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Work–Life Balance: Britain and Germany Compared

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**Work–Life Balance:
Towards an Agenda for Policy Learning
Between Britain and Germany**

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**Anglo-German Foundation
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WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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Contents

Contents	i
Preface	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	iv
1 Political contexts	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 European dimensions	3
1.3 Legislation, policies and responses in the UK	4
1.4 Legislation, policies and responses in Germany	7
2 Theoretical perspectives	11
2.1 Notions of time	11
2.2 Time use	12
2.3 Operating times	13
2.4 Gender time	14
3 Research findings: exemplars	16
3.1 Research in Europe	16
3.2 The need to retain staff	17
3.3 Working long hours	17
3.4 Working part-time	18
3.5 Permanent contracts	19
3.6 Time off for special reasons	20
3.7 Combining family and work	20
3.8 Life in rural communities	21
3.9 Teleworking	22
4 Conclusion and further questions	24
References	26

Preface

This report is one of six commissioned by the Anglo-German Foundation in an effort to give added focus to its work in supporting comparative research and discussion of key issues facing policy-makers in both the public and the private sector in Britain and Germany.

Topics were selected for their relevance in both countries, and for their potential to yield policy-learning dividends. Authors were selected for their expertise in the 'state of the art' in Britain and Germany. They were asked to review current knowledge, and to identify gaps in that knowledge, which might form an agenda for future bilateral research and discussion.

The Foundation's Board of Trustees will use the reports, and the reaction and comments they generate, to assess the potential of each topic as an area of focus for future investment by the Foundation.

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Introduction

Prompted to some degree by policies and concerns promoted by the European Union, and the Council of Europe, the set of issues now widely termed 'work-life balance' is much discussed in academic and policy circles in the UK and in Germany. It is also moving up the agenda of British and German employers and trade unions.

This survey considers policy, strategies and developments in both countries, together with the empirical research which inform them, and potential areas of future comparative research which might contribute to mutual policy-learning, and to the wider debate.

The range of issues embraced by the term 'work-life-balance' is wide. In academic terms, it crosses disciplines and traditional boundaries. It covers aspects of gender, gendered time, time use, work and family relationships, and the implications of these for issues such as staff retention and motivation, excessive working hours, part-time working, time off for special purposes combining family and work, life in rural communities, and teleworking.

The report is structured around three key themes:

- Political contexts, legislative frameworks and policy developments in the UK and Germany, seen against the European context (Chapter 1)
- Theoretical notions of time in relation to work and family life, such as time use, diary time, operating time and gender time (Chapter 2)
- Examples of research undertaken for a variety of purposes and political agendas in the public, private or voluntary sector or by higher education institutions often in conjunction with government and other agencies in either the UK or Germany, or across European countries (Chapter 3).

The report ends with a conclusion, and with questions for possible future research.

1 Political contexts

This chapter examines aspects such as legislative frameworks and policies arising partly from the European context and partly from specific social and cultural dimensions appropriate to both Germany and the UK. The first section provides an overview of key issues and concepts together with European dimensions, as they seem relevant to the topic on hand. The subsequent sections tease out specific aspects that are significant in either the German or the British context.

1.1 Introduction

In the course of this investigation two key themes, seen from both the employers' and the employees' perspectives, have emerged: one relates to changes in working time arrangements (part-time and full-time) and the other to the balance and tensions surrounding unpaid work in the family and paid/unpaid work in employment. In Germany part-time or flexitime working arrangements are widely accepted and implemented. In the United Kingdom a smaller but increasing number of companies also offer a range of alternative work models. Politicians and others involved in labour relations in both countries are actively promoting work–life balance issues. As the term implies, these aim to raise employers' awareness of the benefit to business of introducing policies and practices which help employees to obtain a better balance between work and the rest of their lives. While what is the 'right' balance varies from person to person, the policies and practices an employer introduces are dependent on the organisational settings in which employees work (Hogarth *et al.*, 2001). The underlying assumption is that we all work too hard. We live to work – not the other way round. Yet towards the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s educators, policy-makers and academics anticipated the advent of a golden leisure time era. The extended application of computer technology, it was promised, would enable people to spend more time away from work. However, rapid globalisation processes, mass communication systems and the need to remain competitive exert pressures of their own. Flexibilisation of the workforce in a knowledge society has not only become a major slogan but has resulted in many people working longer hours, with weekend work or shift work increasingly becoming the norm. At the same time employers and politicians recognise that many employees need 'work–life balance' support if they want to be able to cope with the many pressures of work and home life. A range of government policies aims to support both parental rights and family-friendly work schemes in the UK and Germany – although in practice and in law these may be tackled differently in either country.

The term 'work–life balance' has gained wide acceptance in the British media. Numerous experts, politicians, scholars and union representatives have explained and debated the term in various contexts, particularly in relation to 'workers being stressed' (BBC, 30.01.01), Britain's overtime culture and many workers' inability to work flexibly (Trades Union Congress (TUC), 21.08.01). Yet at 5.1 per cent the unemployment rate is relatively low (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2002a) and unemployment itself is longer at the

forefront of political discussions in the media. The TUC has campaigned for some time for all workers to be offered ways of working that allow them to achieve a better balance between work and personal activities such as learning, sport, leisure and other interests, as well as family life. Furthermore, an increasing number of workers care for young children or older relatives and need help to be able to balance these responsibilities with work (Labour Research Department (LRD), 2001). In 2000, for example, the population of the UK reached 52.9 million, an increase of 0.5 per cent compared with 1999. Of this increase 24 per cent was due to more births than deaths and the remainder mainly to international migration. An indication of societal changes is the number of births outside marriage: 39 per cent in 2000, nearly four times the rate of 1979. Of those, 90 per cent of births were to teenagers and 63 per cent to women aged 20–24. By contrast the average age of women giving birth has gradually increased, from 27.5 years in 1990 to 29.1 in 2000 (ONS, 2001).

The English expression ‘work–life balance’ is occasionally used in Germany, although German terms such as *Balance in der Arbeits- und Lebenswelt*, *Vereinbarung von Arbeit und Familie*, or the related term *Flexi-Arbeiten*, have gained wider recognition in the media and elsewhere. In Germany, too, the ageing of the population is a matter of considerable national concern and is adding to the pressure on the working population to cope not only with the demands of work but also with family life and with caring for the increasing number of older people. At the end of 2000 the Federal Republic had a population of 82,260 million, a 1 per cent increase on the preceding year. In east Germany the population continued to decline following German re-unification, from 16.02 million in 1990 to 14.02 million (excluding Berlin) in 1998, while the west German population increased from 63.73 million to 68.02 million in the same period. Nowadays fewer people get married: while only 15.7 per cent of over-18s were not married in 1960, by 1998 the number had increased to 40.6 per cent. More foreigners migrated to Germany than emigrated, leaving a balance of 86,000, a slight reduction compared with 1999 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 15.10.01). The number of lone parents in Germany is more than 15 per cent, or 1.8 million, with more than 2.6 million children under the age of 18. Some 85 per cent of lone parents are women. Lone parents are, therefore, no longer marginal to society but an integrated part of it (Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung (BIB), 2000). Such societal changes inevitably impact on policies and the political and societal commitment to support work–life balance systems in and outside the workplace:

‘Verbesserungen für Familien ziehen sich wie ein roter Faden durch die gesamte Politik der Bundesregierung. Niemals zuvor sind Familien umfassender gefördert worden als heute.’¹

(<http://www.familie-deutschland.de>, accessed May 2002)

However, German policy initiatives have to be seen in the context of relatively high unemployment: 10.0 per cent in March 2002, with 8.0 per cent in the west and 18.8 per cent in the east (Bundespresseamt, 15.04.02). Part-time working arrangements were therefore introduced in the anticipation that these will, in due course, raise employment levels and thereby reduce unemployment. Perhaps not surprisingly, German laws regulating part-time work are more comprehensive and far-reaching than those in the

¹ ‘Improvements for families run like a red thread through all of the federal government’s policies. Never before did families receive more comprehensive support than today.’

UK, where many aspects of labour relations continue to rely on voluntarism rather than on tight legislation.

1.2 European dimensions

Nowadays Europe-wide interaction highlights tensions between what is often described in terms of opposites: the global and the local, homogeneity and heterogeneity, universality and particularity. The topic of work–life balance cannot, therefore, be treated in the temporal or spatial isolation of only two countries, since both Britain and Germany are members of the European Union and the Council of Europe. They are also part of an increasingly global economic and cultural community.

The notion of working times entered labour relation discussions during the 1970s and 1980s, at a time when the rise of employment during times of unemployment could no longer be guaranteed (Meiskins, 1998). Following the 1992 Treaty on European Union (Amsterdam Treaty) and the subsequent Luxembourg Summit, employment strategies became a key issue, mainly because unemployment rates across Europe remained high compared to the US. With regard to ‘time’, one of the determining factors in this study, there is much emphasis across all European countries on changes in working patterns and trends towards shift work, weekend work, short-term contracts and flexitime and overtime arrangements. The European Working Time Directive, based on Article 118a of the Treaty of Rome, was adopted in 1993 for this reason (Council Directive 93/104/EC). The article sets the goal of improving standards of health and safety of workers in the EU. Though still controversial, the directive is now implemented in UK domestic law by the Working Time Regulations 1998, which came into force in 2001 and state that workers cannot be forced to work for more than 48 hours a week. However, the UK is the only EU country where workers can agree to ‘opt out’, that is, work longer than the 48-hour limit, provided that they sign a written agreement (Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), 2001a). Compliance with the directive is estimated by the DTI to cost the business sector £2.2 billion annually. By contrast, the estimated cost of compliance with the Employment Relations Act 1999 seems modest, at £60 million per annum, half of which is attributable to parental leave (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2000). In some countries, such as the Netherlands, France and Germany, there is a strong political commitment to working time reductions and more diverse and flexible arrangements. However, working time reduction does not appear to be part of the political momentum in Britain (Fagan, 2001).

Nowadays working time regulations and welfare state policies have been reformed in most European countries with the aim of making markets more flexible and also to promote, among other issues, women’s employment in child-raising years. Noteworthy, too, is the increase in the number of men and women with children who work full-time. In 1992, according to Eurostat statistics (2002), 55.1 per cent of couples with children in Germany were working full-time, compared to 60.3 per cent in 2000. In the United Kingdom these figures are somewhat higher: 63.4 per cent in 1992 and 70.2 per cent in 2000. Such changes are reshaping relationships, although gender differences remain as far as working times and domestic responsibilities are concerned. The promotion of ‘gender mainstreaming’ was agreed by EU signatories to the Amsterdam Treaty. This means accepting and valuing the differences between men and women and the diverse

roles they play in society, and to bring gender equality perspectives into the mainstream of everyday policy-making. The aim, therefore, is not gender-neutral but to include the views of different groups of women and men in the formation and delivery of such policies (Cabinet Office, 2002). Member states of the Council of Europe, too, are significant actors in the development of effective work–life balance and family-friendly policies across member states, all of which are obliged to consider ‘gender mainstreaming’. Gender issues such as combining family and work, and equal opportunities and rights for women have been taken up by the Council of Europe since 1978 in an effort to reconcile demands made by work and family life. The Council states that most member countries now have extensive legislation on equal treatment in the workplace. However, these ideas must be implemented in central and local government agreements in the workplace:

‘We must create a climate at every single workplace so that it is understood that employees with caring obligations need some flexibility in their daily lives. And employers ought to meet these needs whenever possible’

(Council of Europe, 1996: 38).

Within these discussions, which have Europe-wide and global dimensions, cultural, social, structural and political differences remain. The UK’s reliance on voluntarism, while welcomed by many employers, is regretted by British trade unions. The tension between EU interventions, government control and voluntarism remains marked. British business continues to protest at the burden of new European regulations limiting working hours, extending parental leave and improving part-time workers’ rights, while the current Labour government seeks to support both social justice and economic efficiency (*Financial Times*, 08.03.00).

1.3 Legislation, policies and responses in the UK

Both the UK and Germany have important laws which govern current policies in relation to work–life balance issues. In the UK the Employment Relations Act 1999 provides, among others, new rights and changes in family-related employment. The Act aims to make it easier for workers to balance the demands of work and the family by simplifying and extending rights for parental leave for men and women when they have or adopt a baby. It also regulates time off needed for urgent family matters (HMSO, 1999). The government has also set up the ‘Work and Parents Task Force’, which aims to examine ways of giving working mothers and fathers of young children a legal right to ask to work flexible hours and to have their requests considered seriously by their employers.

The Employment Bill 2001, before Parliament at the time of writing and to be fully implemented in April 2003, covers a wide-ranging package including issues relating to work and parents, disputes in the workplace and fixed-term working. It aims to help working mothers by extending entitlements to six months’ paid and a further six months’ unpaid maternity leave. The Bill also recognises the role of working fathers by granting them two weeks’ paternity leave. It will place a duty on employers to give serious consideration to requests from parents to work more flexibly. For the first time parents of young children will have the right to apply for flexible working arrangements. Employers

will be able to refuse such requests only where they have a clear business reason (DTI, 2002). Prior to the implementation of the Bill maternity leave consisted of 18 weeks' paid leave with an entitlement for additional maternity leave of 29 weeks (unpaid) for employees with at least one year's service with that employer. Of significance, too, in the context of work–life balance are the Part-Time Workers Regulations 2000, which came into force on 1 July 2000. These ensure that part-time workers are not treated less favourably than comparable full-time workers in their terms and conditions (DTI, 2001b). The Sex Discrimination Act 1975, together with the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Equal Pay Act 1970, also serves to support work–life balance issues by helping women, even if indirectly, to insist that, given certain circumstances, employers consider gender equality (LRD, 2001).

In spring 2000 the UK government launched its 'Work–Life Balance Campaign', which aims to raise employers' awareness of the benefits to business of introducing policies and practices which help employees to obtain a better balance between work and the rest of

'Juggle don't struggle. It is about working smart. Working-life balance isn't only about families and childcare, nor is it about working less. It is about being fresh enough to give all you need to both work and home without jeopardising one for the other.'

DTI, 2002, Guidance from Work–life balance Unit: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance>, accessed May 2002

their lives. In this sense, the perceived task of UK government agencies is to set the framework which will allow employers, on a voluntary basis, to introduce the organisational settings which aim to improve their employees' work–life balance while maintaining their business goals. These efforts require considerable consultative processes. For this reason, the government set up the 'Work–Life Challenge Fund' of £10.5 million with the aim of providing free consultancy advice to companies, public, private and voluntary organisations in England. Similar schemes operate in Wales and in Scotland (DTI, 2000).

The government in its document *Changing Patterns in a Changing World* (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 2000) offers a checklist to employers. The list states that an organisation committed to work–life balance

- 'Recognises that effective practices to promote work–life balance will benefit the organisation and its employees
- 'Acknowledges that individuals at all stages of their lives work best when they are able to achieve an appropriate balance between work and all other aspects of their lives
- 'Highlights the employer's and the employee's joint responsibility to discuss work solutions and encourages a partnership between individuals and their line manager
- 'Develops appropriate policies and practical responses that meet the specific needs of the organisation and its employees, having regard to
 - fairness and consistency
 - valuing employees for their contribution to the business, not their working pattern
 - monitoring and evaluation
- 'Communicates its commitment to work–life strategies to its employees
- 'Demonstrates leadership from the top of the organisation and encourages managers to lead by example.'

(DfEE, 2000: 4)

'The demands of the economy are changing rapidly and people's needs are changing accordingly. Customers increasingly expect, for example, to be able to access services outside traditional working hours. Working patterns are changing to meet this demand. At the same time, more and more businesses see it as part of good human resource management to help employees balance their work and life outside work. As employers seek the best people to enhance their profitability and as the workforce becomes more diverse, both large and small businesses are adopting a range of employment practices to attract and retain staff.'

(DfEE, 2000: 3)

Government advice stresses further that 'life outside work is valuable and important too. Both male and female employees need time for that part of their life' (DfEE, 2000: 7). Part-time work is by far the most common way of balancing work and family commitments. In autumn 2000 there were, according to Labour Force Survey statistics, 5.5 million women and 1.3 million men working part-time (LRD, 2001). Part-time work can mean switching to and from part-time work, reduced hours, job-sharing, term-time working (not working during school holidays), flexitime, compressed working week, self-rostering, dependency leave, study leave or teleworking.

Another development was the establishment of 'Employers for Work–Life Balance', an alliance of 22 major employers across a wide span of public and private sector companies committed to promoting work–life balance.

The 'National Work–Life Forum' is aimed not at employers but at employees. The organisation sets out to advise individuals on how to develop strategies to help them combine successfully the demands of work with their personal, family and community life. A number of other voluntary agencies such as 'Parents at Work' or 'New Ways to Work' have a similar remit. Nevertheless many companies have a long way to go before they can claim to have family-friendly work practices (Bond *et al.*, 2002).

Northern Foods PLC, with 22,639 employees, is one of the companies involved in 'Employers for Work–Life Balance'. Key work initiatives include part-time working, flexitime, job-sharing, term-time working, annual hours, seasonal working, paternity leave, on-site nursery, a holiday play scheme and some partnership nursery places, family life solutions information service. The company states:

'The business benefits are not about quantity, but about quality. Food production is about making products today that are on the shelves tomorrow – so we need to be very flexible. Diverse, flexible working practices to suit local needs help staff to balance work and home – and us to deliver high quality products in time.'

(<http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk>, accessed May 2002)

'A project involving the Inland Revenue and the civil service union PCS has been experimenting with a number of possible new ways of working. These include a nine-day fortnight, banking hours to take later in the year, or changes to the current core times in the flexitime scheme. Work–life balance has traditionally addressed the difficulties faced by workers and parents. But those running the project are keen to demonstrate that it can be benefit all staff and recognise that people's needs change during their working lives.'

(LRD, 2001)

The current distribution of paid work and caring work remains inequitable. Some people are combining very long hours of paid work with very long hours of caring responsibilities, while others with no caring responsibilities are excluded from paid work. At the turn of the millennium, for example, more than one million lone mothers were bringing up two million children in poverty in the UK, the sixth largest economy in the world (Perrons, 2000). Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed a number of significant, albeit incremental shifts within UK society which impact on the boundaries between work and family. The New Deal for Lone Parents, for example, seeks to move women away from welfare and back to work. Other government policies have been introduced to increase opportunities for women in paid work. However, childcare remains a key problem for most, particularly since local authority provision of day nurseries and the number of places in them has decreased by 240 (35 per cent) between 1990 and 2001 (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001). Other initiatives, such as Working Families' Tax Credit, introduced in October 1999, seek to offer financial assistance for working families on low and middle incomes. In order to gain tax benefits families, married or unmarried, or lone parents need to work at least 16 hours a week, have one or more children living with them and have savings of no more than £8,000.

1.4 Legislation, policies and responses in Germany

The reduction of working hours was a key bargaining point in Germany during the 1980s and early 1990s. Flexibilisation of working hours also gained momentum from the mid-1990s onwards in the employer–employee relationship and has remained one of the German cornerstones ever since (Lehndorff, 2001). Government policies were aimed at reducing working hours in order to fight unemployment, though many of these early initiatives did not succeed. Nevertheless, substantial progress has been made during recent years with respect to allowing more flexible working time arrangements at company level (OECD, 2001). The OECD reports that in 1999 working time accounts were in operation for 35 per cent of west German and 33 per cent of east German employees. The accounts allow for compensating for periods of overtime with reduced working hours within a certain period, extending from a short period to over several years. The trend is continuing. In 2002 flexible working has almost become the way of life for about 50 per cent of the German working population. Only 49 per cent now work with fixed beginnings and endings to their working day; almost a third have working time accounts

(*Arbeitskonten*), mainly in medium-sized or large companies of 50 or more employees. In companies below 50 the figure is reduced to 23 per cent (Statistisches Bundesamt, 22.05.02).

Comparable national data are not available for the UK. Although case study surveys point to an increase in part-time and flexitime arrangements, the number of employees involved remains low. While the UK's Employment Bill 2001 restricts the right to apply to have a full-time job converted to part-time to parents with young children only, Germany's *Gesetz über Teilzeitarbeit und befristete Arbeitsverträge* (Law on Part-Time and Fixed-Term Working) of 2001 extends such rights to all employees. Accordingly, all employees have the legal right to convert a full-time job into a part-time job and vice versa. Collective contracts that establish the right for older employees to take up part-time instead of full-time employment as part of their preparation for retirement (*Altersteilzeit*) have further increased. At the end of 2002 such contracts cover 15.4 million older employees (OECD, 2001). The new law, based on EU policy frameworks, replaced the *Beschäftigungsförderungsgesetz* (Law Promoting Employment) on 31 December 2000. Accordingly, reasons for application are now no longer tied to parental duties and other family matters, but also cover a range of other reasons such as education and training, commitments to sport or other honorary activities. Employers can refuse all of these reasons, but only when such arrangements are proven to be detrimental to business. The German law stipulates further that employees have to let their employers know at least three months in advance of a wish to work part-time. The law promotes labour relations on the basis of *partnerschaftliche Zusammenarbeit* (working as partners) (Bundesministerium für Arbeit (BMA), 2001a). Most working time arrangements in Germany, unlike those in UK, are settled within the context of *Tarifverhandlungen* (autonomous negotiations between employer organisations and the trade unions) and without government interference. These rights are enshrined in the *Betriebsverfassungsgesetz* of 1972 (Works Constitution Act). Works councils represent the interests of full-time and part-time employees within an organisation, for instance in relation to collective flexitime arrangements and other entitlements. However, as the statement below indicates, sometimes employees seem to be more clued up than their representatives on the work councils:

'Mit wenigen Ausnahmen bezogen die Unternehmen ihren Betriebsrat frühzeitig – direkt oder indirekt – in die Entwicklung des Arbeitszeitmodells ein. Gemeinsam erarbeitete Regelungen wurden in der Regel dann auch vom Betriebsrat (mit)vertreten, was Aussagen wie "Der Betriebsrat hat um Akzeptanz gekämpft" oder auch "Unser Betriebsrat betrachtet die Regelung als sein 'Kind'" deutlich machen. Die Arbeitszeitsysteme wurden dann auch von den Mitarbeitern eher akzeptiert. Manchmal allerdings scheinen die Mitarbeiter in ihrem (Um-)Denken bereits weiter gewesen zu sein als ihr Betriebsrat.'²

(BMA, 2001b)

Also significant in this context is the *Reformgesetz zum Erziehungsgeld und zur Elternzeit* (the law which regulates family allowance and parental leave) of 1 January 2001. The law

² 'With only a few exceptions companies involved their works council in the development of working time schemes from early on, either directly or indirectly. Generally works councils took (co-)ownership of such collective schemes, as evidenced by statements such as "The works council fought for acceptance" or "Our works council considers these schemes as its 'baby'". This also meant that employees were more likely to accept the working time schemes. However, sometimes the employees seemed to be further in their (re-)thinking than their works council.'

allows not only mothers but also fathers to work part-time, up to 30 hours a week, during the child's first years, or longer by agreement, without discrimination or job loss and with the possibility of further extensions. This means that both parents can share parental responsibilities and earn a living if they so wish (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ), 2001). The Mutterschutzgesetz of 1952, amended in 1997 with further amendments implemented in 2002, grants mothers before and after birth the right to continued employment and full pay during maternity leave. Before the implementation of the new law mothers were entitled to six weeks' maternity pay before and eight weeks' after the birth of the child; the latter is now to be extended to 14 weeks.

The German government, not unlike the British, promotes 'the family' with campaigns such as '*Mehr Zeit für Kinder*', or '*Familie in Deutschland*'. These aim to bring together information about political initiatives aimed at young people, families and lone parents. Various projects such as '*Mann und Frau – gemeinsam in Beruf und Familie*', a joint venture with Deutsche Telekom, promote the notion of work–life balance through work and family life. Examples of best practice refer to women returners, flexible working, teleworking, care centres for children at work and stress the need for flexibility and family-friendly working environments (BMFSFJ, 16.04.2002). Government statements refer to policies aimed at promoting family life with the aid of tax reforms and provisions for older people.

Flexible working time arrangements are promoted by the Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ, 1999) and the Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung (BMA, 2002). An abundance of advice and guidance is issued by the government on how to implement the new law on part-time work in order to have more time for the family, or more time for oneself, more time for learning, less stress, and benefits from taking early retirement. Various working time models are presented: employees work an hour or two, even a day, less during a week; or they take advantage of '*Teilzeit-Invest*', that is, the employee works full-time but gets paid less, with the difference being invested and used as part of an early retirement package. The ministry further publishes detailed research in the form of case studies (*Arbeitszeit-Praxisbeispiele*), involving 200 companies from various sectors and of different size which have introduced a variety of part-time/flexitime schemes in response to individual requests of employees. Almost all companies reported the need for effective information and communication strategies, allowing the direct involvement of individual employees and work councils together with members of the management team. The process, it is stated, was neither bottom-up or top-down and one of mutual agreement and shared visions. Indeed, it was important that managers not only understood time management but also changed their own practices:

'Nahezu alle Unternehmen stellten fest, dass sich die Rolle der Führungskräfte in flexiblen, weitgehend durch Mitarbeiter gesteuerten Systemen grundlegend verändert. So wird mehrfach darauf hingewiesen, dass es für die erfolgreiche Einführung eines Arbeitszeitsystems unabdingbar ist, dass die Führungskräfte sowohl Verständnis von Arbeitszeit als auch ihr eigenes Arbeitszeitverhalten ändern.'³

(BMA, 2001b: 40)

³ 'Almost all companies noted that the role of managers changes significantly in flexible systems that are largely promoted by employees. Several point out that the successful introduction of a working time system demands that managers understand the concept of working time and change their own behaviour in relation to working hours.'

Almost all federal states have initiated a series of campaigns on the implementation of the new law in relation to part-time working. In January 2000 North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), led the initiative '*Aktion 100 Betriebe*' which offered advice free of charge to small and medium-sized companies on how to introduce more 'modern' flexible working conditions. In the end more than 200 companies took part and 68 companies have introduced various schemes of flexitime working, thereby creating 500 new jobs. Other companies were still involved in negotiations with employees in an effort to introduce such schemes. Working time accounts (*Arbeitskonten*) were the most popular and the scheme was considered to have been a success (NRW, 2002).

Another voluntary organisation, '*Arbeit: Leben: Zeit – Forum von Kirche und Gewerkschaft*' (Hans-Böckler-Stiftung), promotes various models of part-time work with the aim of reducing mass unemployment. The Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB, German trade union umbrella organisation) links personal work-life balance to the benefits of working fewer hours and having more time for other matters in life, as well as to the reduction of unemployment and the creation of 500,000 new jobs (DGB, 2002). According to union estimates about 2,1 million men and 1,9 million women will be unemployed in Germany during the course of 2002. On a more positive note the DGB notes that unemployment among older people decreased by 15 per cent in 2001 compared to the previous year, though unemployment among the young remains high. To what extent these policies are effectively reducing unemployment remains doubtful. The introduction of shorter working hours often leads to more intensive production or a reduction of overcapacity. Alternatively, those seeking to work part-time are rarely those who were previously unemployed, though some groups of employees such as older workers, women or the less qualified, do seem to benefit from part-time agreements (BMA, 2001c).

2 Theoretical perspectives

This chapter highlights theoretical frameworks as they currently influence work–life balance research. Here the notion of time arises out of sociological perspectives in academia. Not referred to are those which underpin work-related research in occupational psychology, such as personality factors, motivation, stress management or occupational therapy – all of which are widely reported elsewhere.

2.1 Notions of time

Social scientists have been attempting to construct social and economic developmental accounts for several centuries (Gershuny, 2000). In the 19th century Karl Marx argued that capitalism created an ineluctable downward pressure on wages, forcing workers to work long hours in order to sustain themselves. Accordingly, working people made time ‘a terrain of struggle’ (Marx, 1976). More than a century ago, labour movements in industrialised countries made the reduction of working hours an issue. The result, after a long and often bitter struggle, was the eight-hour working day. Bauer *et al.* (1997) point out that until the mid-1980s there was little understanding about the formal structures of working hours on the one hand, and employees’ wishes to either work longer or shorter hours on the other. Normal working hours were 35 to 40 hours per week. Flexible working arrangements were more or less unknown. The relatively recent term ‘*Arbeitszeit-arrangement*’ (working time arrangement) is considered to be a compromise between formal ‘*Betriebszeiten*’ (operating times) and the subjective tolerated or wanted individual working time. In terms of research, therefore, it was relatively easy to use empirical quantitative data analysis. Research into employees’ wishes, by contrast, demanded qualitative approaches, usually in the form of interviews. In their discussion on theoretical contexts Bauer *et al.* (1997) refer to Habermas (1981), Giddens (1984), Theunissen (1991) and Oevermann (1991). All of these writers locate actors in spatial, geographical and structural contexts, though from different theoretical perspectives. Giddens (1984) specifically acknowledges the time–space–place dimension – i.e., where the respondents were at the time of each activity, with whom they were doing it, and whether they were doing any other activity simultaneously, whether it was considered ‘work’ or ‘leisure’, together with when the activity took place, be it at the same time as usual, in pre-determined time slots, or fitting in around many other activities either at home or at work.

Terms such as ‘life time’, ‘diary time’, ‘time use’, ‘time budget’ or ‘time management’ are based on different theoretical concepts arising from located academic sub-disciplines. Research into time use, for example, has shown that most people have a lack of self-knowledge concerning time: most people do not know how many hours a week they spend on certain activities. More often than not they are able to tell you what they did, but not how long it took. Earlier distinctions around time theories emphasise time in terms of the ‘clock’ as linear sequence of measured units and ‘task orientation’. Contemporary research considers the following distinctions: natural, scientific and social

use of time. Scientific time is associated with computational, mathematical time while social time is considered human, warmly imbued with meaning and signification. Social time, as Gershuny and Sullivan (1998) argue, is less easy to define since it is often no more than the implicit positive to the more explicated negative. The identification though, the authors argue, is clearly with the fragmented, effervescent quality of the experienced time, which defies sequence and cannot be measured, but is full of meaning and significance. Individuals perceive time and pressure on time differently. Our perception of time is simultaneously strongly dependent on and coloured by a host of symbolic meanings and emotional attributions, which accord specific significance and priority to particular events and activities. In the contemporary Western context, with increasing wealth and the demand for a better quality of life, the attribute 'leisure' society seems appropriate (Garhammer, 1999). The concept of 'quality of life', an indicator of Western wealth, has been chosen to reflect this social dimension. The desire to have a better quality of life or more personal time for family and leisure is frequently voiced in most surveys involving employees, particularly in the UK with its long working hour culture.

2.2 Time use

Time use studies recognise the limitations of 24 hours in the day, many of which are allocated to sleep. Most people work a certain number of hours a day, travel to and from work and have other routine activities which leave few hours for what is termed 'consumption time' (leisure/family). The main activities carried out by people in the UK are sleeping, working and watching television – a third of the time available is spent sleeping (ONS, 2002b).

It was in Russia in the 1920s that large-scale longitudinal studies of the operating processes found their way into the everyday activities of different social groups. During the 1960s and 1970s time use research began to look at not only work but also leisure relationships. Nowadays time use studies involve paid work, unpaid work and consumption. Each of these activities is a distinct category of time use, and all are embedded in notions of nation, gender and class (Gershuny, 2000). In developed countries in the latter half of the 20th century, according to Gershuny, there appears to be an approximately constant balance between paid and unpaid work in society (generally around 55 per cent to 45 per cent). Sullivan and Gershuny's (2001) cross-national study involved several industrialised countries, including the UK

'Time use is not separable into distinct blocks of activity; it has multiple aspects, rhythms, density, mental states, simultaneity.'

(Paolucci, 1993; cited in Gershuny and Sullivan, 1998: 74)

but not Germany. Time use diaries were collected from the 1960s to the 1990s and confirmed relative stability in the balance between work and leisure time over the period covered by the analysis. Despite the popular notion of 'time famine', the authors argue, or people's professed experience of what was happening with their time, there is little evidence to support the idea of a time deficit or time bind.

With reference to gender, women do on average more domestic work and much less paid work than men. Towards the end of the 20th century, high-status groups among women had substantially more paid work than those in the lower-status groups. They also had less unpaid work and hence more leisure time. Overall, modern life exerts considerable pressures not only on time use at work but also on time use for consumption. Changes in time use reflect not only economic but also social/cultural change, change of habits, values, preferences and so on. In Gershuny's view, there is a paradox here: each year we have to work harder to be able to consume all those things that we have been working harder to produce in our work time. In other words, the richer society has become, the more our free time is crowded with consumption activities (Gershuny, 2000). Furthermore, the longer the hours we intend to work, the more likely it is that non-work activities intrude into our normal working hours. According to Gershuny (1999), if we have a genuine 36-hour working week we can probably arrange personal appointments out of working hours. If, on the other hand, we work 50 hours a week, it is less likely that we could manage this. It seems that for the working individual the time expended in paid work is not fully accounted for by their working hours alone. Time use studies also consider work-related time outside working hours, such as the time taken to get to work, preparation time, breaks at work, further training and occupational work done at home. All these are taking up more of our 'consumption time'.

Garhammer's (1999) research into sleeping and mealtimes concludes that the amount of time needed for sleep at night is also an indicator of time prosperity. In Germany and Great Britain a portion of sleeping time is converted into active time: in Great Britain employed persons are only left with 8.0 hours sleep, 0.4 hours less than ten years previously, and in West Germany only 7.6 hours, 0.3 hours less than in 1965 (Garhammer, 1999: 73). With reference to mealtimes Garhammer states that Britons also have less time for eating. In 1961 it was still 83 minutes, in 1985 one hour, ten years later just 46 minutes. West Germans showed a quarter of an hour less in 1991 compared to 1965 but still more than the British (Garhammer, 1999: 75).

Garhammer argues that time use studies cannot be explained without regard to the national time use cultures in which they are embedded, though intracultural differences prove to be stronger than intercultural ones. Gender, family status and socio-economic factors play a greater role than national cultures in the use of time. 'This is another way to state the global convergence in time use' (Garhammer, 1999: 77).

2.3 Operating times

A further dimension in relation to the notion of time stems from research undertaken on what is termed 'operating time' in companies. Operating time is analogous to working time (Stille, 1999) and in many ways overlapping with time use research, though the focus is employer-led. There have been a number of Europe-wide studies concerning operating/working times in manufacturing and service industries. These consider, in the main, production together with the input and output factors in relation to labour costs and available capital. Data gathered in the EU context considers the following: full-time and part-time work, unpaid and paid overtime, weekend and night work, statutory entitlements and voluntary activities. Employees generally strive for shorter working times, while operating times seen from the employers' perspective need to be extended

– hence the push for flexibilisation, shift work, weekend work etc. Shorter operating times make it more difficult for companies to finance vocational education and training, for example.

2.4 Gender time

Gender research argues that one of the ways in which time is structured is through social relations and gender inequalities which are reflected in the social organisation of time. Although over the period 1960–1990 there has been a considerable rise in the proportion of women working, the use of time is strongly dependent on household structures; for example, mothers of young children are less likely to be in full-time employment and more likely to be spending time in unpaid domestic labour (Sullivan and Gershuny, 2001). The notion of ‘gendered time’ or ‘gender time’ is based on the assumption that free time is not equal between women and men. Bauer (2000), however, points out that the divisions and consequences of paid and unpaid work involve not just men and women but the whole family, irrespective of gender, in various stages of decision-making. In other words, the term ‘gender’ has to be seen in the wider and more complex domain of familial and social structures rather than in narrow dichotomies. The tension between work and the demands of family life invariably means having to balance demands exerted by both. Nevertheless, underpinning policies that influence patterns of paid work and family life is an assumption that the amount of paid work performed by women influences the amount of housework performed by men. However, even in countries where men and women are equally well educated and there is a high level of female labour force participation, the segregation between sexes persists.

Sirianni and Negrey (2000) refer to research undertaken in the US which indicates that while employed married women still spend more time than men on doing household chores, men’s time doing chores has increased by one hour over the past 20 years. Household tasks tend to be heavily sex-typed and gender-segregated, e.g. with women doing cooking, cleaning and laundry while men prefer tasks such as lawn-mowing, home repair and car repair. For wives who are employed outside the home, the ‘double day’ – that is paid work outside and unpaid work at home – is the norm and time inequalities between husbands and wives are the greatest. What often passes as ‘leisure time’ for women is bound up with household work.

In the context of gender and time, Esping-Anderson’s (1990) typology of welfare states (the liberal, corporatist and social democratic) is frequently cited. Germany (west) is seen as a prime example of a conservative/corporatist welfare state regime with two primary characteristics:

1. The preservation of status differentials, which means that the impact of state policies is negligible
2. The role of the church and a concomitant emphasis on the preservation of traditional family values.

According to the principle of subsidiarity, the state will only interfere when the family’s capacity to service its members is exhausted (Esping Anderson, 1990: 27). However, a

comprehensive system of benefits does provide at least a basic level of support for German citizens. In the Anglo-Saxon liberal regime residualist social policies are the norm. Liberal states provide only modest employment-linked state benefits, with means-tested programmes offering a poverty-level safety net where market and family 'fail'. Thus the German corporatist model is based on the premise that children are provided the best opportunities when they are primarily cared for by a parent in their own home with one parent focusing extensively on child-caring and family responsibilities (Trzcinski, 2000). A conservative, traditional attitude towards German women and family life is confirmed in a comparative study on the division of labour within the EU (Staatsinstitut für Familienforschung Bamberg (IBF), 2001): 'In Deutschland ist die Idee, dass eine Mutter bei ihrem Kind bleiben sollte, viel ausgeprägter'⁴ (Marina Rupp, IBF, quoted in *Die Welt*, 13.05.02).

⁴ 'In Germany there is more emphasis on the notion that a mother should stay with her child.'

3 Research findings: exemplars

Research findings presented here are inevitably eclectic. Furthermore, data is collected for different reasons and is often sponsored by government or commercial agencies with a particular purpose in mind. Some findings have made catchy newspaper headlines although their source, methodological approach or methods used may not be apparent. Other research findings reported here, particularly those undertaken by a university or in collaboration with other organisations, are empirical and widely accepted in academic circles.

3.1 Research in Europe

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (European Foundation) is a significant player in work–life balance research. It has the specific mandate to contribute to the planning and establishment of better living and working conditions through actions designed to increase and disseminate knowledge likely to assist these developments. The European Foundation has produced numerous research surveys and reports ranging from *Combining Family and Work: The Working Arrangements of Women and Men* (2000a) to *Working Time Preferences at Different Phases of Life* (2001a). Research conducted in 1998 into full-time and part-time options highlights many similar trends across the 15 EU member states and Norway. For example, 91 per cent of men work full-time; only 62 per cent of women do so. Of all those surveyed, however, 81 per cent (30,557) stated that having a permanent post is the norm for most of the employed population, and a quarter of those, mainly women, expressed a preference for part-time work if given the option. Asked if they thought that, in general, part-timers were worse off than full-timers so far as protection by employment law and social security was concerned, 44 per cent of respondents in Germany and 64 per cent in the UK answered 'yes'. When full-time workers were asked why they wanted to work part-time, the reasons varied but most stated that they wished to have more time for themselves, reduce the strains resulting from work, and have more time for children (European Foundation, 2000b). A survey entitled *Gender, Employment and Working Time Preferences in Europe* (European Foundation, 2001b) found that the number of hours currently worked by many people in the European workforce is not in line with their working time preferences: 45 per cent would prefer to work fewer hours in exchange for lower earnings, while 12 per cent would prefer to work longer hours. On average men prefer a 37-hour and women a 30-hour week. Women with young children were the most likely to prefer part-time working hours. These surveys contain a wide range of comparative data in relation to the UK and Germany which is not apparent from the various summary reports. Nevertheless, they offer scope for further in-depth research, beyond the boundaries of this report.

3.2 The need to retain staff

A study of 17 financial services companies in the UK showed that family-friendly employment is dictated by the need to retain staff (Bond *et al.*, 2002). The research team from Edinburgh Napier University, Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of Stirling carried out interviews with managers, staff representatives and trade union representatives and conducted in-depth case studies including employee surveys in four family-friendly firms between January 2000 and February 2001. They found that in cases where trade unions were recognised there was a wider spread of family-friendly policies. Companies were concerned about the need to retain staff and therefore offered flexitime and part-time working rather than leave-based policies. Although the Employment Relations Act 1999 for Scotland grants employees enhanced maternity rights, few employees were aware of such entitlements. Gender was not an important factor in the uptake of family-friendly policies, except that women were more likely to have contract hours which allowed them to work part-time. It is noteworthy, too, that in all companies involved in the research line managers had significant discretion over determining actual leave arrangements and the operation of payments. Managerial discretion was also a major influence on access to flexible working practices. The study found that forms of flexibility were much appreciated by staff – although management discretion was an area of concern. The study recommends that employers should consider codifying family-friendly policies (Bond *et al.*, 2002)

3.3 Working long hours

Britain's 'long working hours culture' is a topic frequently referred to in the media and other areas of public debate. Comparative research undertaken on behalf of the Anglo-German Foundation revealed that both unpaid and paid overtime is much more prevalent in the UK than in Germany (Bell *et al.*, 2001). Unpaid overtime tends to be concentrated among managerial and professional workers, while manual workers, whose wages are generally lower, are usually paid a premium for working overtime. If a lower-paid worker can make up earnings by working overtime, he/she might be less keen to spend time on other aspects of life. Furthermore, according to the study, the variability of total hours worked is greater in the UK than in Germany, reflecting the greater diversity of working time arrangements in the UK. According to the TUC (04.02.02), the Working Time Directive has had little impact, particularly on women working long hours. TUC research shows that 17 per cent of women in management and 25 per cent of professional women are the major source of the long hours culture. Women in education work the longest hours, with 16 per cent working more than 48 hours a week, while overall nearly four million (16 per cent) of all employees are now working more than 48 hours and one in 25 men working more than 60 hours a week (TUC, 04.02.02). A survey of 5,000 women in the UK conducted for a women's magazine found that 75 per cent think they are underpaid, 62 per cent feel they are overworked and 77 per cent feel that career stress is damaging their health. Moreover, 58 per cent say that stress causes them to shout at their children and 80 per cent think that being a full-time working mother emotionally damages their children. Only 6 per cent have access to a company crèche, while 56 per cent of companies make no allowance for working mothers (*The Independent*, 08.06.00).

Frequently cited in a number of government reports and by those supporting better working conditions is Hogarth *et al.*'s 2001 baseline study, which examined a number of these issues in considerable depth. The study was undertaken on behalf of the then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), in co-operation with the Institute for Employment Research (IER) at the University of Warwick and IFF, an independent market research agency. The findings are based on a representative survey of 2,500 workplaces with five or more employees, interviews with managers in head offices of 250 workplaces and a survey of 7,500 persons in employment in workplaces with five or more staff between April and July 2000.

The key message from the employer and employee surveys was the high underlying level of support for the idea of work–life balance. The researchers found that 62 per cent of employers and 80 per cent of employees agreed with the statement that 'everyone should be able to balance their work and home lives in the way they want'. These views were not uniform across all sectors. Employers in the production sector and those employing a small number of people reported slightly lower levels of support. On the other hand, employers who had adopted work–life practices were more likely to have positive attitudes to the values embedded in the notion work–life balance. The majority of employees worked outside the 'standard working week': only 39 per cent of workplaces, covering 40 per cent of employees, operated Monday to Friday 'standard hours', 9am–5pm. Almost 11 per cent were working 60 or more hours a week. Long hours were particularly prevalent amongst men in couple households with children. Only 6 per cent of women worked long hours. The conventional working week was most common in the construction, finance and business services and in public administration. In service industries hours related directly to the standard working week were less common. More than 80 per cent of all workplaces reported that some staff regularly worked longer than their usual working hours. In the study the term 'long working hours' is defined as 60 or more hours a week.

A similar study was undertaken by Groß and Munz (2000) on behalf of the Ministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, Qualifikation und Technologie (North Rhine-Westphalia). The research, based on telephone interviews, involved 1,500 people aged 16–65. Most employees worked on average 38.4 hours a week, four hours longer than contractually agreed, with men working 5 extra hours and women 2.3. Unpaid overtime, the study found, rises with level of qualification and job. Indeed, when compared with a study undertaken in 1999 (Groß *et al.*, 1999), the gap between the contractually agreed number of hours a week and those actually worked had increased from 1.9 hours per week to 4 hours. The study also looked at employees' wishes and found that half of those interviewed would like to work fewer hours. One third was happy with the hours worked, while only every sixth person wanted an increase. The employees who wanted to reduce the number of working hours cited quality time and solidarity with the unemployed as their reasons. Two thirds of those working overtime on a regular basis preferred time in lieu rather than additional pay (Groß and Munz, 2000).

3.4 Working part-time

Hogarth *et al.*'s baseline study (2001) states that flexible working time arrangements are not very wide-spread in the UK. The study revealed little evidence of a significant take-up of flexible working times arrangements among employees, other than flexitime or

part-time working. Among the employers surveyed 62 per cent permitted staff to vary occasionally their usual working hours. Of part-time workers 55 per cent, mainly women, did not want a full-time job and 47 per cent of employees not currently using flexitime would like to do so. The term 'flexible' can be interpreted in different ways depending on employers' or employees' needs and perspectives, for instance part-time work, shift work, term-time contracts, flexitime, compressed working week, or reduced or annualised hours. Flexitime and shift work were reported by 24 per cent and 21 per cent of employees respectively. Flexitime, in this instance, is understood as a working time practice that is fundamentally concerned with a degree of employee choice of hours worked, while shift working is often a requirement of business. Part-time employment relates to a working week of less than 30 hours. Approximately 55 per cent of employees currently working in a part-time job reported that they did not want to work a full-time job. Some 44 per cent who had deliberately chosen part-time employment said they wanted to spend more time with their family. This was particularly the case among women (49 per cent compared with 14 per cent of men). Men tended to cite a wider range of reasons, such as not needing to work full-time because they were financially secure (15 per cent). Asked if they were prepared to allow staff to change their hours from full-time to part-time and vice versa, 14 per cent of employers said that this would be acceptable in exceptional circumstances only. Around 19 per cent stated that this would depend on individual circumstances.

By contrast, research findings published in Germany by the Statistisches Bundesamt declare part-time working to be popular and on the increase, particularly in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg. While in 1980 part-time work amounted to 14 per cent, it has now risen to 20 per cent; 50 per cent of women now work part-time compared to 31 per cent in 1980. The share of men working part-time, on the other hand, has increased from 10 per cent in 1980 to 15 per cent (Statistisches Bundesamt, 22.05.02). Research undertaken by Groß and Munz (2000) among 4,024 people in North Rhine-Westphalia found that 85 per cent of those working full-time benefited from some kind of flexitime arrangement. These figures are comparable with those for the whole of Germany (86 per cent in west and 82 per cent in east Germany) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 22.05.02). Perhaps noteworthy, too, is that 37 per cent of those working full-time were able to take part in some kind of 'accounts' system (*Arbeitskonten*), particularly in the civil service.

3.5 Permanent contracts

In the UK a recent Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) survey (Taylor, 2002) involving 2,500 employed people, including self-employed, across all occupational groups established that as many as 92 per cent of workers held permanent employment contracts compared to 88 per cent in 1992, according to a comparable research. Nevertheless, the survey showed, today's world of work is much less satisfying to employees than the one experienced ten years ago. It has also grown more stressful for all categories of staff – mainly because of the long hours people are now required to work and the amount of work that must be accomplished. What is also striking, the report concludes, is the apparent significant deterioration in workers' sense of personal commitment to the company that employs them. The extent of labour flexibility is also questionable, according to the ESCR survey. Most employees do not enjoy the power to vary their hours of work themselves. In most cases hours were fixed when they agreed to take on the

work, leading the *Financial Times* (01.05.02) to write: 'Work myths study shows rise in staff discontent'.

3.6 Time off for special reasons

In the UK many employers adopt a sympathetic and flexible approach when members of staff are faced with a crisis, according to research with 103 employing organisations and more than 650,000 employees (Industrial Relations Services (IRS), 2002). Some 93 per cent of employers were willing to let employees take personal leave, defined to cover the following circumstances: attend hospital, observe a non-Christian religious festival or to get married. According to the survey 73 per cent of employers had a written policy covering staff taking time off to sit an examination and 71 per cent had a policy concerning study leave. Other reasons were linked to pre-retirement leave, disability leave and public duties such as jury service leave. Furthermore, 31 per cent of employers were willing to allow time off work to fight a parliamentary campaign, while more than a quarter (27 per cent) were prepared to let their staff take additional leave to stand for a local council seat and 21 per cent willing to support employees taking part in sporting events. Not only do many employers offer time off work, but a significant proportion are also prepared to pay for it: 84 per cent of employers offer study leave to their workers, though only eight (out of 103) allow leave for courses that are not directly relevant to an employee's job.

3.7 Combining family and work

According to a major study undertaken by the Staatsinstitut für Familienforschung Bamberg (IFB, 2001), west German women spend 35 hours a week and east German women 34 hours doing domestic work such as cooking, shopping and doing the laundry, while men in both parts of Germany manage only 17 hours which, in the main, is spent on, for example, complex garden work or on cars or bicycles. This compares with research undertaken in 1965, when men in West Germany spent only 3 hours a week on domestic work compared with 30 hours for women. In the former GDR, on the other hand, almost all women, like their male partners, were in full-time employment and at that time contributed 4.2 times as much to domestic work as men. It is surprising, however, that since re-unification differences between east and west have more or less disappeared. East and west German men spend about half the amount of hours on domestic work in comparison with women in both countries. That is despite the fact that more east German than west German women work full-time (78 per cent and 58 per cent respectively). These findings are influenced by the age of women and their previous educational achievements, as well as the length of time in employment prior to being in a committed relationship.

Research undertaken on behalf of the UK government's Women's Unit (Bryson *et al.*, 1999) focused on decisions about combining paid work and mothering, what childcare arrangements were most suitable for children of different ages, what childcare women

were using and what family-friendly employment arrangements women wanted. The study comprised face-to-face interviews with 962 women. The research also involved six focus groups, which added to an understanding of the underlying factors that shape women's attitudes. The main findings were as follows:

- The majority of women were positive about mothers trying to combine their role of bringing up children with a career or job.
- Eight out of ten mothers felt that most mothers have to do paid work to support their families. However, more than eight out of ten said they thought mothers felt guilty about leaving their children.
- Women's views on mothers doing paid work depended quite strongly on the age of the children involved.
- Women with more than one child faced particular difficulties, especially if the ages of the children meant that they need different childcare arrangements.
- There was a preference for family members, particularly grandparents, to be replacement carers, rather than using strangers.

(Bryson *et al.*, 1999)

Grieco and Turner (1999), looking at urban life in the UK, related gender time to poverty. They argued that women have different transport and travel patterns to men in the developed world. Women are involved in poorly resourced, highly complex, multi-purpose trips, while men make single-purpose trips on higher-cost and superior modes of transport. In other words, households headed by women in low-income areas have their time poverty compounded by the poor quality of public transport in these areas. There was an abundance of evidence of the very real constraint poor women face in the context of low wages, a high dependence on poor transport and scarce childcare provision.

3.8 Life in rural communities

Many parents in Scotland feel that rural communities provide the ideal environment within which to raise children (Mauthner *et al.*, 2001). Freedom, safety and independence for children, a sense of neighbourliness, trust and community spirit, and patterns of reciprocal support were cited as welcoming factors. These findings are based on an ethnographic study into work and family life in rural communities, undertaken at the University of Aberdeen and based in and around three distinct rural communities in Scotland and northern England. The study focused on 52 two-parent households, with at least one earner and one child aged 12 or under. It was based on 200 individual face-to-face interviews with mothers, fathers, community figures and employers in the autumn of 2000. The study brings together research and policy agendas that are often treated separately: reconciliation of work and family life and the changes affecting rural communities. Most of the men took for granted the financial necessity of paid work and the role of the economic provider, although most placed high value on their parenting roles and were actively involved in caring for their children. Women's work included casual, multiple and seasonally variable jobs. They tended to change their work patterns more to reflect the changing needs of their children. The study identified four distinct ways in which families combine work and family life:

- Traditional (father in full-time paid work, mother not in paid work)
- New traditional (father in full-time paid work and mother in part-time paid work)
- Downsized (father in part-time paid work, mother in either part-time paid work, or not in paid work)
- Work-rich (both parents in full-time paid work).

Some families used formal childcare or a combination of formal and informal childcare. However, they preferred informal care provided by family and friends. Many saw informal childcare as an extension of parental care and highly valued its flexibility. The researchers conclude that policies aimed at improving work–life balance need to recognise and support parents' diverse values and preferences.

Life in rural communities for women in east Germany before and following re-unification throws up very different dimensions, as a study conducted in Mecklenburg-Westpomerania indicates (van Hofen, 2001). Here women had to construct new identities following re-unification. Previously the work organisations had created distinct patterns of 'female' and 'male' work, despite policies to promote women into male-dominated sectors. Nevertheless, the greatest impact on women's lives came with mass redundancies, particularly in the previously 'female' work sectors. Research findings suggest that the re-organisation of the labour market after re-unification was largely based on conservative and discriminatory practices. One key informant, for example, described changes in the animal production sector where, in contrast to the dozens of women employed as manual milking personnel prior to re-unification, three men operated milking machines afterwards. None of the women interviewed claimed to have been relieved at being able to stay at home and having more time to spend with their families. Although women had generally been unable to challenge existing inequalities in the rural workplace in the former GDR, they had been able to create spaces within their daily activities in which they had found comfort and support. In the (new) FRG, the report concludes, their integration would automatically solve problems associated with social diversification and lack of self-identity. By not doing anything, by adopting a 'wait-and-see' attitude, women nowadays denied themselves alternative opportunities to make changes they could identify with.

3.9 Teleworking

The term teleworking – not to be confused with home working, not discussed here – generally means working outside the employer's workplace and using electronic communication systems such as computers in order to complete tasks which do not involve the employee's physical presence at the workplace. Teleworking can be done either exclusively at home, or partly at home and partly in the workplace, or in branch/satellite offices within the same organisation. In the UK, despite a 20 per cent increase in the numbers teleworking in 2000, only 6 per cent of the workforce are teleworkers (Hogarth *et al.*, 2001). It seems that teleworking is not a solution to combining work with caring responsibilities: 'Homeworking revolution adds to stress ... Employees in the UK already work the longest hours in Europe. Now they are expected to take work home with them as well' (*The Times*, 04.08.01).

A TUC report on teleworking (2001) points to the potential downside of teleworking, which could become simply the extension of white-collar work intensification, with some teleworkers placed at a disadvantage compared to work-placed colleagues. The report states that there has been a very strong growth in teleworking in recent years: between 1998 and 2000 the number of teleworkers jumped by 40 per cent to just under 450,000, with the number of occasional teleworkers up by 58.5 per cent. However, the report also states that teleworking is not driving a fundamental shift in work organisation or the balance between working at home and working in the office.

Research into teleworking was also undertaken in Germany on behalf of the BMA by the Fraunhofer-Institut für Arbeitswirtschaft und Organisation (IAO) (BMA, 1997). The study, based on data received from 3,500 companies, found that mobile teleworking was the most widely used, followed by a combination of working from home and in the employer's place of work. Relatively few employees worked mainly from home. About 20 per cent of employer organisations planned to increase teleworking from home among their workers. However, legal and practical problems had yet to be solved.

4 Conclusion and further questions

There are many striking similarities in work–life balance policy rhetoric, policy strategies and initiatives between the UK and Germany. Government statements in both countries stress the need for a ‘healthy’ well-balanced society, with employers and employees working in harmony. Effective communication systems within organisations concerned with the implementation of work–life balance are regarded as crucial if schemes are to succeed. If collective schemes are to be agreed, it is also important to involve trade unions in the UK and the works councils in Germany. Managers in both countries are encouraged to look at their own work–life balance practices. Nevertheless, there are profound differences between the two countries. The German law on part-time working, for example, has to be understood in its social/historical context, as previously indicated. Both the UK and the German governments have also placed the needs of families and parents at the forefront of many policy developments. While some may argue that ‘the family’ as a social unit is still more important to Germans than to their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, it is clear that German social structures are changing just as rapidly as elsewhere.

There are examples of Europe-wide or international research, such as some of the studies undertaken by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions and the Council of Europe. Time use research also crosses national boundaries. The international Research Network on Time Use (RNTU), founded in 1998, is supported in Germany by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Technology and the Federal Statistical Office. Membership also includes representation from the UK. Similarly, Eurostat has run a project aimed at harmonising future time use statistics in Europe since the early 1990s and data from twelve countries has so far been evaluated (Rydenstam, 1999). The American Time Use Survey, which includes studies undertaken in the UK and Germany, also measures the amount of time people spend doing various activities, such as paid work, childcare, volunteering, commuting and socialising (US Department of Labor: <http://www.bls.gov/tus/home.htm>, accessed May 2002). A further international study, *Internationale Betriebszeitforschung: A Comparative Study on Operation Hours, Working Time and Employment*, involves France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom. It is led by the Institut zur Erforschung sozialer Chancen (ISO), an organisation which has already contributed greatly to work–life balance research. Networks in gender studies have not been mentioned, but there are some across Europe and further afield. Perhaps worth noting is the European Network on Policies and the Division of Unpaid and Paid Work, a research network which addresses themes related to work–life balance research across several European countries at the Staatsinstitut für Familienforschung, Bamberg (Germany).

Leaving aside studies sponsored by the Anglo-German Foundation, it is perhaps striking just how little, if any, specifically Anglo-German research into work–life balance issues has been undertaken. There seems to be ample scope for further in-depth comparative work–life balance research. Numerous questions come to mind, some embedded in policies and practice while others might address cultural/theoretical one in relation to time. For example:

WORK–LIFE BALANCE

- Do individuals/families/employees/employers perceive time differently in Germany than in the UK?
- What are the socio-cultural differences between the UK and Germany in relation to families and work?
- How do German and British companies evaluate work–life balance practices and the range of different schemes across different sectors?
- How effective are early retirement schemes at a time when we are all expected to work longer?
- What place does childcare provision have in companies?
- How do lifelong learning policies as advocated by the EU impact on work–life balance issues?
- What effect has the increase of teleworking on employees and organisations? What are advantages and disadvantages in policy and economic terms?
- What is the role of trade unions or works councils?
- How do managers support work–life balance schemes, as individuals and as managers?
- How do work–life balance strategies help the disabled or other minority groups?

These questions are indicative only; there are many others not explored here. Indeed, this survey will have raised many more than it answered, thereby pointing to more work to be done.

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