

Work-Personal Life Harmonisation: Visions and Pragmatic Strategies for Change

Summary of reflections arising from a Scenario Meeting, March 23-24 2004

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The harmonisation of paid work with other parts of people's lives is a central issue for many societies and people today. As more and more people (but by no means all) work longer or more intensely – be it because of perceived or absolute economic necessity, a response to societal or increasingly demanding workplace expectations, or because they enjoy and derive fulfilment from paid work – key questions are emerging:

- What does such a lop-sided distribution between paid work and other parts of life do to people and societies in terms of equity or well-being?
- How does a lop-sided distribution between paid work and other parts of life impact on the sustainability of people, families and communities in terms of both changing demographics or a sense of dignity they are able to experience?
- What are current working patterns and expectations doing to time and energy available for family responsibilities, care and connectedness with others, leisure, and time to simply think, rest and refresh the spirit?
- And what opportunities are available for people who have or wish to dedicate time and energy to other non-paid parts of life?

These questions link with many issues connected to the global economic context in which our lives are unfolding (Rapoport, Lewis, Bailyn and Gambles, in press). In research exploring work-personal life harmonisation¹ in India, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, the UK and the US, we have heard:

'There used to be an imbalance towards the life side...the change has been positive from the consumer point of view...but there has been a reverse with an imbalance towards the work side. I feel kind of alienated...and maybe that, too, is why I have begun to concentrate on work so much' (Indian woman)

¹ With a grant to the Institute of Family and Environmental Research from the Ford Foundation, Rhona Rapoport, Suzan Lewis and Richenda Gambles have been engaged in an international project *Work-Personal Life Integration: Looking backwards to go forwards*. This project focuses on thinking about what has happened over the past 40-50 years with the hope of learning something about how to proceed.

'People increasingly form relationships through the internet because they have no time – they are always working' (Japanese man)

'Society is changing, but the way we think about working life hasn't. Everyone knows the present organisation of work does not work, but nobody is ready to translate this into actual practice, despite this having serious implications for gender equality and life satisfaction' (Dutch man)

'I think people are more disconnected because they are just too busy. I hear everyone say that there is not enough time to meet friends, to be with our families' (Norwegian woman)

'I do have friends, but hardly. I am in the office at weekends. That is my life. I don't want to work so hard, but I have found my work environment is my second home, even Sundays. I haven't been to church this year' (South African woman)

'I see distributed work, distributed friendships, basically an increasingly atomized world, and I think people are all feeling increasingly lonely' (British man)

'There are two trends in response to the current situation of long hours and workplace intensity: a return to traditional gender roles in families, or having no children. It is not that people are actively choosing these options, they just don't have other options at the moment' (American man)

These quotes illustrate some of the current discontents people from around the world voice about harmonising the many parts of their lives: discontents connected to a current lop-sided distribution of time and energy given to paid work. These discontents are exacerbated because work-personal life harmonisation connects with a number of other issues felt across a range of countries. Experiences of harmonising paid work with the rest of life are both affected by and affect falling birth rates; the emergence of stress-related sickness and epidemics such as HIV/AIDS; changing needs and wishes of men and women and relationships between them; changing family structures and values; changing practices and value given to paid work; and the current global economy that brings affluence to some, poverty to many and tends to encourage long and intensive working practices.

Work-personal life harmonisation issues are experienced in the context of different cultural expectations, levels of government, and workplace and family support (or lack of it). They are also experienced across countries with varying economic and social contexts and conditions.

But many of the core issues are similar, particularly as globalisation and technology have made the world more interdependent. For many people, the push for ever more 'efficient' (in the sense of less expensive) but not necessarily effective ways of working has led to increasingly long and/or intensive working hours and more intensive lives. Issues relating to the harmonisation of paid work with personal and family lives are central. They can not be considered as purely personal, or as just family, employer or even national concerns. They are crucial issues of concern in the unfolding global economy.

Where are countries now?

In order to optimise the experiences of people and societies in relation to work-personal life harmonisation, it is essential to understand where countries currently are in their evolutions of understanding and support for these issues. Here we summarise briefly 'where different countries are now' in relation to work-personal life harmonisation based on our research findings.

India

- Growing numbers of women in formal work in recent decades have posed challenges for ways in which paid work is harmonised with other parts of life such as care responsibilities.
- Few legislative or welfare measures exist to help men and women harmonise paid work with personal lives.
- The opening of the economy has led to the importation of outsourced work and has increased the intensity and pressures of paid work for many people.
- Traditional extended families, which have previously offered so much work-personal life harmonisation support, are giving way to nuclear families in some areas and being challenged in others. This contributes to general life intensity.
- Concerns about 'work-life balance' have emerged in this context, but workplace responses tend to be based on a US model of initiatives to support people to be able to work more rather than less.
- 'Work-life balance' is seen as a luxury issue for a tiny majority and economic development is perceived as more urgent than 'social well-being' and 'people' issues.

Japan

- A low birth rate and ageing population partly reflect reactions to and causes of work-personal life harmonisation discontents. These have led to public policies for care leaves.
- But gendered caring assumptions and high gender earning gaps remain: this perpetuates many inequities.

- Working environments are also very intensive, which poses work-personal life harmonisation issues for men as well as women.
- In this context, stress, rising divorce rate and relationship difficulties are occurring (as they are in many other countries).
- There are drives for 'family-friendly' policies but implementation gaps persist: change has not been systemic.
- Debates are emerging about how to change men's behaviour and workplace culture and practices, which highlight recognition that change so far has been insufficient.
- We hear of emerging hope and optimism for change in relation to work-personal life harmonisation – linked with responses to low birth rates and economic stagnation.
- Some unions are pushing for more rights for time out of work than wage increases, and advertisements are emerging that emphasise a more domestic male role.

The Netherlands

- Although this has traditionally been a single breadwinner society, a one and a half earner 'norm' has emerged creating new issues for work-personal life harmonisation.
- But although gender inequities remain, there is limited concern about under representation of women in top jobs.
- We hear many women 'prefer' current part time working patterns but would like men to work less as a strategy for easing work-personal life harmonisation.
- Some people also speak of the emergence of progressive forms of 'feminine' leadership (as in other countries). These are regarded as softer and more collaborative management techniques, which, it is felt, may alter the ways that people are able to combine paid work with personal life.
- Progressive legislation also supports shared parenting as a way of easing work-personal life and gender equity concerns. Innovative Government initiatives to stimulate change in organisations and society are emerging.
- But global pressures often undermine such initiatives because of perceptions that competitiveness rests on 'commitment' through long hours in some contexts, and the general intensification of work
- In this context, burnout, sickness and disability leave, and early retirement issues are emerging, highlighting the problems that a lop-sided focus on paid work can have on people, workplaces and society.

Norway

- High female labour market participation, supported by state policies including the 'daddy month' leave, reflects attention to work-personal life harmonisation issues.

- A 'state feminism' approach characterises much of the initiatives concerned with gender equity and work-personal life harmonisation. But we hear that emerging shifts in emphasis to enable women to care at home are seen as moving back from this position.
- Despite all the support for work-personal life harmonisation, men and women report feeling pressurised to 'have and do it all' in paid work and family life.
- In this context there is rising disability, stress, and divorce, as in many other countries.
- Despite all the legislative support, there currently appears to be a lack of systemic and cultural change in workplace environments in relation to work-personal life harmonisation.
- We hear that globalisation 'productivity' pressures undermine progressive policies and a focus on equity.
- Some people think gender equity which is so connected with work-personal life harmonisation, is not increasing. But others feel Norway is entering a new phase of development in relation to gender equity issues.

South Africa

- The new 'post-apartheid' constitution emphasises equality. But compared to race, we hear there is less focus on gender equality issues.
- There is no national debate on work-personal life harmonisation but individual awareness of the issues is emerging as are organisational initiatives in some contexts to deal with this.
- A legacy of truth and reconciliation, in the context of race equality, highlights awareness about the importance of processes, rather than a quick fix, in enacting change.
- But in the context of gender we also hear that current approaches focus on increasing numbers of women in paid work rather than changing society to fit changing work-personal life harmonisation needs.
- We also hear that at the moment, work-personal life harmonisation and gender issues are overshadowed by other concerns: AIDS, unemployment, crime, poverty.
- There is backlash among some employers and groups of people to equity considerations and affirmative action promoting blacks and women in the workplace that can be constructed as threatening 'efficiency'.
- In this context, we hear of a 'brain drain' as people leave the country in search of 'better' opportunities.
- However, we hear that people are beginning to make some connections between work-personal life harmonisation and many of these issues.

The UK

- Although the growth of women in the labour market in the past half century has been associated with developments of 'family friendly' or 'work-life balance' initiatives they still largely focus on individual solutions rather than systemic change. Initiatives also tend to be geared towards mothers, even though fathers need these initiatives too.
- There has been minimal compliance with EU Directives relating to the reconciliation of paid employment with family life, although the Government has recently encouraged voluntary actions by employers by promoting a business case for change.
- Nevertheless long working hours and intensification of work remain and seem to be getting more acute.
- We hear of global 'productivity' pressures, which also affect the extent to which policies for more optimal work-personal life harmonisations are introduced or implemented (as in many countries).
- We also find that flexible working arrangements are often associated with more work not less work (as in many other countries).
- For all the current hype about 'work-life balance' there is a feeling that the debate is feminised and stuck.
- Nevertheless we see some recent movement: Government and pressure groups are raising issues of shared parenting; the provision of care by men as well as women; and the Government is beginning to see this as a key issue relating to social justice.

The US

- Because of minimal state support, corporate led 'work-life' initiatives have emerged to ease the harmonisation of paid work and personal lives as more women have entered the formal paid labour market.
- But as in other countries, these initiatives are often designed to enable men and women to work more rather than less.
- A 'work-life' practitioner profession has emerged but tends to focus on HR organisational policies and initiatives, rather than viewing these as strategic issues more generally. Thus work-personal life harmonisation tends to be marginalised as an issue, as are people making use of any such supports (as in other countries).
- In this context, policies for leaves and diverse working practices are often undermined by intensive working conditions and cultures.
- Pockets of innovative research exploring new ways that work could get done to be more equitable and efficient are emerging (as they are in other countries, such as the UK and the Netherlands for example). But despite these initiatives and the evidence produced

advocating a synergy approach to work-personal life harmonisation, profits are generally considered more important than people.

- Many people say progress feels stuck: in fact we hear there is uncertainty about what progress is in the context of work-personal life harmonisation.

These brief overviews highlight that there have been country specific impetuses for change in relation to work-personal life harmonisation issues. Norway, for example, has been prompted primarily by gender equality concerns; and in recent years, the Netherlands have been prompted by concerns relating to rising workplace stress and costly stress-related sickness leaves. The UK has been influenced of late by EU Directive requirements as well as awareness of the business case for change so as to maximise productivity; and concern over work-personal life harmonisation issues have largely been prompted by falling fertility rates in Japan. In the US, the impetus for change in organisations has been centred on business needs and the need to recruit and retain skilled diverse workers, particularly women, although there is also mounting concern about families (including fathers) among certain pressure groups and researchers. In India, change seems to be more connected with urbanisation and globalisation trends and economic development. And in South Africa we see economic development and business motivations to tackle the 'brain drain', as the rationale for addressing work-personal life harmonisation issues, although HIV/AIDS has prompted growing concern over new ways to combine paid work with other needs and care activities.

But regardless of prime motivations within these societies or levels or types of support made available, our country snapshots highlight that work-personal life harmonisation issues are being felt within all these different contexts. People within all these countries are experiencing work-personal life harmonisation discontents, which have been exacerbated by the global competitive economy. The global economy is not new. But the levels of exposure to it through the mobility of people, money and businesses and growing competition within and between countries, marks a relatively new development. And many people, many workplaces and societies more generally seem to feel powerless to make changes that seem to go against global economic trends that either introduce or develop initiatives to ease the harmonisation of paid work and personal life.

While the routes into looking at these issues are diverse, it seems that core underlying and unresolved tensions are similar in many contexts. No welfare state or society has managed to fully value the unpaid work done in families, primarily by women. Nor has any welfare state or society fully recognised the ways in which diverse personal life experiences and obligations feed into and affect experiences of paid work. These dilemmas are exacerbated by the competitive global economy. The global economic climate perpetuates and exacerbates notions of efficiency that involve fewer people doing more work as well as myths and assumptions that characterise

'ideal workers' as those who can work as though they have few or no responsibilities outside of paid work

In Norway, for example, there is extensive government support and collective ideological commitment to equity between men and women and equality more generally, which seems to help the harmonisation of paid work with personal life. But because of growing competitiveness within workplace environments, people – particularly men – find it difficult to negotiate alternative working arrangements, downshift or take leaves that are formally available. In other countries, such as India or South Africa, there is a feeling that despite some concern about work-personal life issues, it is not possible to implement any radical policies. The need for economic development to deal with many other concerns including widespread poverty is seen as much more pressing and at odds with work-personal life harmonisation strategies. There is a feeling in India and South Africa that 'there is no alternative' to long or intensive working hours if they are to compete or 'develop', despite the implications such an approach has for equity or well-being. In other countries, such as Japan or the US, which have a history of intensive workplace environments, while discontents are also emerging in relation to work-personal life harmonisation, few people feel able to challenge the status quo. They too see 'no alternative'. Many people fear jeopardising levels of income or already precarious levels of job security. We also see in countries such as the UK or the Netherlands that competition is affecting increasing numbers of people regardless of the sector or level in which they work. Public-private partnerships, for example, which use private sector funding for public service facilities and provisions, mean growing numbers of people are affected by competitive forces. The contracting out of many lower skilled jobs to agencies or cheaper country locations also means more people are exposed to global competitive forces. These trends and forces affect all the countries in our study. For example, we see this in the UK, which outsources much lower paid work to cheaper countries, and in India, which receives some of this work. Competitive pressures around the world mean many people across countries feel unable to push for workplace change towards more optimal harmonisation of paid work and personal life. This is despite the potential benefits a more harmonised approach could bring for people with diverse personal life needs, as well as potentially enhancing workplace effectiveness (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher and Pruitt, 2002).

All in all, we hear that people in paid work around the world are working longer or more intensive hours. More seems to be expected of people in their paid work: physically, mentally, and emotionally. This has implications for those in work, as well as for those who are unable to participate in paid work as fully as they might like because of a generic lack of consideration within workplaces of people's diverse personal life needs and situations. In this context, stress-related sicknesses and discontents are emerging within many countries.

These developments have implications for equity, well-being and sustainability in relation to work-personal life harmonisation issues within all these countries.

Future thinking: the scenario meeting

In the final stage of our research (see footnote 1) we brought together creative people² from the seven different participating countries in a small international meeting using scenario techniques. The aim of this meeting was to begin a 'global' dialogue on the future of work-personal life harmonisation by making the time and space to think collaboratively about optimal harmonisations and strategies for moving forward. Participants discussed the directions in which societies were heading more generically, before envisioning the future of work-personal life harmonisation and collaborating on pragmatic strategies for change. There was a particular focus on moving forward the debate and the question of how to contribute to the development of work that is socially as well as economically sustainable.

Group discussions on where societies are currently situated in relation to work-personal life harmonisation and the critical points identified above led to the following observations.

1. Current forms of the globally competitive economy have led to intensified consumerism resulting in rising greed in terms of status, material possessions, wanting it all in all aspects of life and rising individualism. Gender identities and family structures have changed which, while having the potential to be positive, presently tend to reflect or contribute to a devaluing of care. The effect of all of this is a decline of overall 'wealth', if defined in a broader way, which incorporates human and social capital, and general well-being.
2. The negative aspects of western consumer economies tend to erode communities, social values and attitudes which, in turn, further fuels consumer economies. Legislation is being developed in some countries around working time limits for example, to deal with and try to rectify negative implications of consumer economies and associated social erosions. But legislation though necessary is not sufficient. The rise of new forms of globalisation and technology act as a super boost to work-personal life harmonisation tensions, so legislation is insufficient in a global world. Does the current global economy

² This meeting, at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor, United Kingdom, on March 23rd – 24th 2004, brought together *Lotte Bailyn* (USA), Professor of Management, MIT; *Pierre Brouard* (South Africa), Deputy Director, Centre for the study of AIDS; *Richenda Gambles* (UK), Research Associate, Institute of Family and Environmental Research; *Ian Greenaway* (UK), Managing Director, MTM; *Lisa Harker* (UK), Chair of Daycare Trust, freelance policy advisor and researcher; *Annemarie van Iren* (the Netherlands), freelance Management Consultant; *Sumiko Iwao* (Japan), Chair of the Gender Equality council in the Prime Minister's Office; *Alex Jones* (UK), Senior Researcher, The Work Foundation; *Suzan Lewis* (UK), Professor of Organisational and Work-Life Psychology, Manchester Metropolitan University; *Jo Morris* (UK), Senior Policy Officer, Trades Union Congress; *Bram Peper* (the Netherlands), Post-doctoral researcher, Erasmus University; *Rhona Rapoport* (UK), Director, Institute of Family and Environmental Research; *Vineet Sharma* (India), Chief Quality Officer, Hindustan Times; *Ragnhild Sohlberg* (Norway), VP, Hydro; Corporate Centre and Scientific Secretary, The European Research Advisory Board (EURAB); *Atle Taerum* (Norway), Agri Business Consultant/Farmer; and *Kaiser Thibedi* (South Africa), Gender Trainer and Business Consultant

sow the seeds of its own destruction, through forces such as demographic change? It seems the present global economy encourages people to live their lives in ways that may be unsustainable. But it may also eventually provide the social forces necessary to facilitate change.

3. Current forms of capitalism, greed, money, consumerism and a tendency to place profits above people are driving current trends in each country and the directions that they are likely to take in the future in terms of work-personal life harmonisation unless there is a fundamental shift in thinking. Global competition, efficiency drives and developments in information and communications technology often result in greater workplace intensity or longer hours and the well-being of people is increasingly threatened³. Many societies seem to be moving from control (by norms and institutions) towards greater freedom, with increasing diversity of value systems and potential ways of living. The positive side of this shift towards freedom could be greater equity, balance and a sense of belonging. But the negative aspects could be increasing greed, individualism, consumerism, and inequities.

Future thinking: critical points holding back optimal change

Based on research prior to the international meeting, five critical points holding back optimal change in support of the harmonisation of paid work and the rest of life, were identified. These were discussed and widely agreed upon by international participants. These critical barriers include:

- Limited thinking about alternatives to current implementations of market economies that also value people
- Limited thinking about changing men-women relationships at all levels of society
- Limited thinking about valuing those who 'want a life' outside the workplace
- Limited thinking beyond quick fixes
- Limited thinking about the actual processes of change

Future thinking: the processes of change

To move beyond these critical points it is important to understand and learn from cross-cultural comparisons of experiences of levers and barriers to change, and to do so in a historical context. While experiences are by no means universal, generic levers for or drivers of change

³ Organisational case studies being carried out in private and public sector organizations in seven European countries, including two former communist regimes, indicate that the experience of intensification of work is widespread at diverse occupational levels. See www.workliferesearch.org/transitions

have emerged and continue to emerge at various times with varying impacts in different countries. These include:

- An influx of women into paid work
- Changing men-women relationships
- Changing family structures and values
- Equality, equity and diversity drives
- Recruitment and retention needs of employers
- Demographic shifts including low birth rates and ageing populations
- Advances in technology and blurring of boundaries between paid work and personal life
- Increasing globalisation and changes in its characteristics
- Emerging disease, disability, sickness and stress issues

The influx of women from all walks of life into formal paid work has created ongoing challenges for individuals, families, workplaces and wider society about how to handle the distribution of paid work and non-paid caring responsibilities. Together with changing and diversifying family structures, this has altered gender roles, identities and relationships between women and men. Workplaces have sought in part to deal with some of these changes for recruitment and retention reasons or in some countries or contexts because of equality, equity or diversity concerns. Changing relationships between women and men has the potential to lead to greater equity between men and women and enhanced life satisfaction if people are able to organise their lives in ways that enable a variety of aspects of life to be combined within their daily experiences. Moreover, technology and the emerging 24/7 global society can facilitate and encourage new and innovative ways of working that enable greater work-personal life integrations and harmonisation. All of this offers impetus for change.

There are diverse individual and societal responses to these various levers for change. There are pockets of innovation and optimism in some segments of societies. Some feel societies and people have entered a new phase in the evolution of these issues, in which the consequences of current and emerging working practices on people's lives – in all their diversity – are only just beginning to surface and be worked through. But at the same time, many feel increasingly helpless and many people and societies appear stuck in thinking about how to move forward.

Building on the five critical points already highlighted many ongoing or emerging barriers to change were identified in our international research and the scenario meeting. These include:

- Taboos and fears
- Conflicts

- Resistance
- Growing individualism
- Powerlessness
- Limited connected thinking

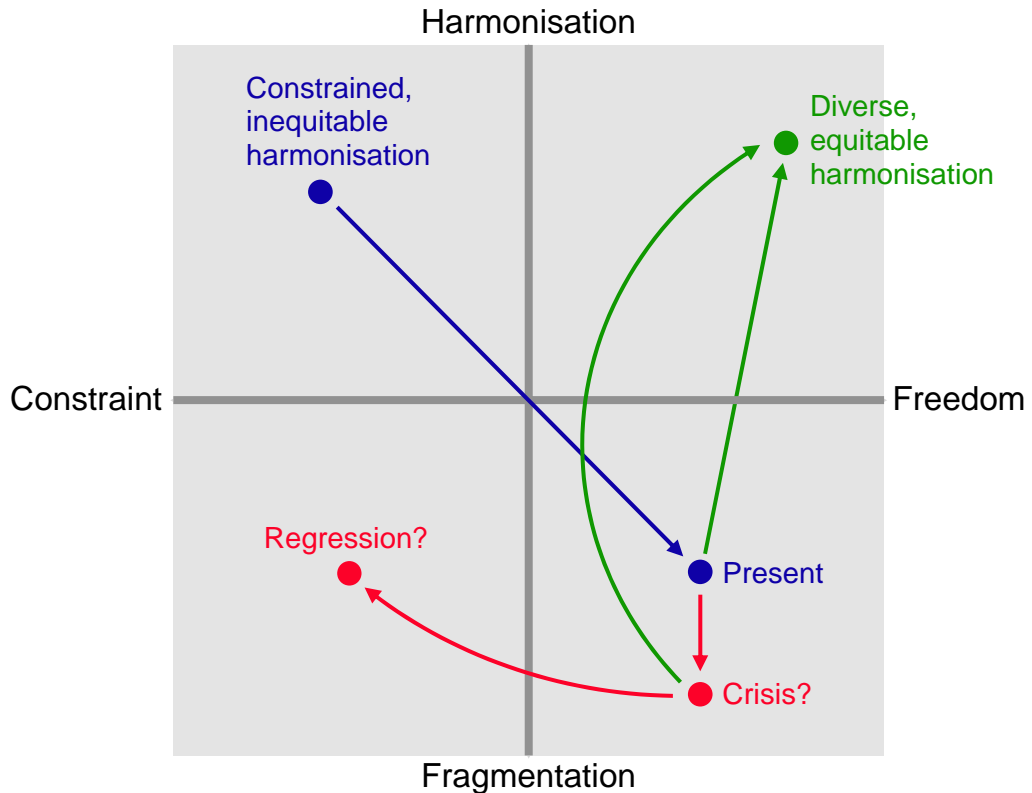
These barriers play out at many different levels of societies. For example, men and women's fears and resistances about changing gender roles, identities and relationships with each other persist. Feelings of powerlessness against the supremacy of money and consumer forces are also apparent, as are taboos in relation to challenging the place and value of paid work in people's lives and within societies. It feels difficult – and many feel helpless – to challenge the current global economic framework that underpins contemporary values and practices. There is a widespread view, evident at the scenario meeting, in some sections of the media and our discussions with people in our international research that governments and different organisations within countries often focus on their own interests, without considering others: that there is less of a focus on collaborating with other countries, governments and organisations in ways that could enhance the well-being of others.

At the moment, there is too little connected thinking about how issues of work-personal life harmonisation affect and feed into many other social problems. Work-personal life harmonisation is a central issue facing societies today, which links with equity, well-being and sustainability issues across a range of experiences and 'social problems'. **It is vital to consider the ways in which work-personal life harmonisation issues are connected with many other problems or social forces in play today. But this wider thinking can mean people feel unable to make concrete change. It is also crucial to act locally in ways that account for and incorporate bigger thinking. In other words, it is vital to see localised actions within a wider context.**

The future: visions

The societal and economic changes that occur over time are not linear. They are complex and can shift in various and sometimes unexpected ways. So how will these situations develop? As we have stressed, work-personal life harmonisation links in with many other issues: of identity; of equity; of life satisfaction; of connectedness with others; of the provision and receiving of care; of changing gender roles and relationships between men and women. And all in the global economic context in which people's lives are unfolding. Discussions of many of these issues during the international meeting led to the development of a **scenario pathway framework**. This framework maps the pathways in which individuals and societies could develop in relation to work-personal life harmonisation.

Scenario Pathway Framework



During the meeting, dimensions of constraint, freedom, fragmentation and harmonisation were seen as useful ways to capture something of the directions in which work-personal life harmonisation issues have and could continue to evolve. Using these dimensions, four possible directions for the future were identified. The top left hand corner, which features the idea of 'constrained, inequitable harmonisations', reflects the pre-industrial past (but also reflects some societies or segments of societies today). While there was something of a seamless yet largely unconscious and involuntary harmonisation of work and personal life, there was much constraint and little personal freedom for many people. For example, men and women in agrarian economies often worked (or work) alongside each other in the many productive and reproductive tasks, responsibilities, or parts of their lives. But this was usually experienced in a patriarchal and inequitable context in which equity and well-being issues were not so widely considered. This has changed in many societies through the process of industrialisation, and arguably post-

industrialisation, through emerging discourses about personal freedom. But inequities persist. In this context, and that of a formal and conceptual separation of paid work from domestic and family environments through industrialisation processes, social fragmentation has increased. This leads on to the present, which is indicated in the bottom right quadrant.

The present situation may lead in two directions. Firstly, there may be an increase in the harmonisation between paid work and personal life maintaining personal freedom and attention to diversity (see top right quadrant). Or secondly, a plunge into a crisis or set of crises could occur (bottom right). The United Nations has already discussed crises of care emerging in many societies which has critical social consequences, threatens traditional cultures and exacerbates issues of poverty and well-being in many societies (UN, 1999). This bottom right quadrant could also include crises in terms of the environment (already increasingly noted) as well as crises in terms of economic stagnation or regression (also gaining more attention).

If such crises occur (and it may be that we are already very close to experiencing them), there are two possible emergent pathways. One, with higher levels of social cohesion but achieved through coercion and a loss of personal freedom or attention to diversity (see bottom left quadrant). In the other, the crises may act as stimuli for increased harmonisation of paid work with personal lives without loss of freedom or attention to diversity of people's varying needs and experiences (see top right quadrant).

The 'upside potential' (see top right quadrant) involves a move from the present situation, either directly or via the stimulus of a crisis, to a condition which combines a high level of individual freedom and consideration for diversity with enhanced work-personal life harmonisation. The notion of 'harmonisation' in relation to paid work with the rest of life is a common human aspiration, but it represents a new evolutionary direction for human society. Industrial society has enhanced individualism and increased social fragmentation, but it may also be on the brink of providing the tools and organisational forms for individuals to act and interact primarily through flexible distributed networks. The power of information technology could preserve individual self-expression, autonomy and effectiveness of action while providing social relatedness and support through group connection and interaction. This emergent future scenario – *diverse, equitable harmonisation* – would represent a move beyond the 'mass production/mass market' solutions of the industrial era, to a new pattern of 'individual-in-group' solutions which could transform both work and personal life, offering both greater social harmonisation and individual fulfillment.

Moving forward: critical questions

So how could people and societies move towards this more optimal 'upside potential'? Critical questions, building on our original critical points holding back change, now need to be asked if people and societies are to move forward in optimal ways. They include:

- How can we overcome the apparent impossibility of thinking of alternatives to the ways market economies are implemented despite what current or emerging forms appear to be doing to personal relationships, general well-being and human dignity within societies?
- How can we work through and overcome resistance towards thinking about deep identity issues that arise from changing relationships between men and women in different societies and redistribute these roles more equitably and satisfactorily for those involved?
- How can we overcome the reluctance or even apparent lack of awareness of the need to address workplace structures, cultures and practices and ways in which work is actually done that persist in penalising people who make changes in their own working practices?
- How can we overcome a focus on quick fixes and see these issues in wider and more radical ways? In the medium or long run, this may be less time consuming.
- How can we overcome reluctance to appreciate and address the complexity of change processes, recognising that they need to occur at a personal or individual level, but also at all other levels including the cultural and systemic?

Moving forward: pragmatic strategies

Action is necessary at the international level because of the increasing global connectedness among countries and people. This is very difficult and many feel unable to work at this level. But to follow the thinking of the influential literary critic and post structuralist thinker, Edward Said (1935-2003), who spoke of the need to be idealistic without having illusions of the difficulties this produces, the scenario group participants expressed the need to try to encourage people who work globally and international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to think about and take on these issues.

But while it is vital to think globally and widely about work-personal life harmonisation issues and to consider the critical questions highlighted above, it is also essential to harness pragmatic actions and strategies for change at local levels. It may be possible that actions at a number of levels could stop or mitigate the emerging crisis or set of crises or even turn them into something positive.

Action is also necessary within different societies and at all levels. It requires action from and collaboration between:

- *governments* that need to consider how to respond to changes in families, work, workplaces and communities;
- *workplaces* seeking to recruit, retain, motivate and utilise talented and diverse workers;
- *trade unions* who want to make themselves relevant to the issues and discontents facing people in workplaces today;
- *communities* hoping to revive local participation and civic spirit;
- *families*, households and people in intimate relationships who value equity, companionship, friendship and connectedness;
- and *individuals* in the everyday organisation of their lives.

The international scenario meeting participants were eager to identify pragmatic actions to bring about change at each level. However these must be considered within the complex situations and debates in diverse contexts and it is not possible to be prescriptive about the precise course of action for diverse stakeholders. Therefore we briefly consider below some of the areas where pragmatic actions in some contexts could contribute to systemic sustainable change in the future and mention a few generic principles associated with these.

Government level actions

Legislation has a role at many levels: in supporting people with caring responsibilities; introducing or raising levels of minimum wages; and developing legislation in relation to working times for example. There is also a need for governments – and wider societies – to develop and appropriately implement strategies in collaboration with people in their own countries as well as with other countries. This requires trust and mutual dialogue.

Legislation on leaves

- Statutory leave entitlements such as parental leave, though not universal, are more generous or well established in some countries than others. However there is a gap between policies and implementation in practice in most contexts and it is important that policy is supported and appropriately implemented at the workplace level. If such leaves were available and acceptable not only for people with specific caring responsibilities but also for others regardless of family circumstances, this would require a radical rethinking of the way work is carried out. It could result in positive systemic change, involving

widespread challenging of outdated norms and assumptions that operate at structural, cultural and practice levels. This kind of change, that recognises a variety of personal life needs or wishes, could bring greater equity for a variety of people. It could also mitigate potential backlash against mothers, parents or other carers who currently make use of special provisions.

Legislation on working time

- Maximum working hours vary considerably across countries. Many governments and organisations fear legislation on maximum working times may be detrimental to their economy. However, this does not take account of the possibility that if people worked differently they could be more effective in less time

Legislation and mechanisms to support carers:

- Public policy support for carers also varies cross nationally and this has a major impact on the harmonisation of paid work and personal life. Support for carers in diverse contexts within countries is essential. But we also need to consider the impact of globalisation and international trade policies on carers around the world and particularly in developing countries where extended working hours and lack of care support can put the life of family members in danger (see for example Heymann, Earle, and Hanchate, 2004).

Introducing minimum or living wages:

- A realistic minimal living wage is a basic necessity for equitable and sustainable harmonisation of work and personal life. It is important to continue to address this challenge in each country as well as within international organisations such as the ILO and the WTO
- Introduction of a minimum wage is emerging in some contexts. This needs to be enhanced and developed so that people do not need to work around the clock simply to make ends meet. How to do this will vary in different countries. Difficulties will also emerge between countries, particularly given outsourcing and globalisation trends. This requires working through so as to enhance the benefits without producing negative costs such as unemployment.

But while we want to stress legislation is essential, it is mainly facilitative. It is necessary but not sufficient on its own and its aims often fail when it is not implemented appropriately at different levels of society. There is a need to think about implementation

of initiatives, in terms of what is required to make legislation or government initiatives successful and how to get optimal impact.

Workplace level actions

One of the major problems of work-personal life harmonisation currently stems from workplace expectations and assumptions about what is a committed and competent employee. Outdated and gendered assumptions about 'ideal workers' – as those who have no other responsibilities in life and can put the job first no matter what – remain. It is now important to move beyond the quick fix by tackling these persisting – but outdated – assumptions (for examples of the benefits for equity and workplace effectiveness see Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher and Pruitt, 2002).

Tackling persisting myths or outdated assumptions about 'ideal' employees:

- Dialogue and collaboration is required in organisations about how to move forward from current working practices and persisting assumptions about 'ideal' workers. Most employees do not have wives at home full time. But many workplaces continue to operate as if they do. To be seen as a committed and effective worker, and to manage intensified workloads, long hours and 'face time' are often expected. This penalises women, men and families who have no full time carers at home. Such assumptions or myths are being exported to non-western contexts with critical social consequences.
- Workplace policies have been developed in many contexts to support family and care needs and wishes of employees. But those taking such initiatives still tend to be marginalised. This results in widespread inequities for women, and prevents many men from taking advantage of these initiatives. Hence existing gender roles are reinforced. Outdated assumptions now need to be tackled systemically and culturally by encouraging dialogue and collaboration between men and women about why they find it hard to reconcile paid work with other parts of their lives, and how paid work could be done differently to accommodate a variety of personal life needs or wishes, regardless of family circumstances. It is time to move beyond the quick fix and tackle much more embedded assumptions about how to work and how to harmonise this better with personal lives.

Recognising and using the Dual or Multiple Agenda:

- Enhancing workplace effectiveness and equity does not have to be a trade off. Evidence shows that collaboration between people already working together in organisations to develop new working practices, values and norms – that account for and respect personal life needs and workplace effectiveness – can bring positive results for both. For

example, in a small manufacturing company that had made big losses, a new CEO turned the company around by paying attention to people's expressed personal needs. He recognised that it was a 'backs to the wall' situation and that people were his greatest asset. He worked with them to create innovative working practices which would not only satisfy their personal needs but also enhance workplace effectiveness (see Lewis and Cooper, forthcoming).

- Tackling outdated assumptions about 'ideal' workers frees people to develop much more innovative ways of working that take account of both business and personal needs. Such an approach can be called a dual or multiple agenda. The dual agenda was developed in the context of exploring new ways of working that enabled greater gender equity and workplace effectiveness (see Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher and Pruitt, 2002). The dual agenda approach uses the premise that personal life and workplace needs are not antithetical. They impact on each other and both need attention in order to maximise the other. This approach takes time to begin with, and involves tackling deep identity issues, assumptions and resistances, which require guidance, collaborative leadership and support. But we have since developed this approach to a multiple agenda that looks at a range of equity issues at a range of levels, including not only the workplace but also the community, family, interpersonal and individual (see Lewis, Rapoport, Gambles, 2003).
- Leaders can also facilitate change by showing examples of work-personal life harmonisation awareness and practice; and in recognising the importance of relational skills.

Sustainable corporate governance:

- Companies including multinationals are sensitive to pressures from consumers and investors. Evidence in some countries suggests people are willing to pay a bit more for fair trade products and companies with ethical investment policies attract growing numbers of customers.
- If companies had to report publicly on their performance regarding finance, environment and people, they would become aware of bad publicity. They do not like this, particularly when it affects their share price and could encourage or generate change.

Trade Union level actions

Trade unions are beginning to recognise that work-personal life harmonisation is a major issue for men and women and some are increasingly pushing for greater rights for time for other activities in life. Yet many, particularly those which remain very male dominated, have been slow

to take up such an agenda. Addressing work-personal life harmonisation issues from a global and local perspective is key and trade unions need to play a part.

Staying relevant in a modern world:

- If unions, whose support and membership continues to dwindle in many countries, want to make themselves relevant to the needs of people and assert modern day relevance, they will need to follow the example of those unions that place work-personal life issues at the top of their agendas (see www.tuc.org.uk/changingtimes).

Addressing national / international tensions:

- Unions have to confront dilemmas about the rights of workers in their countries and those of workers in other countries. A reassessment and step towards inter-country collaboration – evident in some unions – needs to occur as the labour market becomes more and more connected.

Community level actions

In many societies, current or emerging discontents about work-personal life harmonisation also feed into and are affected by concerns around a decline in community participation and sense of belonging. 'Over work' is a major reason cited for decline in community participation (see Putnam, 2000), because many have less time to spend in their localities or to engage in communities that matter to them. Current patterns of work, often away from community contexts, with long commutes for example, or involving short term, episodic labour in the new flexible capitalism (see Sennett, 1998) can also perpetuate this erosion.

Tackling community decline:

- Restoring a sense of belonging within fragmented communities is at the heart of several emerging initiatives across the western world. One response is to enable employees to be given more time for voluntary activities and participation in school, church and other organised activities, as part of corporate social responsibility programmes. According to Ann Bookman (2004) people already do this, but find their activities limited through non-responsive working cultures.

Recognising and using a Dual or Multiple Agenda across civil society:

- Actions at civil society levels also need to utilise a dual or multiple agenda approach, seeking solutions that meet the needs of individuals and families, of workplaces and of communities. Community supports and practices are often based on the assumptions

that there is a family member (usually a mother or other female carer) at home. School structures, cultures and practices, for example, need to examine assumptions about families of children. It would be helpful for parents, teachers and children to work collaboratively on issues such as school hours, holidays and the ways teaching gets done. A similar approach could be adopted across a range of public bodies and professions, including health, and social care.

New community systems:

- Skills exchanges are emerging in some communities in which the talents or resources of different community members are exchanged instead of paying for services and resources. These range from care provision to water plumbing, and needs to be utilised and encouraged in a variety of community settings (see Letslink, 2003).
- It is important to recognise that communities vary in nature. Communities are not only formed on the basis of where people live, but also where people work, socialise or worship spiritually. For example, communities can be formed at churches, at mosques, or at schools.

Family level actions

At the family level, gender and other inequities permeate. These need to be worked through with collaborative dialogue and mutual understandings. Such strategies require legislative and workplace support, but this does not address many of the difficulties people face in making such changes. Issues of identity and resistance or fear are widespread: men can be reluctant to give up power or status derived from the world of paid work, and women can fear giving up power in the home or the identity they derive from nurturing and caring roles. Tackling these issues is crucial.

Sharing and valuing care:

- The sharing of care, connectedness, leisure, well-being and financial sustainability between women and men, or those with same sex partners, requires mutual and honest dialogue at the family level. It can be very difficult for men and women to take on behaviours 'traditionally' regarded as belonging to the 'other' gender in workplaces, communities or families. Action research in the US is currently pioneering a shared care programme that seeks to work with people at the family level to encourage men and women to collaborate in trying to resolve tensions arising amongst families by seeking new forms of care and family arrangements (Degroot and Fine, 2003;

www.thirdpath.org.uk). This has had positive results and the general approach could be built upon in appropriate ways in other contexts.

- A complementary path, supported through government benefits or workplace allowances, could also ensure that care providers are financially rewarded and skills developed through caring activities become recognised and rewarded in the workplace.

Individual level actions

While work-personal life harmonisation discontents are largely systemic issues rooted in factors such as entrenched social power relations including the gender imbalance, the nature of industrial economies, and global competition, some responses are possible at the individual level.

Rejection and renewal:

- If growing numbers of people reject or rebel against current forces by altering the ways in which they harmonise paid work with the rest of their lives – a trend that seems to be emerging – the system will eventually be forced to change.
- People can reject conditions that are no longer appropriate and celebrate trade offs between higher individual material standards of living and other ambitions of men, women, and societies, whether spiritual, ecological, cultural or social.
- But such action assumes people have the financial capacity to act in this way, and requires collective actions as set out at other levels of societies to ensure more people – regardless of their socio-economic position – can take such steps.

Moving forward: new alliances

Currently many people feel lost, pedalling in a hopeless direction. Some feel there is no alternative to carrying on along the same path: that it has to be this way. But alternatives are beginning to emerge from environmental and sustainable development movements. We can learn from successful social movements about how to enact optimal change and new alliances need to be formed. Essentially, emerging social movements and trends are exploring whether there is a different way to live. An emphasis on sustainability of prosperity, the environment and people – can forge new alliances. This may help to challenge the primacy of unfettered economic growth and consumerism that fails to pay attention to the well-being of people and societies more generally.

For a more detailed overview of reflections on the harmonisation of paid work and the rest of life visit: http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/wfnetwork/loppr/reflections.pdf or email Richenda

Gambles for a version of this paper (address below). Real change requires attention to a diversity of ideas. Email r.gambles-alumni@lse.ac.uk with your reflections and your ideas for change?

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