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Work-home Balance: a Management Perspective

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Work-home balance: A Management Perspective

Abstract

Work-home balance issues have become a very important challenge for both management and employees in the 21st century. The purpose of this paper is to examine work-home balance practices from a management perspective in the Irish hotel industry. There is a dearth of research in relation to work-home balance practices in the hotel sector. The study included a sample of all hotels including Northern Ireland. It found that the needs of the organisation are paramount with profitability considerations being the main driver of work-home practices and benefits. While the majority of managers agree that people work best when they can balance their work and home life there is evidently a gap between the theory and practice. Work-home balance is now a critical issue for the hospitality industry and it is imperative it comes to terms with the long working hours culture and related issues which impact negatively on work-home balance. The interdependent relationship between home and work needs urgent attention as this not only impacts on the quality of working life but on the individual and on the greater good of society. Management would do well by broadening their perspective, not just considering the needs of the organisation but also the employee's home life. Doing the latter will redound to the benefit of the organisation as happy employees result in greater productivity as shown by the literature. This study has also highlighted that trade unions can also be more proactive in relation to work-life balance practices. So far they have adopted a laissez-faire approach and they could provide leadership to both managers and employees on such a critical issue for both personal well-being and the well-being of the organisation and society.

Keywords: Work-home balance; Family; Management; Unions; Society; Hotels;

Individual

Work-home balance in the Irish hotel industry

Introduction:

“The topic of work-life has evolved into one of the most significant business issues of the 21st century” (Harrington and Ladge, 2009). There is significant work-life balance literature (Ten Brummelhuis and Van Der Lippe, 2010; Magnini, 2009; Deery and Jago, 2008) and some criticism of the work-life balance perspective (Cohen et al, 2009). A significant literature is emerging on work-home balance (Brough and O’ Driscoll, 2010; Kreiner at al., 2009; Ilies et al., 2009; Kreiner 2006). Cohen et al (2009, p.1) are critical of the notion of work-life balance which they say “is fast becoming a kind of cultural shorthand for a rather ill-defined set of lifestyle choices and workplace responses. They suggest that relationship between work and non-work-life is more dynamic and they focus on aspects of the work-home dynamic such as control, identity and emotions. Work-home conflict has been dealt with in the literature from an employee perspective (Tromp and Blomme, 2012; Dijkers et al., 2004) but in the hotel industry no one has looked at the management viewpoint. In fact, Trompe and Blomme (2012) note that there is little work-life balance research in the hospitality industry (Deery and Jago, 2009; Kusluvan et al., 2010 cited in Trompe and Blomme, 2012). The latter indicate that future research should incorporate organisational culture as an important variable in work-family conflict and the importance of giving employees more control over how to arrange their work and family obligations. This paper will attempt to address this gap by examining the work-home balance practices in Irish hotels from a management perspective. Perceptions of work-home balance will be examined and implications presented. The work-home balance implications are underdeveloped in the Irish hotel sector. The argument is

made for a more proactive role on the part of management to recognize the importance of home life for the good of the individual, the organisation and society. For the purpose of this paper work-life balance and work-home balance will be used interchangeably as in the context of the research done work-life balance deals with issues of work-home balance.

Emerging significance of work-life balance

Kanter (1977) observes that early in the twentieth century, corporations tended to take over the functions of the family by turning workplaces into independent institutions. Later, establishments tried to separate work from home. However, more recently, perceptions of work and life have changed and they are now regarded as interdependent and complimentary (Werbel and Walter, 2002). Furthermore, evidence from the workplace shows that it is no longer possible to manage most businesses on the assumption that it is the employers' responsibility to provide work and the employees to manage their home-life. It is now recognised that flexibility is an essential part of the labour market supply/demand equation. However this research is not just motivated by the market model of demand and supply but the hospitality industry's contribution to society and more specifically home life. Employers require flexibility to satisfy uneven demand for labour, shift working and changing production needs. Employees also need flexibility as a means of holding their position in the labour market, while pursuing home and family responsibilities and other lifestyle choices (Kanter, 1977; Fisher, 2000; Saltzein and Yuan Ting, 2001). We have seen a move from work-life balance being considered a women's issue to one of a workforce management issue.

Karatepe and Magajc (2008) have identified as an issue the difficulties employees in the hospitality industry have in balancing their various roles. In the hospitality industry a significant aspect of work-life pressure is time-based conflict (Magnini, 2009). Time based conflict happens when time dedicated to one role makes it challenging to participate in another role (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Within the service industry the operations are often round the clock thus creating greater pressure on employees. This affects quality of home life. More intensive work hours and the unsocial hours characteristic of hospitality result in less quality family time (Deery and Jago, 2009). It is well documented that management jobs in the hotel industry have practices that are unfavourable to home life such as the long hours working culture and the practice of presenteeism (Harris *et al.*, 2007). Poor working time practices can lead to turnover, and consequently employers have started to implement family-friendly programmes and practices in the knowledge that helping employees balance work and home-life can enhance the firm's human resources (Xiao and O' Neill, 2010).

There is agreement that working women have to manage the dearth of time within the family (Maher *et al.*, 2008). According to Baxter (2002: 419) "Women (still) do about two thirds of the childcare tasks, at least three quarters of the routine everyday indoor housework tasks, and spend about three times as many hours as men on the latter".

Furthermore, Beagan *et al.*, (2008) in their study found that in practically all families women have primary responsibility for food-work. However, Hook (2006) in his study of unpaid work in 20 countries noticed an increase in the time men spent on domestic work and childcare. Nevertheless, while men are doing more domestic work

it is not in keeping with the amount of time spent by women working outside the home (Fisher *et al.*, 2007).

For most people paid employment and family responsibilities are part of life. Depending on the stage of life one is at, one can find oneself adapting paid employment to facilitate the care of the home in some way. It is important to understand how people achieve this balance so that better policies can be developed to help families at the different stages (Baxter and Gray, 2008). Demerouti (2004) found that work-home interaction was best characterised by a four dimensional structure i.e. work to home influence (WHI) vs. home to work influence (HWI) and the quality of influence (negative vs. positive). Job control and particularly job support were associated with positive WHI. There was no support for a similar facilitating process from the home. In addition particularly negative WHI was linked to fatigue and health problems. Clearly there is a need for work-life balance programmes but how these should be implemented is a question that is open to discussion. In a study conducted in Australia, under two governments, it was found that both preferred work-life balance initiatives to be objects of negotiation between employers and employees and/or between couples in the family rather than to be pursued at national policy level (Craig *et al.*, 2010).

According to Poelmans and Sahibzada (2004, pp. 8-11), there is tension associated with work-life balance and employers are concerned with the “bottom line”. In cases of high unemployment, some companies can get employees to accept working conditions that are not compatible with their family care responsibilities. Another factor of interest is the fear of labour unions. Many firms are afraid that unions will

take advantage of family-friendly/work-life balance policies and claim them as basic rights for all employees. There are challenges regarding the creation of a positive company culture. Organisations vary in their level of benefits but they are important in “attracting and maintaining a talented workforce” (Dulebohn et al. 2009, p. 97). It will be argued that organisation benefits to their employees should not just focus on the organisation’s interest but also the contribution of the organisation to society. It is worth noting that in some Bed and Breakfasts (B&B) in Taiwan and America, it was found that they could maintain a satisfactory balance between work and home life. Associations representing the interest of B&B’s could offer short training courses in skills such as time management, conflict management and relaxation in order to facilitate a better quality in one’s life (Yu-Chin and Yueh-Hsiu, 2010).

Why do some employers offer benefits which represent considerable costs while others do not? On the one hand organisational theory suggests that institutional pressures dictate which types of organisations are more or less likely to adopt non-mandated benefit programmes (Dulebohn et al., 2009, p. 98). Various organisational characteristics have been studied in relation to work family/home benefits provision. Dulebohn et al. (2009) claim that work family adoption is more prevalent among organisations such as the public sector which has a greater diffusion of benefits and among larger organisations. Oliver (1991) argues that institutional environments exert a potent conforming influence on organisations. Goodstein (1994) found that organisations were more likely to provide work family/life programmes when there was a perceived benefit. He demonstrated that the presence of women in an establishment and the level of unemployed women in an industry group, were differentially related to the provision of work-family/home programmes. Regarding

family-friendly and work-home policies, in the hospitality industry, there is some research showing that they have very positive effects (Fredriksen-Goldsen and Scharlach, 2001; McLaughlin and Cullen, 2003). Deery (2008) highlights employee issues in the hospitality industry which lead to high turnover such as exhaustion and job burnout. In addition, some authors have questioned whether it is really in the best interest of businesses to be truly family-friendly (Fredriksen-Goldsen and Scharlach, 2001). Family initiatives at work are usually aimed at increasing work time and productivity. Improving the quality of employees' lives and the organisations contribution to the well-being of society is not a primary concern.

Goodstein's (1994) study is in keeping with other research which showed that certain kinds of work family benefits are more prevalent than others (e.g. parental leave versus flexible work arrangements). Similarly, it fits with Osterman's 1995 conclusion that employers do not necessarily adopt a uniform set of work family benefits, but instead adopt those benefits that are in some degree relevant to their workforce. For example it may be necessary for an employer to provide assistance with childcare to counteract absenteeism and tardiness at work. Economic theory suggests that businesses will introduce work-family benefits if they increase profits however this paper will argue that the hospitality industry should not just driven by economic theory and the market model but also the interests of their employees. The literature does document benefits to the firm from the introduction of work-family policies such as: aiding in recruitment and retention of employees (Dex and Scheibl, 1999): increasing productivity and efficiency (McCampbell, 1996): reducing stress and sick leave (Financial Management, 2001) increasing organisational commitment (Grover and Crooker, 1995, Eaton, 2003): and as a source of competitive advantage

(Allen, 2001, Foster, 2001). The literature has addressed the benefit of work-home balance for the organisation but there is a silence on the benefits to employee's home and family life.

Stress is a feature of the tourism and hospitality industries, which has harmful effects on employees (Karatepe and Bekteshi, 2008; Karatepe and Kilic, 2007). In a study of hotel frontline employees it was found that family social support alleviated conflict in the work-family interface and increased family-work facilitation. It was also noted that work-family facilitation was significantly and positively related to life satisfaction. In addition the results show that both work-family and family-work facilitation contribute to frontline employees' job performance (Karatepe and Bekteshi, 2010, p. 1). This literature focuses on the contribution of the family and home environment to the employee's performance in the organisation rather than the organisations impact on family and home life.

The hospitality industry is known for its unsocial hours, which makes it difficult for employees to fully participate in their family and social life. This occurrence frequently leads to high turnover (Deery and Jago, 2009). There is some evidence that schedule flexibility can act as a buffer against many of the negative effects associated with working non-traditional work hours, such as those usually encountered in the hospitality industry (Staines and Pleck, 2007). Furthermore according to Lee et al., (2011, p. 27) in a study conducted in hotel properties in South Korea, a hotel worker's satisfaction with his/her schedule flexibility is negatively associated with turnover intention. In another study of hotel managers it was found that when employees experienced conflict from work in their personal life they tried to achieve balance by

leaving the company (Hsieh *et al.*, 2009). This implies that employers can reduce turnover by helping employees achieve a better work-life balance. Hospitality organisations that want to prevent loss of talented employees need to be aware of the personal life needs and family obligations of employees and develop programmes for helping employees to be fulfilled in their life outside work (Hsieh *et al.*, 2009). Quality of working life is a vital issue for hospitality establishments when they try to recruit and retain talented managers who expect a balance between work and family (Kandasamy and Ancheri, 2009). Hospitality businesses that provide a family-friendly workplace are more likely to increase retention and achieve greater business savings such as balancing labour costs and performance (Xinguan *et al.* 2011). Yet again this literature focuses on the organisation rather than the impact of these practices on these employees and their home environment. Together the research evidence leads us to propose the following research question: Does management in the Irish hotel sector adopt work-home balance practices strategically in order to support the particular needs of their employees or the organisation?

Methodology

In order to answer the research question a mixed method approach was used. This paper is part of a larger quantitative study on work flexibility and work-life balance. A structured postal survey was used (Brannick, 1997), the purpose being to describe the picture of a phenomenon. The hotel industry is a key component of the hospitality sector. Furthermore, the setting up of a hotel is governed by legislation and in Ireland all hotels must be registered and this facilitated access to the sample used in this study.

The author's view was that a structured survey of hotel managers would be most appropriate in order to provide broad coverage of a study of work-home balance. Brannick (1997) notes the accuracy of data collected by a postal survey is very good along time and cost considerations being favorable. The disadvantage of a poor response rate was overcome by (a) personalizing the covering letter (b) using the logo of the main representative body of the respondents (Irish Hotel and Catering Institute, IHCI) and (c) having recourse to follow-up phone calls.

The questions on work-home balance were part of a bigger study on work flexibility. The survey contained 46 questions and was structured as follows: Section A: Hotel characteristics, 7 questions, Section B: Work-life balance, 7 questions, Section C: Part-time work, 11 questions, Section D: Numerical flexibility, 6 questions, Section E: Functional flexibility, 5 questions, Section F: Contracting out/outsourcing, 3 questions, Section G: Wage flexibility, 1 question, Section H: Unions, 6 questions. The questions on work-home balance issues were based on a survey conducted by the Industrial Statistics Unit, Trinity College Dublin in 2002, as they satisfied the research aims (Industrial Statistics Unit, 2002).

The questions related to work-home balance and work-life balance were as follows: Question 1 dealt with approximately what percentage of staff who are currently working the following working time arrangements? (Tick relevant boxes for each category e.g. flexitime, shift-working, part-time working (permanent), part-time working (temporary), job-sharing, annualized hours and casuals. Question 2 dealt with why were working time practices introduced in the organization? (Please tick where applicable) e.g. lower unionization, improving reputation, employee demand,

improved productivity, reduce number of full-time employees, work-life balance issues, difficult to find full-time staff, reduce number of full-time employees, labour cost savings, changes in organizational design and other reasons. The third question was whether the organization provides employees with support for work-life balance issues with a yes or no answer and then, if yes, what form does this support take? e.g. employee assistance programmes, staff counseling service, continuing professional development, pre-retirement advice and support, stress management course, career planning and guidance and other care support. The fourth question related to managers giving their opinion on five work-life balance statements on a scale ranging from agree strongly to disagree strongly. The statements were (a) everyone should be able to balance home and work-life in the way they want (b) the employer's first responsibility has to be to ensure that the organization meets its goals (c) employees must not expect to change their working pattern if it results in disrupting business (d) it is not our responsibility to help people balance their work and the other aspects of their life (e) people work best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their lives (f) policies that help some staff balance work and other interests are often unfair to other employees. In question 5 managers had to identify which of the statements in question 5 was the most important. In question 6 managers were asked how important would they consider family friendly/work-life balance arrangements are for their organization (1= irrelevant 4=very important). In question 7 managers were asked which, if any, of the following work-life balance arrangements are provided in your organization for employees and if available to all employees or just to full-time employees? (Please tick where appropriate) e.g. paternity leave, compassionate leave, career break, bereavement leave, study/exam leave, parental

leave, carer leave, adoptive leave, maternity leave, force majeure, unexpected occurrence, other please specify.

In order to overcome some other disadvantages of a quantitative study, triangulation was used (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Two face-to-face interviews were conducted, one with an HR manager and the other with a trade union official of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU). The interview with the HR manager was chosen to represent views of management in relation to work-flexibility and work-home balance. The interview complemented the survey findings. In relation to the interview with the trade union official, clarification was sought in relation to the role of unions in promoting work flexibility and work-home balance. SIPTU is the trade union representing employees in Irish hotels as well as other members. The author contacted the headquarters of SIPTU with a view to doing an interview with a trade union official who was familiar with policies and practices of flexibility and work-home balance in the hotel sector. The purpose of these interviews was to complement the analysis of the questionnaire and to provide further in-depth insights into work-home balance. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to facilitate the interviewer in probing, adding or omitting questions or changing their sequence as the need arose. This type of interview allowed the researcher freedom to elicit in-depth complete information. The main advantage of personal interviewing is the depth of information that can be obtained if it is carried out successfully. As Oppenheim (1966, p.81) states “Interviewers come into their own when we need to ask numerous open-ended questions, or open-ended probes, and where the interviewer has to record verbatim the answers given by the respondents to say what they think and to do so with greater richness and spontaneity”.

The interview process followed the seven stages of interview inquiry (Kvale, 2007). They are namely (a) thematising: where the purpose of the investigation was clarified. In this case it was to provide an in-depth analysis of issues raised in the questionnaires. (b) designing the study (c) interviewing (d) transcribing: the interviews were taped and transcribed from oral speech to written text (e) analyzing: as there were only two interviews the responses were not coded. Instead responses were analysed by themes. (f) verifying: the results were considered to be reliable and valid insofar as they fulfilled their purpose and were consistent. (g) reporting: the findings were communicated in an ethical manner e.g. anonymity of responses and in a readable way.

In relation to the interview with the trade union official there were 22 questions related to work flexibility and work-life balance. The following questions were relevant for the present paper: There is a history of low unionisation in the hotel sector. Why is this so? My findings show that 30 percent of hotels have a union presence. How does this compare to your figures for the industry? Is union presence in hotels increasing? What are the major challenges to be faced here? Is membership of unions increasing? Would membership be mainly management or employees? Would your union's attitude be positive towards work-life balance issues? Would you consider work-life balance provisions unfair to some employees who don't avail of them? What would be your view of flexible work practices such as working time practices? The vast majority of union members were in their twenties. Does this reflect your membership? In the vast majority of cases flexible work practices were negotiated without union involvement. Do unions have much say in hotels and if so in

relation to what issues? On the area of flexibility, looking at work-life balance working practices would you say that there is mutual gain there for employees as well as employers? The interview with the HR manager had seven semi-structured questions relating to work flexibility and work-life balance. The questions relevant to the present paper are whether flexibility works more to the benefit of the employer than the employee? Also the question how do you perceive the importance of work-life balance issues? Is it high on your agenda? What in your view is the main reason for flexible working?

Four hundred and seventy hotels from all star categories were included in this study. All 5* hotels were sampled and a stratified random sample of all 4*, 3*, 2*, 1* and unclassified hotels. All 5* hotels were surveyed because they would be considered to have the most sophisticated produce and more work-home balance practices. The key respondent for the survey was the HR manager and the general manager in the case of hotels not having a HR manager. The response rate was 38 percent and this is considered to be within the norm for a postal questionnaire (Murphy, 1997).

Table 1: Sample of Hotels Surveyed and Response Rate

Hotel type	Number surveyed	Number who responded
5*	23	17
4*	54	49
3*	181	84
2*	107	18
1*	33	1
Unclassified	72	8

Questionnaires were posted to the human resource (HR) manager or manager who carries out the HR function. A stamped addressed envelope was enclosed to encourage a response. Follow up phone calls were made to the relevant HR/hotel manager and a second postal reminder was sent out.

The statistical package SPSS 11.00 was used for analysis of the results. As it was an exploratory study descriptive statistics which included frequencies and cross tabulations were considered to be adequate. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and analysed for significant comments in relation to the research questions.

Results and Discussion

From table 21 it can be seen that 80 percent of management agree that everyone should be able to balance home and work-life in the way they want. At the same time 96 percent of managers agree that the employee's first responsibility has to be to ensure that the organization meets its goal. It is clear that employers are concerned about the "bottom line" as reflected in the findings of Poelmans and Sahibzada (2004). However, in a workplace where long and irregular hours are the norm, employers need to pose the question whether they are catering for employees' needs (Wong and Ko, 2009). Employers identified labour cost savings and improved productivity as the main benefit of family-friendly/work-life balance arrangements. This reflects findings by Gambles *et al.*, (2007).

The study found that 54 percent of managers agree that employees must not expect change their working pattern if it results in disrupting business. There is clearly a tension here as 24 percent disagree and 21 percent are unsure. Furthermore 71 percent of management disagree that it is not the employer’s responsibility to help people to balance their work and the other aspects of their lives. Again there is tension here as 19 percent agree and 11 percent are unsure. 96 percent of management agree that people work best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their lives. There are mixed views among management about policies that help some staff balance work and other interests are often unfair to other employees with 42 percent agreeing, 37 percent disagreeing and 22 percent being unsure.

Table 2: Managements Perspective on Various Aspects of Work-home Balance/ Work-life Balance

Everyone should be able to balance home and work- life in the way they want (N=175)	
	Percentage
Agree strongly	26
Agree	54
Unsure	11
Disagree	9
Disagree strongly	-
The employers’ first responsibility has to be to ensure that the organisation achieves its goal (N=177)	
	Percentage
Agree strongly	44

Agree	52
Unsure	2
Disagree	2
Disagree strongly	-

Employees must not expect to change their working pattern if it results in disrupting business (N=175)

	Percentage
Agree strongly	15
Agree	39
Unsure	21
Disagree	23
Disagree strongly	1

It is not the employers' responsibility to help people to balance their work and the other aspects of their lives (N=176)

	Percentage
Agree strongly	2
Agree	17
Unsure	11
Disagree	62
Disagree strongly	9

People work best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their lives (N=177)

	Percentage
Agree strongly	58

Agree	38
Unsure	3
Disagree	2
Disagree strongly	-
Policies that help some staff balance work and other interests are often unfair to other employees (N=177)	
	Percentage
Agree strongly	4
Agree	38
Unsure	22
Disagree	33
Disagree strongly	4

According to Table 3, 49 percent of managers say working time practices were introduced because of labor cost savings, 43 percent of managers say because of work-life balance issues and 42 percent of managers state to increase productivity. The findings here reflect the fact that management are concerned about productivity and profit considerations. Any development of work-life balance programmes clearly has to fit in with overall financial targets. According to employers, labour cost savings, family-friendly/work-life balance issues, improved productivity and employee demand were the primary reasons given for introducing working time arrangements. This evidence further supports the research question that employers adopt work-life balance programmes to cater for the needs of the organization.

Table 3: Employers’ Reasons for Introducing Working Time Arrangements

	Percentage Yes
Labour cost savings	49
Work-life balance issues	43
To improve productivity	42
Employee demand	39
Difficulty in finding full-time staff	34
To reduce the number of full-time employees	23
To improve reputation	20
Changes in organisational design	15

From Table 4 it can be seen that the most important principle identified by management for work-home/work-life balance was that people work best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their lives. This reflects the increasing

significance of work-life balance in the workplace (Harrington and Ladge, 2009). The findings confirm the literature that employees work best when there is a balance between work and non-work life. This confirms Werbel and Walter's (2002) findings that work and family are interdependent and complimentary.

Table 4: The Most Important Principle Identified by Management for Work-home/Work-Life Balance

	Percentage
Everybody should be able to balance home and work- life in the way they want	17
The employers' first responsibility has to be to ensure that the organisation achieves its goals	31
Employees must not expect to change their working pattern if it results in disrupting business	2
It is not the employers' responsibility to help people balance their work and the other aspects of their lives	2
People work best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their lives	49
Policies that help some staff balance work and other interests are often unfair to other employees	-

The study found that the industry had working time practices that facilitate work-home balance. Permanent part-time and casual working time are dominant working arrangements for hotels. Eighty five per cent of hotels have permanent part-time

employees and sixty eight per cent of hotels have casual employees. Management have statutory leave arrangements such as parental leave, care leave, adoptive leave, maternity leave and emergency leave. 81 percent of hotels surveyed have bereavement leave, 64 percent have study/exam leave, 53 percent have paternity leave and 74 percent have compassionate leave available to both part-time and full-time employees. Supports available in hotels are employee assistance programmes, pre-retirement advice and support, staff counselling service, stress management courses, continuing professional development, and career planning and guidance. Figures range from hotels with no supports, one support and up to six supports. 38 percent of hotels had no supports, 14 percent of hotels had one support, 25 percent of hotels had two supports, 12 percent of hotels had three supports, 5 percent of hotels had four supports, 5 percent of hotels had five supports and 1 percent of hotels had six supports. With regard to leave arrangements, both statutory and non-statutory and work-life balance supports available it can be seen that employers are adopting arrangements in response to the needs of the workforce. Organizational supports have the potential to contribute to a better work-home balance. According to Dulebohn et al., (2009, p. 97) organizational supports are important “in attracting and maintaining a talented workforce”. The lack of organizational supports could be an indication of a lack of awareness on the part of management of the importance of work-home balance supports. It echoes the description “voice without responsibility” applied to UK hospitality employers in relation to vocational training and skills development (Gleeson and Keep, 2004, p. 50). At a strategic level management need to embrace a vision of the importance of work-home balance supports and transmit this to front line management as well as to all employees. On the other hand, there may be lack of demand for these supports from employees. This may be due to lack of knowledge on

the part of employees regarding what is available. These findings could be a reflection of poor communication as well as of a need for management training regarding employee requirements for work-home balance supports. Wong and Ko (2009, p. 202) emphasize the importance of “open communication” in relation to the work-life balance process. There may be a tendency to focus excessively on short term returns rather than the betterment of individual and family. In this respect Lashley (2011) found that education and training are often a low priority for hospitality employers. The same could be said of work-home balance practices in this study in relation to some establishments. Tromp and Blomme (2012) talk about giving the employee more control over their work and family obligations as more intensive working hours and the unsocial hours characteristic of hospitality result in less family time (Deery and Jago, 2008).

According to Putnam (2000, p. 406) referring to community- and family-oriented work practices, “At least in periods of full employment, moreover, such practices become a key ingredient in recruiting and retaining a high-quality loyal workforce”. This research was carried out before the recession in Ireland when there was a tight labour market. Employees would have had greater bargaining power in relation to work-home balance arrangements. Being an ethical organization that adopts policies that aid the family redound to the benefit of the organization.

According to employers, 80 percent of all employees took up working time arrangements to combine work with the care of other people. This reflects the increasing number of people with caring responsibilities. The evidence here further supports the research question that employers adopt work-life balance arrangements

to cater for the needs of their workforce. This reflects the increasing number of people with caring responsibilities in the home and home related responsibilities. The number of older people is growing (<http://ageingnetwork.pbworks.com>). The fact that family needs were the primary reason given for availing of work-life balance programmes reflects the importance given by Irish people to family relationships (Clinch *et al.*, 2002). Also working parents have to manage the dearth of time within the family (Maher *et al.*, 2008). Drew *et al.*, (2003, p. 13) state that “Personal fulfilment is important inside work and that satisfaction outside work may enhance employees’ contribution to work”. There needs to be a balance between work and home commitments. This demands time as peoples’ care requirements are time consuming involving looking after them physically as well as the housework involved such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and tidying up (Craig and Bittman, 2008). Home demands can be broadly divided in two, “one physical or material and the other interpersonal”. The physical or material aspect has to do with the housework involved in maintaining the home. Those with financial means often get external help for cooking, cleaning and laundry. This allows the husband and wife more time to devote to the interpersonal aspects of home life. It is more challenging for families who have to cater for both aspects (Quick *et al.*, 2004, p. 429). Work-home balance makes a significant contribution in relation to quality of work and to quality of life (Guest, 2001). Indeed there is some evidence that if employees feel that work and home are not balanced they will leave a go in search of a better quality of life (Wong and Ko, 2009).

Despite some evidence that trade union membership can positively affect the availability of work-life balance programmes (Budd and Mumford, 2006) this study

showed that trade unions had no effect on work-life balance programmes. This may be due to the fact that only one third of hotels in the study were unionised (which reflects figures for the industry) and an interview with a trade union official reflected that more work needed to be done by unions to increase membership and to play a more active role in the workplace. However, the interview with the trade union official does recognise the importance of work-life balance. “The work-life balance issue is probably one of the main areas in the past decade where the trade union movement and our union in particular, would have been present mainly because it’s what the membership would have wanted in terms of having that kind of arrangement in place”. The interviewee was of the opinion that work-life balance is a mutual gains enterprise for both the employer and employee. In relation to the question of work-life balance arrangements being unfair to employees who don’t avail of them the response was as follows:

I suppose you are always going to get that type of situation, you know you will always have people who for their own personal reasons want to avail of certain arrangements and you may have others who feel it’s an unfair advantage to those people, but it’s a bit like the smoking ban to the people who smoke, who say what about my rights etc. From our point of view there is not a lot that can be done in relation to that.

In relation to the importance of work-home balance issues a HR manager interviewed noted the interdependent nature of work and home and the need to have balance here.

I suppose respect in the work environment, you’re being paid, you’re being respected, you’re getting thanked, and you’re being appreciated for the services that you deliver in the work environment. If those set of ingredients

aren't right then it can result in poor experiences and if things don't go right at work you can take them home, you can bring it home to your social and personal life. That can influence your personal life but on the other side of the coin then if your personal life isn't good you can bring it into the work environment, so from that point of view it's very important for me in my role in the organisation to make sure that there's a right balance struck.

When asked about the main reasons for flexible working, a HR manager interviewed stated that people are clearly a very valuable asset to the business and it is so important to look after individuals needs in relation to home and family as this has a direct impact on performance at work.

I suppose it's to ensure we get people that are happy in their work, that they have job satisfaction. Isn't that it really? If you want people to, you know, let's be flexible like you know, if somebody's a valuable asset to your organisation and if they're really worth their weight in gold, of course you're going to be flexible if you want them as opposed to not being flexible and risk losing them to somebody else. I mean you keep at it if they're worth anything to you; they're your people that'll succeed and sustain your business for the future.

The HR manager signalled the employee need for work-home balance and providing for this is necessary for the future of work.

Overall, I think flexibility in society today has to be the way forward for the future because work-life balance is a very important part of people's criteria now when they look for a job.

As the HR management stated work-home balance is a vital consideration for the organisation going forward as it impacts on employee well-being and the overall good of the organisation and society.

Conclusions and implications

This study has found that from management's perspective the needs of the organisation are paramount with profitability considerations being the main driver of work-home practices and benefits. Work-home balance is now a critical issue for the hotel industry and it is imperative it comes to terms with the long working hours culture and related issues which impact negatively on work-home balance. The interdependent relationship between home and work needs urgent attention as this not only impacts on the quality of working life but on the greater good of society. The industry can no longer afford to remain passive as employee wellbeing and home life, which directly impacts on both the organisation and society is at stake (Hsieh, et al., 2008). With the economic downturn and many people looking for work it would be important for hotel managers not to fall onto exploitation of employees and thereby not considering the bigger vision of quality employment practices in relation to work and home. Management would do well by broadening their perspective, not just considering the needs of the organisation but also the employee's home life. Fostering the latter will redound to the benefit of the organisation as happy employees result in greater productivity, as supported by the literature. The findings show that management are experiencing some tensions with employees in reconciling work-home balance and balancing this with the needs of the organisation. Management training in work-home balance would be very beneficial here. Those hotel managers working at a strategic level need to communicate this vision of the importance of

home life to front line management so that effective work-home balance practices are introduced. Work-home balance policies are an important way to reflect concern for ethical values which can be a source of competitive advantage for the business. It is clear that trade unions need to be more proactive in relation to work-home balance practices. So far they have adopted a laissez-faire approach and they could provide leadership to both managers and employees on such a critical issue for both personal well-being and the well-being of the organisation and society.

It could be considered a limitation of the study that the analysis was confined to descriptive statistics. It could be interesting to do more interviews to enrich the perspective on work-home balance. The employees' perspective on work-home balance will be the subject of another paper. Another aspect that could be looked at is the human resource perspective. The study was confined to Irish hotels and it might be insightful to replicate the study in an international context.

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