance by ensuring good relationships with their teams and by trusting employees to do their jobs. Team members respond to this trusting attitude with added motivation and a sense of heightened responsibility. Managers throughout the company believe that planning well and managing workloads is a key to enabling balance, and they strive to do well in these areas. The company's business focused yet caring culture, the fact that work-life balance is supported from the top and some policies (such as flexible leave benefits, an employee assistance program, and support with study leave) help create an environment in which managers feel empowered to enable balance for their teams. In addition, by having adequately staffed teams, managers feel that, with good planning, they are able to successfully control workloads.

Improving communication, both between some mobile managers and their teams, and more pressingly, between office staff and mobile staff could help to iron out some of the difficulties inherent in having a large home-based work force. In particular, it is important that office and home-based employees have a good understanding of the pressures each group faces, and the types of communication that best suit them. In addition, given the enormous and visible advantages of home-working for work-life balance, office workers would like to see their own work-life balance needs (mainly with regards to flexibility) addressed in a more direct way.

Since home-based contracts were introduced five years ago, there is the challenge of integrating new employees who work from home into the company's culture. Currently the induction process is fairly informal, and a more structured integration process might be valuable.

Overall, this research has shown that home-based working in the right culture can be a very successful way of enabling work-life balance, at the same time as forming the basis for a highly motivated and loyal workforce.

Penna Consulting Case Study

Established over a decade ago, Penna Consulting is a leading international player in the market of human capital management. With approximately 400 employees and 300 associates the organisation offers over 30 services that span the full breadth of HR activities and are grouped into four broad areas: Resourcing; Executive coaching and Development; Change consulting; and Career consulting. Over the last 12 months Penna has developed a number of newly integrated services, which have united under the single brand name of Penna Consulting Plc. The organisation consists of 11 companies in total ranging from Penna Meridian through to Penna Change Consulting (formerly Crane Davies) and Penna Sanders and Sidney.

At Penna Consulting, Human Resourcing issues are dealt with by the 'Human Energy team.' This is a relatively new unit established early 2001 to align policies and practices within the organisation under the new brand image. There is a strong culture work-life balance culture which is described as 'respectful' and 'supportive' of all employees. A new flexible benefits scheme for all staff has just been launched and in addition a statement of 'work-life balance philosophy' and a set of good practice managerial guidelines will be developed over the next year.

As with all of the case studies, the research focused on the experiences of the management team. Thirteen managers were interviewed (three face-to-face the remainder by telephone) from a cross-section of the organisation – geographically and departmentally. Respondents were based in areas such as; Stoke Poges, Bristol, Manchester, Leeds, Edinburgh and were consultants and directors from a number of departments including operations and finance. The managers interviewed were responsible for groups ranging from small administrative teams to project staff and associate consultants.

Respondents were asked to summarise their understanding of work-life balance. The majority of interviewees appeared to think of work-life balance in very broad terms defining it as balancing work responsibilities with personal responsibilities and needs.

Importance of enabling work-life balance

Enabling work-life balance for employees was seen to be extremely important as long as this did not jeopardise the delivery of business needs. Flexibility was also encouraged and was seen to help people perform in the workplace with the proviso that this does not disrupt the establishment of relationships both internally and externally.

There was a consensus that in the knowledge industry it is the quality of output rather than the time spent at the desk:

> *"They are paid to do the work not sit at their desks until 5.30 – things will be done that need to be done."*

It was also felt that enabling work-life balance was vital to recruitment and retention:

> "It is very important to attract and retain staff, the difference between getting quality staff and not. The salary is important but it is more than that."

There was a general feeling that work-life balance issues should be addressed on an individual case-by-case basis and that managers need to be realistic with regard to enabling balance for staff – they need to develop a 'common sense' mentality.

Challenges to enabling balance

The pressurised and last minute nature of consultancy work is a big challenge to enabling balance:

> "Consultancy is 24-7, it can be difficult: high expectations are placed on our consultants"

Often work pressure is extreme and managers feel that they have to cover and do extra work to enable balance for their staff.
Managing expectations about what teams are able to achieve is seen to be a crucial issue:

> "We need to better manage client expectations. Sometimes we make unrealistic commitments"

> "IT people are pushed hard and I have struggled to manage expectations. In the end I became quite strong in creating a prioritisation system, I embarked upon effective scheduling to give realistic expectations."

A number of respondents felt that there was a lack of support from senior management with regards to enabling balance for their team with constant pressure being placed to meet targets:

> "The single biggest barrier to managers enabling work life balance is that they're frightened that they will be perceived to be weak and soft and less effective"

Respondents felt that when it came down to it 'business needs must come first.'

Trust was also seen by some to be an issue affecting managers' ability to enable balance for staff:

> "It was difficult for me to trust that people would be accountable."

One particular manager from a coaching background defined the managerial implications of enabling balance as; providing sufficient resources, setting up good working practices, creating a sound organisational structure and coaching individuals in personal skills such as time management. He maintains that:

> "Operationally speaking the Manager's role in reconciling these different needs represents a challenge."

A number of the managers interviewed also felt that the job of enabling balance for employees was harder the closer you were to the day-to-day practicalities of the business:

> "The nearer the front line the manager is the greater the challenge becomes of enabling balance – at the senior management level it is easy to be generous and sympathetic."

It was also felt that unless communication between managers and team members was constant and consistent work-life balance issues could not be dealt with effectively:

> "Unless there is ongoing dialogue of short and long term needs of staff and managers alike – managers might find themselves in a bargaining relationship where it's difficult to be objective and effective."

Managerial initiatives to encourage work-life balance

A number of managers have implemented frequent planning and communication sessions to improve the performance of their team and open dialogue regarding personal and work-life balance issues:

> "We have weekly meetings to share information on what we are doing as a business and as a team specifically, and we also have one to one sessions on an informal basis. I talk to every member of the team, if they're out of the office, at least once a day."

A large proportion of the managers interviewed also tried, wherever possible, to create a flexible environment within their team:

> "I've informally introduced a sense of flexitime. When people are juggling home and work life, if they've got flexibility it can fit in with social challenges and personal preferences. Some people are good in the morning, some aren't – so they can work the same hours but in a pattern that suits their style."

> "With regard to planning of communication within teams – they cover for each other. We increased the hours of people 2 days a week to ensure continuous cover, made a change of pattern to cover activities."

One manager emphasised the importance of encouraging staff to become actively involved in their own scheduling and time management:

> "The main thing is to let the managers you're managing become involved in the scheduling or prioritisation. Since I've started this, a few of my people are now working more reasonable hours and are therefore more effective."

The ability to recognise and provide support when employees are struggling with their workloads was also seen as crucial. Rather surprisingly a number of managers suggested that they actually cover for their staff if they are struggling:

> "I provide personal support to people, doing their job when they're struggling, so I dig in and do it myself or negotiate a contractor or renegotiate timing."

However, others stressed that they were unable to set up processes and meetings within their teams because they felt they had: ' simply not time and no support for this.'

How managers enable balance

Allowing and encouraging flexibility is a crucial way that managers at Penna Consulting enable balance. Managers' strategies for enabling balance differed significantly depending on the type of staff they managed.

Administrative staff

Administrative staff have to generally cover a core number of hours and man the phones but within these limits there are a number of examples of flexible and creative working:

- There are many instances of part-time contracts, reduced hours, job-share to cope with family commitments.
- One manager put forward a proposal to his part-time administrative staff that they should work mornings rather than 3 days per weeks – however, his team brought forward a counter-proposal and that was accepted without issue.
- An employee who had returned from maternity leave wanted the month of August off as unpaid leave. The first reaction of her manager was to say no but he soon changed his mind because it meant keeping a valuable employee which would be beneficial to the organisation.
- A member of an administration team wanted to reduce her hours and days due to childcare commitments – she took a less senior post and exchanged roles with another member of the team.

Professional staff

Consultants have to work the hours that suit the client but when they are not working on projects flexibility is encouraged:

- One manager referred to a recent issue regarding bereavement. A team member who lost their parent recently was given 3 months off and worked from home for 6 months.
- One manager with family commitments feels able to start late so that he can take his children to school.
- Other managers encourage staff to work from home whenever possible:

  "A lot of my staff commute, one member of my team works at home a day a week, he lives a long distance away so it is a big win for him."

  "I allow them to work from home, I allow them to work from any office they wish, I have provided them with the technology to interact effectively from where they are, all with the caveat that we maintain the closely knit nature of our team culture."

However, some managers are dubious about allowing staff flexibility:

"One member of staff regularly works late and then takes it upon himself to turn up the next day at noon. There is a need for discipline and covering office hours. I wasn't happy and ended up saying it was unacceptable and we argued."

Associates

There is a great deal of informal flexibility with the management / self-management of associates (people who carry out contract work for the organisation but are not full-time employees)

A lot of the associates have appointments with individuals, and schedule it on days that suit them. There is a 'degree of unspoken arrangement': managers work with them to meet their lifestyle so long as they commit to the organisation when they are needed:

> "There is a relationship, with contractors, if they say they won't be available for the next couple of months, that's OK with me. Some managers would say I need you and if you're not available now, that's the end of the relationship. I don't take that view; they can decide when they're working. We have an understanding, I can say if I'm really busy, 'will you help me and they will reciprocate.'"

Organisational context

A strong theme that emerged from the research at Penna was a belief that the organisation empowered and encouraged individuals to take control of their own work-life balance needs. It was also emphasised that the culture, values and ethos of Penna Consulting recognises work-life balance and that people are specifically recruited in managerial positions who share such values. Respondents referred to sentiments such as 'autonomy' 'respect' and 'genuine delegation.'

When asked about the organisation's general attitude to work-life balance, the majority of respondents confirmed the belief that it is a strong 'value:'

> "Listening to the directors, they are committed and very conscious that helping people to achieve work-life balance is very important for the health of the business."

However, it is also clear that in many cases it is still an aspiration rather than a reality:

> "It is something the organisation is very keen on – aspires to the idea. However, in reality it is very difficult to achieve with the extreme pressures of work."

Some managers feel that the organisation is not acting quickly enough and that not enough support is being given to the enthusiastic and committed workforce:

> "This is a busy organisation in general, and people are passionate and committed. People are driving themselves harder and we ought to take more steps to say that more support is available."

Some respondents felt that the mentality 'the job must be done at the end of the day' would always come first regardless of work-life needs.

Support

Senior management support for work-life balance initiatives and practices seems to vary throughout the organisation. A number of managers emphasise the strong relationship they have with their area management. One manager in particular considers himself to be extremely lucky in that respect:

"I get a lot of support from the overall regional manager – I'm lucky. He takes a good approach to team building and value to the individual. This varies from department to department. However, within my department there are lots of interactions - lunch at people's houses and plenty of social events outside work."

"I have a manager I report to and we have chats about things, but nothing formal is in place."

"Organisational support for managers – nothing official – I learn from my relationship with my manager and then use this example for my own team. My manager deals with work-life balance issues on a case-by-case basis."

However, other managers (Accounts, IT) feel a definite lack of support from senior management, which impinges upon their independence:

"I thought that when I was employed to be a manager I would be able to set up these systems and team meetings but I am not given that freedom – the pressure of work is constant and the clear message being given by senior managers is that work output is paramount."

Respondents emphasised the need for clear guidance from the top of the organisation to actually acknowledge and reinforce their support:

"Communication is very important – we need to feel that senior management see things a certain way – they need to be role models"

Managers do not have a framework of policies to guide them but they are encouraged to respect their employees and treat them as individuals:

"The culture in the company is relaxed, we treat individuals as individuals."

"There is nothing specifically offered, no formalised policy but they do allow me the autonomy to agree these principles with the people who work for me. I'm not sure of anything that could be offered that would be better than what we do."

However, one manager who came from an organisation with a completely different culture found adapting to such a relaxed and open environment problematic. She would have benefited from more formal systems of support such as a forum for managers and internal change management courses.

Policies / initiatives
Respondents generally demonstrated a lack of awareness of official organisation work-life balance policies and initiatives:

"I'm not aware of any policies regarding work-life balance in place"

"There are no concrete policies – initiatives there if you choose to take them up"

However a number of informal processes were highlighted:
- Flexibility to work from home and other office locations
- Career breaks/ sabbaticals
- Recruitment of part-time employees and job-shares
- Flexibility for employees who've been away to come back and work part-time

- Assistance with study for career progress
- Recruitment of a range of different people
- New flexible benefits package

Respondents also felt that initiatives were developed on an ad hoc basis out of a need by a particular individual.

It was stressed that a certain amount of flexibility was inherent to the organisation and there was a concern that formal processes might constrict that:

> *"We don't have a manual/handbook, which is a good thing. As long as there are no inhibitors (setting work hours could be an inhibiting factor)"*

> *"It is important not to try to treat everyone the same."*

> *"There is no need to create more formalised policies, we're more interested in building a culture."*

However the majority of respondents felt that something more was needed and that the introduction of guidelines relating to work-life balance issues would be beneficial to all:

> *"I do not believe that there should be rigid policies but I would like to see guidelines which suggest that certain practices and types of behaviour are ok to do. Guidelines would also be useful as part of the induction process – and as a means of updating existing staff."*

There was also concern that the newly emerging structure of the organisation did not convey a coherent message:

> *"I would like to see a little more formality for equity's sake Penna have been involved in a number of acquisitions and haven't fused the policies across."*

Human Resources

One participant suggested that in the past Human Resources had produced good guidelines and booklets for employees. However, in general respondents displayed a large degree of uncertainty regarding Human Energy's new role within the organisation. One manager commented that the support was simply not enough and that communications so far had been restricted. However a number of respondents referred enthusiastically to the new flexible benefits scheme which has been introduced to the organisation.

Performance management

Most respondents emphasised the personal development nature of their performance management system:

> *"It's about training and developing people and developing ways of improving effectiveness – 360 Degree Feedback is used so that employees can have their say."*

Although some respondents felt that issues regarding work-life balance are often discussed at performance management meetings it is not actually a formal part of the process and is quite often deemed unnecessary due to the close knit nature of the teams:

"Because we all work together so closely, we already know about the issues before such meetings and many of the issues are addressed. Work-life balance is dealt with on a daily basis."

However, some respondents also felt that performance management does not happen enough due to time constraints and work stress. They expressed a desire for the performance management process to formally incorporate work-life balance issues.

Personal work-life balance

Respondents inevitably felt that at times they had to work long hours and felt pressure to be in the office at certain times – due to their managerial status. However individuals also felt that there was a large degree of flexibility also:

"I have a good balance on the whole – I have to work longer hours sometimes but there is flexibility when needed."

A number of managers seemed to be recognising the need for personal balance and consciously trying to ensure it:

"I've worked very hard this last year to change it, to negotiate with my boss, to understand that If I can't get something done in a given day or week, to ask myself if its that big a deal."

This seems to be due to the fact that managers are worried about being taken for granted, have learnt from previous jobs and have a sense of changing priorities.

One manager talked of a number of extra-curriculum activities (such as being a governor at a FE College and a council member at a local hospice whilst also studying for an MA in HR practice), which were fully supported by the organisation. However there are managers who feel that the majority of their time is spent at work and feel pressured to work longer hours. One manager in particular started coming in earlier throughout a busy period and then felt he was expected to keep that up. However for others, working extended hours is a conscious decision to invest extra time and commitment into the organisation.

Role model

A high proportion of the managers interviewed were clearly conscious of their status as role models to their staff and suggested that they 'tried' to set a good example:

"People need to see you as real as well – you need to be credible and doing well at your job."

However, many felt that quite often work pressures get in the way and their commitment to work can influence others strongly:

"I know that I am seen to be too much work focused. Influenced by my working style – team members will go the extra mile."

Future initiatives

- Respondents feel that Penna is currently a diverse and dispersed organisation –there is a need to improve communication and support systems throughout.

- The managers interviewed also feel that HE need to talk to employees in a structured way – an ideal vehicle for this is the annual employee attitude survey. The organisation has a lively and enthusiastic workforce who should be involved and made to feel part of the work-life balance guidelines / initiatives.

- A Forum for managers with HE involvement was suggested as being useful for the development of work-life balance in addition to 'training days, workshops, online forum, bi-annual meetings to follow training days.'

- A better understanding and more realistic view of deadlines from higher management was emphasised by many. There needs to be an attempt to change the current situation (the majority of work is often received just before the deadline) and understand how different departments impact upon one another.

- Respondents also felt that Penna should take a lead in the work-life balance arena – work with clients and investigate what other organisations do. There was a feeling that people should also be rewarded for working hard and that more creative solutions should be driven from the top. It was also suggested that more social events should be arranged to unite the workforce.

Napp Pharmaceuticals

The Napp Pharmaceutical Group is part of a world-wide organisation of pharmaceutical companies, which have ex-company sales in the region of $1.5 billion. Napp's expertise lies in innovative controlled release technology to develop specialised medicines, especially for the relief of severe pain. It is a relatively young company, which although established in the 1920s, was brought together under the current management in 1966.

The company's investment in people has increased steadily, with 700 people currently employed by Napp, compared to 180 in 1975. Approximately a third of the workforce are graduates. One of the challenges associated with this growth, is the fact that the company is located in Cambridge, an area of low unemployment. The pressures of attracting and retaining skilled employees in an area with such fierce competition, make it critical for organisations to differentiate themselves in order to become an employer of choice. Within a specialised industry such as Napp, there is a real drive to retain employees in order that the skills, knowledge and experience which accumulate during their time with the company, are not lost. This is certainly true within the Productions Operation, which was the focus of our research, where a key aim is long-term retention. Given the average length of service within the department, which currently stands at 10 years, there are clearly a number of factors which are contributing to its very successful record in this area.

As indicated above, the research was conducted within one department of Napp – the productions operation. The research is limited to discussions of the situation within the production arm only. This is a substantial part of the business however comprising 25% of Napp personnel and includes technicians, manufacturing staff and the personnel within the filling and packaging hall. Although manufacturing is heavily dominated by male staff, technical staff those employed within the filling and packaging hall and management are made up of equal numbers of male and female employees.

As with all of the case studies, the research focused on the experiences of the management team. All 10 managers were interviewed, providing a diverse perspective which ranged from the Director of Production, to the shift managers.

The Production Operation and Work-Life Balance

The department is focused around the needs of the shop floor production operation, which operates on a 5 day, 24 hour basis with 5 shift patterns. This presents its own challenges in the area of work-life balance as the production line has to be manned with the required number of personnel during these shifts. This may potentially mean that there is little flexibility on the shop floor for emergencies that may arise or little opportunity to change the hours of work to suit changing circumstances. It also has implications for the management team and support staff who are there to support the production line.

Working long hours is not an issue on the shop floor as when one shift finishes the next shift team is there waiting to take over. Although there is a requirement on occasion to work over-time this is paid and is done on a voluntary basis.

At present the organisation has no specific policies around work-life balance. It does however recognise its importance and within the Productions Operation the link between productivity at work and a satisfactory balance between work and other areas of life is felt to be critical, particularly given the level of responsibility required at all stages of drug production. To support this, the department is due to launch a new Lifestyle Training Programme of which issues around work-life balance are an important element. The focus within the department therefore is on educating people to look at their own work-life balance and take personal responsibility. Despite the recognition that work-life balance is a critical issue for the organisation, work-life balance itself is not a subject that gets much discussion.

The department makes high demands of people and has high expectations of them but this is set within a culture of high trust and support. The long-term service of many employees, and the relatively small size of the company was highlighted by a number of managers as creating a situation in which the majority of employees within Production are still striving to help Napp deliver the best products and make the most profits. There is a strong belief that if you look after the company's interests, the company will look after you. The fact that all of the directors know each individuals name on the shop floor, was noted as a critical factor in providing people with a sense of who they are working for, which was felt to contribute a lot towards engendering commitment. This emphasis on people was perceived to run throughout the organisation, right up to the owners.

The culture within Production

The culture was consistently described as being very people focused. Managers reported that there was a '*genuine strive to care for people within the organisation*'. This was felt to be reflective of the length of service of the management team, and the role of senior managers was highlighted as an important enabler of the culture. The senior management team within the organisation consists of managers who have moved up through the ranks, which has helped to create some stability in the culture. Managers felt that cultural considerations were recognised as very important when recruiting into the senior management team and that due to the effectiveness of the organisations' succession planning process, it is not often that someone from outside with different values is recruited in at a senior level.

The fact that the company is privately owned, was noted as providing a strong advantage in that the owners are people oriented which then has a big effect on the culture.

Working smarter not harder

The culture within Napp as a whole is not one where there is an expectation that people will work long hours and this was felt to be very reflective of the culture within Production. The managers set hours are 8.30 to 4.30 and very often these are the hours that are worked. The working day itself was set in response to traffic issues raised by employees, which resulted in a shift from the traditional 9 to 5 day to the current arrangement. Although there is very little pressure to work extra hours, there are clear expectations around the working hours whereby you are expected to be at your *workplace* at 8.30 rather than entering the building, and leaving your *workplace* at 4.30 rather than leaving the building.

The lack of a long hours culture was perceived as very positive by managers and recognised as being very different to other companies in which they may have worked. There was a recognition that some people did work quite long hours within Production but that this was due

more to personal choice than to organisational pressure. This was summed up with the comment that, '*There is no stigma attached to leaving your desk on time and although some people do work longer this is down to personal choice*'. This then sets the culture for those lower down and sends messages out about the working hours expected. Managers felt that their responsibilities outside of work were recognised and that unreasonable demands were not a common experience within the department. Managers in turn don't feel that they put pressure on their staff to work long hours.

It was felt that at different levels there are different levels of pressure. From the shop floor up to team leader level there is no pressure to work extra hours if you don't want to. Any extra hours are paid overtime and so it's up to the individual, although when overtime is needed there is not usually a shortage of volunteers. At managerial level there is an expectation that you will put in longer hours if needed – you don't just walk out the door. But in general if the workload is such that long hours are required on a regular basis, then the workload will be assessed.

The Director of Production is clear that he does not want a long hours culture within his department and to reinforce this he explicitly tells people that they don't need to work long hours to get on in the organisation. He personally doesn't feel under any pressure from his manager to work long hours, although she will often work weekends. He stated that if a job is consistently requiring the individual to be at their desk longer than the working day, then the issue is up for discussion and a solution will be reached which may involve either reviewing the workload or allocating more resources.

The shift managers however did feel that there was increasing pressure to lengthen their working day due to the fact that meetings were being arranged outside of their shift. They accepted that extra hours were sometimes needed and it is important to be flexible but the number of extra hours they were putting in seemed to be steadily increasing. This was on top of the extra half an hour they already worked each day to provide time for an in-depth hand-over. The individuals involved did recognise however that managing this was their responsibility and that they needed to make people aware of the impact that the timetabling of meetings had on their work-life balance.

A culture of communication and trust
Communication is always a key factor in creating or blocking an open culture, and within Napp as a whole but particularly within Production, open two-way communication was perceived as critical to success. It was noted that '*if someone has a problem, we will discuss it before it becomes a major issue*'. This was reflected in the discussions on workload which are reported later.

A key word used by all of the management team in relation to the departments' culture was trust. It was felt that this was essential due to the nature of the business where each mistake is so critical that the culture has been built around the need for people to admit their mistakes so that they can be caught early rather than having mistakes hidden. One manager noted that most mistakes are management problems anyway, either process problems or system problems rather than individual problems. They should therefore be used as learning opportunities rather than for punishment.

Despite this high level of trust, the need for clear boundaries was recognised and it was noted that if the trust does break down, then the system will act quite harshly.

A focus on interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal relations within the department were highly valued and the importance of socialising with each other was noted as being very important to support the open culture. The management team had just been on a weekend away team-building event, which had created a huge degree of openness within the team such that '*anyone can say anything up to Director level – there's nothing that needs to be hidden'.*

The long service adds to these relationships as well as emphasising their importance. A key driver for the culture is the drive within Production to create long-term teams, and it was recognised that within more transitory parts of the business, the culture may be much more performance driven. Within Production it was felt that if turnover increases then the amount of mistakes increase, as the in-depth knowledge about the process is lost. The people focus within the department, including the ability to balance work and home, was held up as a key contributor to this long-term retention record.

A number of managers noted that there was an expectation on them to develop strong interpersonal relationships with members of their team. This was such that managers needed to know not just people's name and work circumstances but also to have a depth of knowledge about each individual such that they understood and were aware of their personal circumstances as well.

This expectation was confirmed by the Director of Production, who held a strong belief that people should be treated as individuals at work. To reinforce this he had had discussions with new members of his management team to set guidelines for effectiveness, which included not only knowing each member of the production team by name but also knowing the name of their partner. This sends out strong messages about the level of rapport that managers are expected to have with their staff. It also ensures that staff members recognise the level of interest that their manager has in them - as an individual rather than just an employee. Additionally it should mean that when difficulties do arise outside of work, the individual feels confident that they can discuss the impact of this with their manager.

The Director stated that the worst scenario was for an individual to have a problem in their home life and for the manager to have little understanding about either them as a person or their personal history. Without this level of knowledge issues of mistrust or secrecy start to creep in.

People-focused within clear boundaries

Despite this caring side to the culture it was also recognised that at times it can be viewed as 'viscous'. The emphasis however is on the manager to have discussions with the individuals to get them thinking about why they are so susceptible to illness and whether there are any changes they can implement to prevent this occurring as frequently in the future. This will be supported by the Lifestyle Training which will educate people about health and wellbeing issues.

The importance of cultural role models

Managers recognised the importance of the image that they portray as role models. They also felt that the example set by their Director who doesn't work long hours, set the right tone for the rest of the department. However a couple of managers felt that there were pressures on managers to be 'whiter than white' and that therefore it was less acceptable for managers to leave early for a doctors appointment as that would be noticed.

The Director himself was very aware of his responsibilities as a role model and tried to be very clear in communicating what he stood for and what he expected his management team to stand for. One way in which he did this was through the use of storytelling at the beginning of a meeting. This method illustrates the issues being discussed with a personal example, which highlights his views on the issue and what his beliefs and expectations are around it. He is also very keen that the management team as a whole live up to being role models and measures this through monthly reviews which ensure that he is talking with managers all the time and is aware of the issues they are facing and how they are dealing with things.

Managing workloads

Communication was felt to be the key to managing workloads within the department. Although there is no formal performance appraisal system, each individual has regular meetings with their manager to discuss workloads and expectations. Within these meetings it is the responsibility of the individual to raise any concerns that they may have about their current workload and this is clearly acceptable behaviour within the team, with one manager rather matter-of-factly stating that '*if our workload gets too big we just openly discuss it*'. This view was confirmed by the Director of Production who said that he made it clear that anyone could come and talk to him at any time about any issues that were concerning them. This offer had been accepted right down through the department and he stated that these informal discussions were happening all of the time.

To illustrate the management of workloads within the organisation, one manager recalled a conversation she had had with her manager following a period when she had been overloaded. During this discussion she had been told by her manager that extending her working day was not the solution. Instead she was to come forward and talk about the issue which would enable a more effective solution to be achieved.

Managers noted that workloads were constantly looked at without anything being formally documented or written down. During regular discussions with his team, one manager noted that he assesses the pressures which his team are under and tries to understand where these pressures are coming from - having too much to do, ineffective time management, or a lack of the necessary skills and knowledge. The solution may differ therefore from training and coaching through to enabling them to just say no.

The management team recognised their role in setting realistic deliverables for their team. One manager drew the distinction between targets and deadlines whereby deadlines have to be met and targets are negotiable. Within his team the majority of work was to targets with a much smaller number of deadlines and although there was always a desire to meet targets, it was important to recognise that these could be moved if needed. The managers' role in planning the teams' workload was also recognised as key and was a key focus of the regular meetings between managers and their staff.

'*The culture is such that, people are aware of how much work people do and if it seems excessive then it is compensated for with extra people or shared out in other ways*'. There was very much a sense that people should be managed on an everyday basis, with issues dealt with as they arise rather than relying on a yearly appraisal system. Recently the production department had been stretched to meet increasing demand and in recognition of this the shift manager position had been introduced.

Managers felt that although it was difficult to admit that you were overloaded due to the sense of failure it can create, the production team have worked together for a long enough period to enable these open discussions. The work relationships which have been established over a relatively long period of time, again therefore play a key part in helping people to raise their concerns.

The shift managers in conjunction with the Personnel Department recognised their responsibility in monitoring and recording over-time both for commercial reasons and for the welfare of the individual. This is obviously also dictated by the Working Time Directive but there is a definite drive to reduce the amount of over-time within the department which necessitates a review of workloads and procedures.

The majority of training within the department takes place within working time and there is always a drive to ensure that this is the case.

Work-life balance during times of change

The Production Operation is currently going through a major change in the shift pattern, with a move towards a double-day shift arrangement. The implementation of this change is perceived to have been handled very positively, as the new pattern has been allowed to evolve over time, creating '*quite a painless exercise'* for the managers who have had to manage the change process. Although the reasons for change were clearly based around business needs, the emphasis on people during the process of change was so strong that one manager stated that '*change is nearly always driven from the people angle*'. Clearly a primary aim for the organisation was to try and get a win-win situation – whereby they met business demands but retained key people at the same time.

The managers interviewed believed that senior managers within the organisation were very proactive in relation to change. This forward thinking approach meant that the organisation took the time to look ahead and identify any potential negative impacts of change on employees. The change is then managed to minimise these impacts.

In the case of the current changes to the shift pattern, employees have been given the option of changing shift or of remaining on their current pattern. Managers stated that there was no pressure to change shift, as the needs of the current employees would always be accommodated. The old shift pattern would be phased out as the current employees left, but until then, the operation would not move entirely to a double-day shift. This is despite the fact that naturally it is better for the business if the change is across the board.

This flexibility around the process of change contrasted starkly with the last big change in shift patterns within the organisation. The memory of this change was clearly very much alive, despite it having occurred almost a decade ago. In the past the change was imposed, with individuals given the option of either changing shifts or leaving the company. Despite the negative fall-out of the previous change process, it was recognised that if the business needs demanded it, then this process would be repeated. In the current situation however, the retention of skilled staff was a key requirement of the change.

In general, the management of workloads during change was felt to be positively handled. Managers were given clear milestones, which on the whole provided realistic goals within realistic time frames. Alongside this however managers were clear that they have a

responsibility to their staff, to only agree to things which are achievable. This approach was reported to be very much the way things are done, with change being introduced in partnership rather than by force.

Flexibility

Flexibility was clearly recognised as important within the department. Managers noted that they were prepared to put in extra hours when it was needed (which tended to be occasionally rather than regularly) out of a commitment to the organisation rather than because it was always expected. In turn however, managers did not expect their staff to follow their example and particularly for the production workers, any extra time was paid overtime. On one level, managers expressed a desire that their reports show some flexibility in relation to their hours and work extra when the job demanded it. However this was balanced against a view that if this happens consistently then it is an issue of workload and needs to be addressed.

Although long hours are not an issue on the shop floor, there are clearly still issues of work-life balance which require a flexible approach to management. This flexibility, to enable people with good reasons such as medical appointments or family sickness to have time off work will be managed between the shift managers and the production manager. They noted that it was very rare that this flexibility was not provided as long as it met the business needs as well.

Within the department, there is an approved absence procedure, which is managed by the individual manager. Alternatively individuals can change shift if this is more appropriate. It was felt that the make-up of the workforce, which particularly on the twilight shift consists of working mums, necessitated a flexible approach. One manager described a recent case where a member of staff needed to take two weeks off to look after her children while her husband went into hospital. Rather than having to take it all as holiday, it was agreed that she could work a 5 day shift on returning to work, rather than her 4 day shift, to make up the number of days she had taken off.

The issue of abuse of trust in relation to this flexibility was recognised as being an important one for managers. It was felt that managing this was a key part of being a good people manager – '*the skill lies in knowing who is being genuine and when*'. This knowledge was felt to grow out of the strong interpersonal relationships that managers are encouraged to have with their staff. Good managers within the company are recognised as those who have very well developed people skills and who can accept differences between people and manage accordingly. It was recognised that there will always be people who 'need managing' but the view was that these are isolated cases. Each case is therefore assessed on an individual basis.

In isolated cases however when people do abuse the system, the importance of sending out the right messages about how this will be dealt with, has been emphasised by management adopting a robust approach.

Although an initial reaction to abuse of trust may be to clamp down and tighten the system, on reflection it has been recognised that the vast majority of people can't be trusted. Procedures may need to be tightened up but it is felt that the overall approach to flexibility should remain the same. This is a powerful example, as it demonstrates the stability of a culture which is sufficiently ingrained that it is not compromised when times get tough.

Areas for improvement

Innovative thinking to accommodate different ways of working

There were clearly issues within the department about different patterns of working. At present there is only one person within Production who works part-time although there are also a couple of people on the old twilight shift who work 4 days a week. Within the organisation as a whole the number of people working a different pattern to the traditional 5 full days a week, can be counted on one hand and the use of patterns other than part-time working i.e. job sharing are non-existent. This was reflected in the fact that there was very little knowledge within the Production management team about the possible different ways of working which could be introduced. With all of the managers, conversations about different ways of working tended to focus on flexi-time and it was difficult to even get them to consider the possibility of methods such as job-sharing or term-time working etc.

The negative attitude towards different ways of working was centred around a belief that person A can't do their job if person B isn't there. There was a deeply held view that within production, the needs of the production line are critical and that support functions should be available as and when they are needed to support what is happening on the ground. It was stated that production is a very day-to-day operation and that the work of the department is very much tied to events that happen on the shop floor. The main issue which was repeatedly raised in relation for example to part-time working, was the problem of the individual not being around when they are needed which was felt to be potentially damaging to the production process. Although there was some acknowledgement that this was not an insolvable problem, there was also a recognition that the organisation was doing little to come up with innovative solutions.

Although it was acknowledged that different ways of working may be feasible within other parts of the organisation, the managers within Production clearly felt it caused difficult issues in respect of their part of the business.

Consideration of work-life balance issues when using Outlook

The need for discipline in relation to the scheduling of meetings was noted by a number of managers as being a concern. It was felt that currently there was a lack of consideration of work-life balance issues when meetings were arranged and that this was being exacerbated by the recent introduction of Outlook, which enables meetings to be arranged without any discussions among the relevant parties. The ability to schedule meetings through an electronic diary system was perceived as removing some of the individuals' control over their diary. It was felt that individuals needed to be more up-front in managing their diaries through actively blocking out time for lunch etc. and making it clear when they were and weren't available – particularly if they were working shifts.

Mixed messages about over-time

There was an issue within the department that production was moving towards a seven day operation which highlighted some differences in views within the management team. For the shift managers there was a sense that this extended week was having a negative impact on their personal life as it meant that work was encroaching into their weekends. Having worked shifts during the week, weekends were seen as the main part of the week in which they could have a personal life. Managers stated that they needed to have some boundaries around their work life and that after putting in extra hours during the week, weekends were beyond their boundaries.

However a slightly different perspective emerged from the Director of Production who reported that he had recently made a statement about seven day working. His view was that overtime should be minimised both for business reasons but also for individual health and lifestyle reasons and therefore he was keen to reduce the amount of overtime that was currently occurring. He had made it clear to shift managers that if overtime was being done at the weekend then he expected them to be in the building to supervise it. This was done to try and break the culture of catching up on a Saturday, which seemed to prevail at present. His view was that the shift managers have control over whether overtime is done or not and therefore if by authorising overtime it had a negative impact on their work-life balance, they may change their motivation towards finding smarter ways of working.

There was clearly a need for further discussion about ways in which the process could ensure smarter ways of working and whether the workload was feasible within the current working week.

Summary of the case study

The situation within the Production Operation of Napp Pharmaceuticals was interesting, given the emphasis within the department on supporting the shop floor production workers. The reliance on set shifts meant that working hours were clearly defined for those on the production line. This was also applied to support staff, who were expected to be available during key periods in case problems arose. Despite this relative rigidity of hours, there was a high degree of flexibility within the department to accommodate emerging work-life balance needs.

The case within Napp therefore seems to be rather different to what might be expected. In addressing issues of work-life balance, many organisations introduce formal policies about different ways of working. They then hit the challenge of creating a culture which is open to flexibility in such a way that it is not limited to these formal arrangements but can be extended on more of an informal ad-hoc basis. Napp seemed to show an alternative approach whereby the culture was highly conducive to informal flexibility and yet could not accept more formal arrangements.

It appeared that in many cases, the degree of resistance was due to a lack of knowledge and experience of different ways of working. The possibility of accommodating people's needs to work differently did not seem to be an issue which had sparked much discussion within the department although the view was expressed that such policies would be attractive to a number of current employees. This was an issue which emerged as one for potential further exploration by the organisation, to ascertain whether there are more innovative ways of working which can enable flexibility on a more formal basis.

In relation to the culture within the department however, there are clearly valuable lessons to be learnt. The role modelling by senior managers, the openness of communication at all levels, the emphasis on personal relationships and the degree of trust and respect were all features of a culture which was unanimously felt to be very people focussed. It is recognised within the research literature that an organisations culture is the real enabler of work-life balance and this was clearly an area which Napp excelled in.

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