

REFLECTIONS ON THE INTEGRATION OF PAID WORK AND THE REST OF LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Despite a wealth of research and policy initiatives around ‘work-family’, ‘work-life balance’ or what we prefer to call work-personal life integration, societies seem stuck about how to make equitable, satisfactory and sustainable changes in the ways in which paid work can be combined with the rest of life. So what is holding back satisfactory change? And how can people move beyond this apparent deadlock and really go forward? In this paper we look at some of the reasons why issues about work-personal life integration have become so pressing and then reflect on implications for working towards more fundamental changes. We highlight sticking points holding back change but we also argue that these could be developed into new levers for change, by emphasising the need to rethink and question many deeply held – but outdated – assumptions about work, families, culture and personal lives.

Work-Personal Life Integration as a Pressing Issue in 21st Century Societies

Work-life balance has become a hot topic in the media, governments, workplaces, social research and in people’s everyday lives. In contemporary societies, many men and women find themselves working longer and more intensely than ever (Lewis and Cooper, 1999; Burchell et al, 2002; Bond et al, 2002; White et al, 2003; Poster and Prasad 2002; Brandth and Kvande, 2001). This is prompting concern about implications for other areas of life that are often crowded out.

Understandings of and responses to work-personal life issues have evolved over time. Indeed the authors of this paper represent three generations of researchers experiencing these issues within their own personal and professional lives over a period that spans more than four decades. During this time, research into the ways families and the nature

of work are changing has prompted legislative and workplace policies aiming to make it easier for people – particularly women – to combine paid work with the rest of life. Yet their impact is limited (Lewis, 1997; 2001; Brandth and Kvande, 2001; Rapoport et al, 2002). Despite the research, policies and current hype, it seems societies are more or less stuck about how to go forward with equitable and sustainable change.

The increasing invasiveness of paid work in people's lives

If anything, things have become more difficult. Paid work is increasingly invasive in contemporary western societies (Taylor, 2002; Lewis, forthcoming), and this is spreading progressively to non-western societies with globalisation. Explanations for growing attachment to paid work include increasing economic needs or desires, the sense of identity or self esteem work offers and the opportunities it provides to engage in meaningful relationships with others (Lewis, forthcoming; Kofodimos, 1993; Thompson and Bunderson, 2001). Moreover, the changing nature of work has also meant that the boundaries between paid work and the rest of life have become increasingly blurred (Perlow, 1998; Nippert-Eng, 1996) and it is most often work that spills over into non work time (Hochschild, 1997; White et al, 2003).

Implications for equity, satisfaction and people sustainability

The growing invasiveness of paid work has negative implications for gender and other equity issues and people sustainability (Lewis and Cooper, 1999). Many women find they are unable to meet the increasing demands and expectations of time dedicated to paid work because of their non-paid caring commitments. And men find they are increasingly isolated from family and leisure activities in an ever increasing climate of long hours and working intensity. This makes it difficult to increase equitable divisions of paid and non-paid work. As societies age, caring for older people exacerbates pressures of carers. And older workers may find that they too cannot or do not want to meet the increasing demands of paid work, maybe leaving them vulnerable to poverty and social isolation.

Issues about life satisfaction are also emerging. As work increasingly occupies time previously set aside for families or other interests in life intimate relationships or institutions such as families, friendships or communities are increasingly squeezed out or subjected to consumer forces and market mentalities, with many people rejecting, leaving or switching relationships and corresponding institutions (Bauman, 2003). In this climate, men and women report increased loneliness, eroding support networks and falling quality of life, exacerbated by migration and work related international travel that takes people away from their local or familial communities (Putnam, 2000; Voydanoff, forthcoming). Discussions are beginning to turn towards the negative effects of current working patterns and expectations on people's sense of connectedness with others, life satisfaction and happiness (Layard, 2003; Jacobs and Christie, 2000; Voydanoff, forthcoming).

People sustainability and human dignity are also challenged by the lack of time and energy available for non work activities, arising from current integrations of paid work with the rest of life. As work increasingly dominates, time for care, or the value placed on care, is increasingly squeezed. Crises of child, elder and disability care are spreading throughout the world, threatening traditional cultures and exacerbating problems of poverty and quality of life (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). There is also mounting concern over declining interest and participation in local communities and civic activities, which is threatening community sustainability and democratic and civic spirit (Blunkett, 2001; Voydanoff, forthcoming).

The integration of work and personal life as a central issue

We argue that the ways in which people are able to integrate paid work with the rest of life can no longer be seen as side or individual issues. Rather, they are central, linking in with many other social problems facing individuals, families, workplaces and communities and they connect to expectations and values operating throughout contemporary societies. It is time to think about the ways in which the 24 hour global market place is affecting the nature of work, families and communities and how it fuels growing life dissatisfaction and gender, social class and other inequities. The new

economy, for example, while bringing affluence to some, is widening the gaps between rich and poor, and ever depressing wages for people in low paid jobs means many have to work longer and harder, simply to meet basic economic needs (Toynbee, 2003).

Many social forces are coming together to push work-personal life integration issues onto the public agenda globally, for example, stress, poverty and persisting inequities, more 'efficient' ways of production, low birth rates and ageing populations, epidemics and disability. These social problems are fuelling questions about attachment to paid work and unfettered economic growth and the extent to which paid work and unpaid care are equitably distributed. And loss of time for friendships, or breakdowns of intimate and close relationships are also prompting questions about priorities and quality of life.

In this context we argue that there is now a need to think creatively about how to implement new ways of equitably distributing paid work and integrating this with the rest of life in ways that enhance people's life satisfaction, productivity and potential. Work-personal life integration issues need to form an integral part of discussions around the 'new', global economy.

Moving Forward with Equitable, Satisfactory and Sustainable Lives

Our reflections draw on an ongoing international study supported by the Ford Foundation, *Looking Backwards to Go Forwards: The Integration of Paid Work and Personal Life*, in which we look back at what has happened in the field in a range of countries – the UK, USA, India, Norway, the Netherlands and Japan – identifying past levers for change and problems and sticking points preventing further development, with the ultimate goal of suggesting ways to switch these sticking points into new levers for change, so as to move forward. These countries offer comparative insights into the trends and issues being felt in a range of contexts with different levels of state or workplace support, at various stages in the evolution of 'development', dealing with different diversity and identity issues, expectations and assumptions. Data collection is via country timelines to capture the history and evolution of these issues; country meetings with

diverse groups of people working with these issues and; conversational interviews with creative people involved in some way with the issues.

Rather than providing a detailed analysis of our data, this paper offers reflections on the lessons we are learning about the integration of paid work and personal lives and the different ways that these issues need to be approached to move beyond the apparent stalemate in many different societies. Despite changes in the composition of the workforce, the nature of work, and policy initiatives to make paid work more compatible with contemporary realities, conventional wisdom has remained relatively intact. Many workplace structures, cultures and practices continue to be designed as if time in the office represents commitment and as though employees have wives at home. In this paper, we want to emphasise the increasingly pressing need to rethink relationships between women and men and the need to bring men to the centre of these debates. We also want to emphasise the need to rethink many assumptions inherent within working practices, with a view to real change.

We argue that equitable and sustainable change requires people to address work-personal life issues at a deeper level, to unpack many outdated assumptions and to ask some fundamental questions. What are good lives? What kind of societies do we want to live in? How do the ways we integrate the different aspects of our lives affect wider societies? And how does this feed into desires to make societies more democratic, equitable and enjoyable? These questions are seldom considered in debates on the integration of paid work and personal life. Yet the ways in which we are able to or wish to integrate the many different aspects of life go to the heart of our values, assumptions and behaviour.

It is difficult to ask some of these questions and even more difficult to make them heard. For many they seem too big and too complex. They require collective thinking and discussions, in a world characterised by growing individualism. These questions need to be addressed at all levels of society; by individuals in the everyday organisation of their lives; families or households that value equity and / or companionship; workplaces that wish to recruit, retain and motivate workers; communities that need civic renewal and

participation; and societies as a whole that need to consider how to respond to changes in families, work, workplaces and communities in an increasingly global world. And the connections between these different levels need to be understood and flagged up clearly.

This takes time which is difficult in an ever increasing climate of busyness. But we argue that making time and space for collectively thinking about values and behaviour is essential for moving beyond the many sticking points and barriers to change we have observed in our study. In the words of Bauman in his discussion of the human consequences of globalisation, 'questioning the ostensibly unquestionable premises of our way of life is arguably the most urgent service we owe to our fellow humans and our selves' (Bauman, 1998:5).

Looking backwards to go forward

People have always integrated the different parts of their lives, including paid and unpaid work, family obligations and other caring activities, friendships, leisure and community interests in some way. In pre-industrial hunter gatherer societies for example, men and women often worked alongside each other with childrearing as an activity that was integrated into their daily lives (Demos, 1986). With the Industrial Revolution, however, these social norms became more clearly defined with men concentrating on formal paid work outside the home and women concentrating on care and domestic labour within the home. This became a dominant pattern of integrating different parts of life. Although gender segregated solutions continue to influence patterns of work-personal life integration, a number of social and economic forces or levers for change have arisen over the last 50 or so years. This has created challenges for families, workplaces and societies as a whole as they continue to structure themselves around rigid gender segregated assumptions or implicit expectations. Although the timings, order and degrees differ across the various countries in our study, our timelines, meetings and interviews highlight generic levers for change that can be identified across societies.

Ongoing and emerging levers for change

The generic factors that have affected the evolution of work-personal life integration include the *large influx of women* into formal paid work settings, *equality, equity and diversity concerns* and the evolution of *recruitment and retention* needs of organisations as they recognise the need to employ more people – overwhelmingly women – with child or elder care expectations. These changes together with *demographic shifts*, particularly the ageing of populations, have brought about legislative and workplace policies that aim to enable people with diverse needs to combine paid work with the rest of life. As people work longer over their lifetimes to fulfil their own and wider societal economic needs, this also fuels greater awareness of diverse work personal life integration needs across the life cycle

The *rise of technology* has been another major factor affecting change as it enables new ways of working (such as home-working or other ‘off site’ working) to be adopted. Technology has also fuelled *globalisation processes* and the international 24 hour market place has driven an expansion of atypical working hours and the need for organisations to develop more flexible working arrangements. As many people find themselves working longer and harder than ever, *changes in the needs and desires of men* to have time for a personal life and greater involvement in home and family settings are also beginning to emerge.

An *increase in certain types of sickness and disease* is also a lever for change in many countries. In some contexts this takes the form of an increase in sickness absence from work or in claimants of public disability benefits (Peper et al, 2003). In others it is the spread of HIV/AIDS which not only affects many workers but has also wiped out whole generations of carers, leaving grandparents or extended family, to raise children (ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDs, 2002). Workplaces and other institutions have to adapt and respond to these trends.

Sticking points holding back change

Despite these ongoing and emerging levers for change, there remains much resistance and many sticking points to real transformation to facilitate better ways to integrate paid work with the rest of life.

A major theme, which links into and overlaps with all the sticking points discussed here, is that *fundamental questions have not been asked* in the context of work-personal life integration issues. Instead, solutions being proposed are superficial, quick fixes. Basic organisational structures, cultures and practices have not been challenged by legislative and workplace policies. For example, assumptions about what it means to be a ‘committed’ or ‘competent’ employee have rarely been thought through. So far, critical questions about the underlying problems of work-personal life integration and their causes are not being asked in workplaces or in other spheres of life. These issues now need to be considered in the macro context of the sort of society we live in now (nationally and globally) and fundamental questions about the sort of society we want to live in.

The limitations of language and terminology used to frame these issues, feeds into this current impasse, by limiting the questions asked. While a shift from ‘work-family’ and ‘family-friendly’ to ‘work-life’ and ‘work-life balance’ reflects a broader and more inclusive way of conceptualizing the issues enabling men and those without children, for example, to identify with them, the term ‘work-life balance’ remains problematic. It implies work is not part of life, ignores the distinction between paid and unpaid work and suggests unpaid care work is just a part of the non-work area of life. Furthermore, it implies that work and the rest of life are in some way antithetical or mutually exclusive, which fails to capture how skills transfer between the different aspects of life. This is why we prefer ‘work-personal life integration’ as a working terminology to capture the synergies and connections between the different parts of life and the ways in which they feed into each other (Rapoport et al, 2002: 15 - 17, Taylor, 2002). Framing the issues in this way offers a better reflection of contemporary realities and provides incentives for rethinking the ways in which we combine paid work and the rest of life; it may be

possible to enhance equity and satisfaction issues at the same time as workplace performance.

A culture and language of busyness experienced at all levels of societies is also preventing fundamental questions about the integration of paid work and personal life from being asked. In a climate where solutions are required immediately and the demands of paid work encroach on more and more of our time, it is difficult to make the space to reflect on broader issues such as the way certain skills are valued over others and the implications of changing working practices. The need for speed and convenience is linked to the power of money and consumerism which underpins the dominance of paid work in our lives (Schor, 1991). And in increasingly insecure environments, problems of competition can lead to workers guarding their work and knowledge rather than collaborating. This reinforces individualism and perceptions that solutions to work-personal life issues are individual issues, obscuring the need for collective, collaborative and systemic solutions that could enhance the experiences – and efficiency – of all workers.

There has also been an overwhelming tendency to avoid looking at deep identity and diversity issues existing amongst individuals throughout societies, as well as ignoring the reciprocal changes in relationships that are needed between both people and institutions. While women, for example, have had to adjust to combining paid work, family and personal lives there has been *an inadequate focus on men* and the reciprocal changes in the context of changing gender relationships. Other deep identity issues have also been largely ignored. By ignoring social class, for example, most of the debate has focused on professional and white collar issues. This means work-personal life integration issues are often perceived as luxury, emotional issues rather than concerns which contribute to inequities for many groups of diverse people. There has also been inadequate attention to the changing relationships between aspects or institutions within our lives such as work, family and communities. As work becomes more dominant, the implications for communities and civic participation, for example or for families, friendships and social networks are neglected. Despite living in an increasingly connected world, there has also been insufficient attention to understanding and respecting the diversities between different

societies and ways in which these can be valued rather than eroded through current exportations of western working practices, values, norms and assumptions.

All the sticking points we have so far discussed relate to a failure to consider the dual or multiple agenda. By this, we mean an approach which considers personal needs – equity, diversity and deep identity issues – alongside efficiency or workplace performance, social networks and integration. So far, there has been a tendency to focus on the business case, highlighting ‘win-win’ outcomes for workplaces and employees. But the business case, in many situations, is deeply flawed, and there is a need to be more honest about this. Introducing ‘work-life’ policies absolves businesses from looking more deeply at actual working practices and inherent assumptions that make it so hard to find satisfactory, equitable and sustainable integrations of paid work and personal life. A focus on the ways in which change occurs and the time this takes has been largely ignored. The desire for quick fixes or ‘best practice’ policies often results in a failure to fundamentally challenge deeply entrenched – but outdated – assumptions and practices.

Asking the Fundamental Questions and Broadening the Debate

Probing deeply into ways people may be able to find more equitable, satisfactory and sustainable solutions for integrating paid work with the rest of life requires some reflection on the nature and place of paid work in people’s lives and requires thinking about many of the sticking points that we have highlighted. Some of the fundamental questions which we believe are necessary to move forward include:

Why should societies get beyond the rhetoric of changing men-women relationships?

Why do societies need to rethink working structures, cultures and practices?

Is economic growth all that matters, beyond an ‘optimal’ level?

How can diverse diversities be valued and respected?

And how do these issues link with transnational solidarity in a globalising world?

By asking these questions and discussing the issues they raise, we argue it may be possible for the sticking points to be turned into *new levers for change*. And indeed, as we will show, this is beginning to happen. In discussing some of these questions and issues, we aim to build a broader consensus about the need for change by linking work-personal life integration with many issues facing societies today. We hope this will encourage thinking about collaborative ways in which equitable and sustainable changes could be made.

Why should societies get beyond the rhetoric of changing men-women relationships?

We have noted that further change is hampered by lack of changes in the lives of men commensurate with changes in the nature of families and work and in the lives and positions of women. While some countries have witnessed a degree of change towards greater involvement of men in the sharing of care and other home-based responsibilities (Brandth and Kvande, 2001:2; Hobson, 2002) this has very remained limited in many other contexts.

The struggles women currently face in ‘juggling’ paid work with family responsibilities are well documented and have major consequences on work opportunities and pay (Rake, 2000; Whittock et al, 2002). As men change, these consequences may well affect them too. Discrimination legislation while important has so far proved insufficient. But inequities faced by men are also coming onto the agenda. As pressures and expectations of commitment to paid work grow, men increasingly feel isolated from familial settings and other arenas in life (Burghes et al, 1998). It is useful to think about how the momentum created by the ways men are beginning to change in some countries, can be extended and sustained.

Progress towards more equitable and sustainable ways of integrating paid work and the rest of life requires thinking about ways in which gendered systems that continue to operate around outdated assumptions and expectations (Lewis, 1997; Perlow, 1998; Rapoport et al 2002) can be restructured to get beyond the rhetoric of changing men-

women relationships. For example, in most workplaces, the definition of commitment remains rooted in a traditional concept of the ideal worker as someone for whom work is primary, time to spend at work is unlimited, and the demands of family community and personal life are secondary (Lewis, 1997;2001; Rapoport et al, 2003; Perlow, 1998). This penalises women with caring or other responsibilities or interests as well as men who want a different sort of integration. And the relational skills that develop through family and other non work interactions mirrors many of the skills required in the new, or indeed 'relationship' economy, but remaining largely undervalued (Rapoport et al, 2002). By maintaining an illusion of total separation of this sphere from workplace settings, and discouraging many men in particular from developing these skills, we are maintaining inequities between women and men and losing opportunities for enhancing workplace collaboration, performance and productivity.

Challenging these outdated but pervasive gendered structures, and associated inequities will require bringing men into the centre of these debates. The needs and desires of both men and women and how their actions affect one another need to be thoroughly considered. We believe this will require men and women to communicate more deeply about fundamental changes and deep identity issues. As people find themselves considering new behaviour that was formerly regarded as belonging to the other gender, we need to address issues of resistance from men who may be reluctant to give up a degree of power in the workplace and resistance from women who may be reluctant to give up 'power' in the home. The process of working towards these changes will involve making time for trust to develop between people so that personal stories, feelings and assumptions can be heard and worked through collectively. Only then will it be possible to question assumptions and expectations about the roles of men and women and the extent to which democratic and socially just principles operate within families, workplaces, communities and wider societal contexts. Change must occur in families, but also in workplaces and other institutions that play a pivotal role in facilitating current gender assumptions. These assumptions need to be worked through, challenged and changed in all these environments.

Why do societies need to rethink working structures, cultures and practices?

Policies and benefits do lead to changes at the margins of organisations (Lewis, 1997), but they leave basic organisational structures and cultures largely unchallenged. Those who use flexibility are often marginalized and in all the countries in our study, most men – and indeed many career ambitious women – fail to take up opportunities to change the ways in which they work (Hochschild, 1998; Perlow, 1998). Policies in themselves have not enabled people to rethink and tackle persisting but outdated gendered assumptions and identities that run throughout current working practices or relationships between women and men. Nor have they facilitated a climate in which other diversity issues or inequities can be worked through. Without corresponding shifts in values and working practices, and especially assumptions that work-personal life policies assumptions are antithetical to economic success, little will change.

Moreover policies tend to focus on work-personal life integration as individual rather than systemic issues. But individual solutions obscure the societal, economic and cultural constraints under which their ‘choices’ are made. In particular choices are made in the context of workplace norms, expectations and societal values that generate paid work and money as markers of status. These may deter requests for greater flexibility by people who seek advancement, in the workplace, and can result in impossible standards by which others are measured. Systemic solutions are needed so that individuals do not have to make constant choices about how to work and how to cope with the current difficulties of integrating their lives.

Current assumptions around ‘effective’ ways of working also tend to be individualistic. In increasingly insecure environments, the cult of individualism often leads workers to keep their work and knowledge to themselves, so as to ensure their indispensability. It is time to look at ways of working to encourage greater collaboration, not only as a way of potentially enhancing approaches to work-personal life integration for all employees, but also to enhance workplace performance and productivity: we call this the Dual Agenda (Rapoport et al, 2002).

Is economic growth all that matters? What is the ‘optimal’ level?

But if paid work suffers slightly through more focus on the rest of our lives, then so what? To ask this question and be taken seriously is currently very difficult in a world in which paid work enjoys such a high priority. The power of money and consumerism tends to underpin the dominance of work in our lives. At an individual level paid work has become central to identity, with perceptions of worth attached to consumer goods and money. At the organisational level, the primary focus on efficiency and money underpins reluctance to confront real change. At the societal level the conventional wisdom in western capitalist countries is that business growth, increasing GDP and greater ‘efficiency’, at whatever cost, are society’s primary goals. And at a global level, this economic determinism fuels unsustainable inequalities: global capitalism has brought affluence to some and poverty to many.

While economic growth and determinism has become one of the dominant philosophies of our time and is perceived as a way to enhance people’s lives, there is increasing awareness of the negative effects this can have on satisfaction, happiness and sustainability. Just as economists have begun to look more closely into sustainable development (e.g. Sen, 2000) and the importance of valuing and recognising aspects of our lives, such as unpaid care, mainstream economists have also begun to question the primary focus on economic growth by looking at the negative implications on happiness and well-being. (Layard, 2003; Stiglitz, 2002) For example Layard (2003) argues that despite increasing levels of societal and personal wealth, many people in the western world are not happier. He finds that overall happiness does not rise once a society reaches an average or optimal level of income – at £10000 or \$15000 – and sets out a compelling case for redistribution and higher taxation to encourage a better work-life balance. This reflects a potential seeding of change in thinking and demonstrates that it is possible to question current wisdoms, values and understandings and to make this heard.

How can diverse diversities be valued and respected?

We have already highlighted that deep identity issues, often arising from people's individual diversities, have not been given sufficient attention in discussions about work-personal life integration. This relates, not just to gender, but age, social class, birthplace, nationality and ethnicity, faith, sexuality and disability, for example. But while the debate has tended to be social class blind, for example, research is beginning to explore the experiences of the low paid. Many people working in low paid jobs do not aspire for promotions because of the long hours and difficulties of integration that would arise (Crompton, 2003). It may be that current ways in which people are able to integrate paid work with the rest of life perpetuate cycles of low pay and poverty.

Other issues of diversity need to be considered. To what extent can people from all walks of life integrate paid work and personal lives in equitable ways and what can be learnt from these diverse experiences? A study of lesbian women with children living together, for example, found that they were able to integrate paid work more satisfactorily with the rest of life than many women living with men. These women found innovative ways to do this with a greater fluidity between their employment and domestic responsibilities, as they were not constrained by gendered assumptions within their or work and personal lives (Dunne, 2000).

How do these issues link with transnational solidarity in a globalising world?

In exploring some of the fundamental questions and probing into values and root causes of difficulties faced in integrating our lives, it is no longer possible to ignore the wider global context. As technology and the processes of globalisation open up the world, our existing ways of life are being shaken up at an inexorable rate (Giddens, 1999). The very nature of societal institutions, systems such as workplace organisations, families and relationships within these are changing rapidly. This creates new issues and challenges for the integration of paid work and personal life throughout the world (Bauman, 1998).

Globalisation processes are contributing to increasing pressures and hours spent in workplace settings throughout the world. People in 'developing' countries may lack economic, social or political power to reject long hours, new locations and increasing intensity of work. And people in 'developed' countries are increasingly accepting long hours and increasingly intense working practices for fear they may otherwise lose their jobs to the growing global pool of talent as work can switch to cheaper locations and labour options.

As time expands in the global 24-hour market place and space and distance are compressed by information and communication technology the world in which we live has become bigger, yet at the same time it has also become smaller. With the growing enormity of looking outwards and thinking collectively, many people are looking within local environments and themselves, as Castells (1997) has argued and this is reflected through contemporary terms or processes such as 'glocalisation', 'devolution', 'the new localism' or 'identity politics'. But while a focus on local environments is essential if culture and diversity are to be respected, it is also important to look at work-personal life issues more broadly. There is a need to keep in mind how many different levels, including the wider global context for example, affects the ways in which these issues are experienced in various societies. It is important to pay attention to understanding and respecting these diversities between different societies and ways in which these can be valued rather than eroded through current exportations of western working practices, values, norms and assumptions.

Increasing insecurity with the rise of global labour markets is heightening the debate over the ways globalisation is progressing. Many of these insecurities need to be linked firmly with the ways in which people are able to work, the ways in which they are able to integrate this with the rest of life and the extent to which people feel they can work collaboratively to make real changes in their own lives and the systems which affect these. There is a need to think about the ways in which inequities and conflicts are perpetuated by globalising forces and how we can enjoy the positive aspects of these movements while mitigating the negative ones. We argue that there is a pressing need to

move towards greater solidarity between different societies, and to rethink working practices in ways which ensure greater understanding, respect and equity within and between them.

Making Changes and Moving Forwards

Finally, it is necessary to think about the processes of change and how people can move forward constructively. There are no easy or quick fixes and no ‘one size fits all’ solutions. Issues of integrating our lives are highly complex and require deep, collective thinking and action, which takes time. So how can we use the questions and new levers for changes that we have been exploring in this paper, to generate collaborative thinking and enable societies to move forward in constructive ways?

History shows that ideas that are potentially useful often do not get used until social forces are ready for inherent changes. We have briefly explored the evolution that has led work-personal life issues to become such a popular issue of concern and have highlighted some of the social forces that feed into this. Change will happen. But if these changes are to take equitable, satisfactory and sustainable forms, as well as maintain business imperatives, in what we term the dual or multiple agenda, there may be a need to try to proactively influence the ways these changes occur.

The multiple agenda and action research

While there may be many ways of making changes, and we hope this paper prompts thinking and suggestions around this, we offer one way forward, which has so far had some success at workplace levels; action research of an interactive, collaborative kind, involving people at all levels, such as ‘grass roots’, managers and boards (Rapoport et al, 2002). This is based on an action research method for exploring work-personal life integration issues developed by a team of action researchers in the USA ¹. In line with

¹ Rhona Rapoport, Lotte Bailyn, Susan Eaton Ellen Galinsky, Joyce Fletcher, Dana Friedman, Maureen Harvey, Robyn Johnson, Deborah Kolb, James Levine, Barbara Miller and Lesley Perlow .

their vision of societies in which ‘work-personal life integration would legitimate a diverse range of relationships to work’, they found this required ‘changing norms that assume the primacy of paid work and limit the career choices and opportunities of individuals who seek fulfilment through commitments in both work and personal life’ and ‘redefining implicit notions of commitment and competence to encourage and reward a more diverse set of skills and contributions in each sphere’(Rapoport et al, 2002).

The action researchers went into a number of workplace settings to explore how *efficiency or equity issues were fuelled by outdated working practices* that failed to take account of changing business and people needs. In making time for work groups to come together and think collaboratively about how they could change working practices actually and value different tasks to improve both workplace performance and their work-personal life integration, they found positive and effective changes could be made. In one organisation, for example, problems relating to assumptions that committed workers were full-timers, was creating both efficiency and equity problems. One manager agreed that while he could break up a particular job into two interesting part time positions in a way that would work better for the organisation, but he questioned who he could get to take them as his ‘best workers need full time work’. In challenging such assumptions in workplace environments, it is possible to make changes in perceptions about committed and competent workers, for example, which can lead to equitable and efficient changes.

While the focus of these change processes was on workplaces, because of the current dominance and dissatisfaction many people have regarding their paid work (Rapoport et al, 2002: Rapoport et al, 1997), many of the assumptions holding back change run throughout all levels of societies. Attention needs to be given to change processes at individual, family, community and wider society levels.

Changing mindsets via this approach has the potential to strengthen the impact of policy and legislation and to produce new ideas and practices. At best, this can sew the seeds of change, but it will need broader and ongoing reflection on social and economic goals,

ways of meeting the multiple agenda, and diffusion of change processes, if these seeds are to flourish. But whatever the method or processes adopted and developed by workplaces and other institutions such as families or communities, we suggest four basic principles arising from the foregoing discussion, which must inform thinking about the change process.

Four basic principles for making changes

1. Tackling deep identity issues

We have noted people tend to want *simplistic explanations and solutions* to complex problems resulting in pragmatic solutions concentrated on government *legislation* and workplace *policies*. While these are necessary, it is also essential to consider implementation and working practices and to examine implicit reward systems that generate particular kinds of behaviour – currently high levels of attachment to paid work. This involves tackling *deep and diverse identity issues*. For this to happen, people need to be able to discuss *feelings* as well as intellectual perspectives so that they can reflect on and examine their own assumptions and how these may be holding back change.

2. Encouraging men and women to address gender issues

We have highlighted the need to *get beyond the rhetoric of changing men as well as women's behaviour and gender relationships*. Changing men-women relationships, and the inclusion of men in these debates, is critical in moving forward. Many of the assumptions that hold back the evolution of work-personal life issues stem from gender assumptions about ways in which work should be done and separated from the rest of life. Open and honest discussions are needed about the changing behaviour and identity of women and men, the similarities and differences in thinking, and the difficulties faced in putting values and ideals into practice.

3. Recognising multiple agendas and ways of integrating

Work-personal life can be discussed from many viewpoints, such as policy, benefits, child-care or gender relationships. The interdependence of these different channels must be recognised. Unless we consider the *various business AND social imperatives collectively*, optimal outcomes will not be reached; for business or other work organisations in the medium or long run, or for people's lives. Attempts to make changes, that have let either efficiency or equity issues slip from view, have been largely unsuccessful (Rapoport et al, 2002).

Just as there can be no quick fixes, there will be *no one single best practice* for dealing with the challenge of work-personal life integration, but rather in the context of multiple agendas, multiple practices will be required. People must work out solutions that account for individual, collective, social and business needs within various systems such as families, communities and workplaces, where work-personal life issues arise. These solutions will differ considerably in different contexts and settings and may change over time.

4. Making time and space for multiple solutions

Real change that enables different diversities that exist across and throughout the life course to be respected and values *takes time*. The need to make the time and space to consider these multiple solutions collectively and collaboratively is vital.

To Sum Up

With profound changes going on in the lives of people throughout the world and in the nature of work and families, alongside the increasing centrality of paid work at the expense of other aspects of our lives, there is a need to rethink many of our existing assumptions operating throughout all the levels of society. Work-personal life integration is not a side issue but a central issue in 21st century societies.

In questioning our values in line with desires for good societies and good lives, it is important to come together and creatively think about new integrations of paid work and the rest of our lives, in the context of equitable, satisfactory and sustainable change. In this paper we have outlined the evolution of work-personal life issues and highlighted the many factors holding back further change. In probing more deeply into many of the assumptions and expectations that continue to operate throughout societies, we have argued that these sticking points could actually become new levers for change. Key to this is not only pragmatically changing men-women relationships, but also changing actual working practices. In making the links between work-personal life integration with many other issues facing societies, we have tried to build a broader consensus for using these new levers to make these changes.

We have outlined possible processes and principles for making these changes; highlighting the need to consider and question some of our seemingly unquestionable assumptions, as well as the time and energy it will take to do this. We believe that challenging conventional wisdoms and making the time and space to do this by focusing on fundamental questions, priorities and values is now essential if there is to be progress towards new integrations that enable equitable, satisfactory and sustainable lives.

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