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'The Magnificent 7[am]?' Work-life articulation beyond the 9[am] to 5[pm] 'norm'

Abstract

This article focuses on the work-life 'balance' challenges of those who work in organisations that operate beyond standard hours. The concept of work-life articulation is utilised to examine the experiences and practicalities of attempting to reconcile the, often competing, demands of employment and family life. Qualitative research was conducted in two private sector businesses and one third sector organisation in the UK during the onset of the 2008 financial crisis. The findings reveal increasing competitive pressures, efficiency drives and work intensification. 'Business needs' are prioritised over care responsibilities, and in the private sector organisations there is declining flexible working with a reassertion of the management prerogative. This article contributes to current debates over work-life 'balance' and highlights variable, changeable and unpredictable working time arrangements that permeate non-standard hours, which creates additional complexities and challenges for family time schedules and routines.

Keywords

Introduction

There is expanding academic, policy and practitioner interest in work-life balance (WLB), with political rhetoric of 'alarm clock Britain' as workers typically rise at 7am to begin a new working day and attempt to reconcile employment with familial responsibilities. However, there are relatively few academic studies of those who work beyond the standard Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm 'norm' – with the notable exception of quantitative research (see Presser, 2003; Baines et al., 2006; Craig and Powell, 2011; Presser and Ward, 2011). Whilst these studies are valuable in highlighting the challenges of non-standard hours and WLB, they tend to regard working time as an objective phenomenon. In quantifying such complexities, they lack the depth and nuances of the daily experiences of working lives. This qualitative study contributes to our knowledge by illuminating rapid organisational transformations and how 'business needs' create additional workplace pressures. Moreover, WLB obligations and arrangements are further complicated by changeable and elongated working time arrangements.

The development of a globalised economy and deregulated labour market has extended the operating and opening hours of many organisations. The market imperatives of labour flexibility to meet demand has seen the erosion of the conventional working week (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2010). This diversification of working time arrangements incorporates non-standard hours: early mornings, evenings, nights and weekends (Fagan et al., 2012). Information technology (IT) is used to manage, control and extend working time, and it will be argued that this permeates non-standard hours. These complex developments have implications for our understanding of work and employment.

This article is based on a qualitative study that critically examines the experiences of WLB, care responsibilities and working time arrangements. The research was

conducted during the early stages of the financial crisis, which was the most severe recession since the 1930s (Gallie and Zhou, 2013). This data subset focuses on three organisations that operate beyond standard hours and draws on the concept of work-life articulation (Crompton, 2006; Lyonette et al., 2011) to consider the practicalities, decision-making strategies and lived experience of juggling paid employment with familial duties. The proceeding section critically reviews literature around WLB, working time and the financial crisis to offer a conceptual and analytical framework for the study. The research methods are then discussed, involving qualitative research into two private sector businesses and one third sector organisation. Following this, four inter-related findings are presented, encapsulating the rapid impact of the crisis, the use of IT to schedule and control working time, the intensification and extensification of work, and rising workplace demands with the complexities of articulating work and life. The contribution of this study to understanding the WLB challenges of those who work in organisations that operate beyond standard hours are examined in the discussion and conclusion.

Work-life Articulation, Working Time and the Economic Crisis
The term work-life balance implies that employment can be accommodated with family time through progressive human resource management (HRM) policies and practices (Clutterbuck, 2003; Galea et al., 2014). The 'business case' for WLB asserts that by facilitating a "proper balance" (Galea et al., 2014), employers will generate improvements in employee morale, commitment and performance (Clutterbuck, 2003; Tipping et al., 2012; Smeaton et al., 2014). Messenger (2011) argues that there is a 'dual logic' of flexible working arrangements that can be reciprocal and mutually advantageous, while recognising that crucially employers and employees have differing interests. However, the terminology of work-life 'balance', 'integration' (Torrington et al., 2011: ch. 4) and 'enrichment' (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006) are questionable since they imply harmony and resolution (Bunting, 2004; Crompton and Brockmann, 2006); the reality is often more complex and contested. Crompton (2006: ch. 3) develops the concept of work-life articulation, as a more neutral term, as individuals and families grapple with the, often competing, demands of work and family life. This conceptualisation critically examines the practicalities and experiences of articulating work and life (Crompton and Brockmann, 2006). Household and employment strategies are assessed, as workers and families attempt to navigate a range of complex and transforming issues (Crompton and Lyonette, 2011; Lyonette et al., 2011). Contrary to functionalist accounts of WLB, central tensions over the operationalisation of policies and practices, workplace pressures, working time arrangements and non-standard hours deserve due consideration.

There has been an increase in the development of WLB legislation and policies, where employees have the right to request flexible working arrangements. However, a recent survey reveals that 77% of managers believe that the onus of responsibility lies with the individual, as opposed to the organisation (Van Wanrooy et al., 2013). This contrasts with research which reports that only one-quarter of employees feel that this is not part of the employers' duty (Tipping et al., 2012). In a European comparative study, the findings show that the UK is primarily focused on a 'business case' for WLB, with rhetoric of meeting employee needs (Den Dulk et al., 2011). Indeed earlier research highlights that WLB is not a managerial priority (Hyman and Summers, 2004), and often perceived as a gender only issue, primarily for women

with caring duties (Gambles et al., 2006). Consequently, there are likely to be areas of contestation between employer intentions and worker experiences of WLB (Warhurst et al., 2008). Putnam et al. (2014) agree that there can be tensions over flexible working, but the implementation of WLB practices is central. This view is supported by Galea et al. (2014), who endorse a positive WLB culture and empathetic management style. However, one of the key problems facing organisations moving from formal to informal practices centres on issues of managerial discretion (Den Dulk et al., 2011). Whilst some researchers favour informal practices to facilitate WLB (Backett-Milburn et al., 2008), others argue that key gatekeepers may lack awareness of WLB practices and be more oriented to performance targets than care needs (Hyman and Summers, 2004). Additional concerns relate to the uneven adoption across organisations and equality of access to WLB policies and practices.

Another pivotal WLB issue is working time and employee control over hours at work (Crompton and Lyonette, 2011). Given the proliferation of diverse working time arrangements beyond 'standard' hours (Fagan et al., 2012), there are important questions of 'flexibility' for who and on whose terms (see Fleetwood, 2007)? The length, patterns, organisation and management of time has important implications for the articulation of work and life. Increasingly, variable and changeable hours are used by employers to meet fluctuations in market demand in the name of flexibility (Rubery et al., 2005; Blyton, 2011). The use of results-based contracts, focused on output as opposed to time, have contributed to a long hours culture, particularly for managerial and professional staff (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2010). Moreover, Rubery et al. (2005) convincingly argue that the UK has moved towards an employer-led model of working time to maximise productivity. This creates tensions around the choice and preference of working hours, which are further complicated by the use of IT and expansion of non-standard hours. Such transitions extend the spatialities and temporalities of work, which can result in the spillover of work into family life (Hyman et al., 2005). For instance, new configurations of working time for teleworkers create challenges around care responsibilities (Hilbrecht et al., 2013). Furthermore, working irregular and non-standard hours impinges on home life and erodes the work-life boundary (Gold and Mustafa, 2013). Research into non-standard working hours and WLB reveals that schedules and hours are typically mandated by employers to meet market demands (Presser, 2003). Variable and asocial hours generate unpredictabilities and uncertainties for workers, with limited 'choice'. Indeed, there is dissatisfaction with non-standard and long hours, with further time pressures on care duties (Craig and Powell, 2011; Lindsay and Maher, 2014). These types of work arrangements have a negative impact on the temporal nature of family life, such as, quality time to share meals, participate in leisure activities and attend key events in the school calendar (Presser, 2003; Baines et al., 2006).

The 2008 recession saw the sharpest contraction of the UK economy since the great depression of the 1930s (Van Wanrooy et al., 2013). Accordingly, a number of studies assess the impact of the crisis on employment and WLB, predominantly from a quantitative perspective. During the 1980s and 1990s work intensity reached high levels and then stabilised (Green et al., 2013). However, there is strong evidence of rising work intensification since the crisis (Gallie and Zhou, 2013). Employer responses include moves to increase competitiveness and workloads, whilst simultaneously reduce costs (Felstead et al., 2013; Van Wanrooy et al., 2013).

Many employers have used their strengthened bargaining power to implement work reorganisation initiatives, amidst employee fears of job security (Green et al., 2016). Whilst McGinnity and Russell (2013) also find rising work intensification, they claim that this is mediated by greater levels of employee control at work. However, recent evidence on working time and WLB is more contested and contradictory. Green et al. (2013) report improving working time quality and employee discretion over work hours, as employers respond to WLB needs. Furthermore, a survey by Tipping et al. (2012) reports that while 78% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with working hours, 49% regularly work unpaid overtime due to workload demands. The consequences of workplace pressures and the requirement to work overtime at short-notice can be seen in the small but significant rise in work-family conflict between 2004-10 (McGinnity and Russell, 2013). In a recent qualitative study of public sector HR managers, cost minimisation and employer-led flexibility takes precedence, as responsibility for WLB is increasingly individualised (Lewis et al., forthcoming).

The extant literature and current debates draw together a number of key issues relating to the operationalisation of WLB practices, working time arrangements and non-standard hours. Set in the recessionary context of heightened competitive pressures, there are pertinent questions regarding this study. What has been the impact of the early stages of the crisis on the experience and pace of work? In what ways do working time arrangements and non-standard hours influence the practicalities of articulating work and life?

The Study
The qualitative data that is presented in this article is a subset from an ESRC-funded study involving a survey of 103 UK employing organisations and 87 interviews with managers, employees and a limited number of trade union representatives. The initial survey mapped WLB policies and flexible working practices, and was followed by detailed interviews to critically examine the management and experience of such policies, together with care responsibilities and arrangements. The research was conducted between 2007 and 2010, during the onset of the financial crisis.

This article focuses on three organisations that specifically operate beyond standard working hours. CommunicationCom is a large private sector telecommunications organisation that provides IT, telephone, mobile and internet services and is a 24/7 operation. RetailCom is a large private sector retail outlet, primarily concentrating on the food and drink market, and the majority of stores are open from 6am to 11pm, but some are open 24 hours/day except for Sundays. SocCare is a large third sector organisation that provides care during daytime, evenings and weekends. In total, 23 respondents were interviewed across various grades in the three organisations, comprising 11 from CommunicationCom, 6 from RetailCom and 6 from SocCare respectively – details of the participants' roles, gender and work schedules are provided in table 1. The interview schedule included questions on working life in the organisations in the context of the economic downturn, working time arrangements, the development of WLB policies and the operationalisation of flexible working. The management of WLB policies and practices were examined, together with the practicalities and challenges of attempting to achieve 'balance'. All of the interviews were in-depth, as rapport was quickly established, lasting from between 50 minutes to 2 hours in duration. However, there are limitations as the sample size is restricted

in number as all three organisations would only allow a self-selecting sampling strategy to be utilised. The interviewees were all volunteers who gave up their time as they were interested in WLB issues.   All three organisations were approached on a number of occasions with the aim of increasing the number of participants, but this was declined due to time and resource restrictions in the context of the recession.

Insert table 1 here

All of the interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed. Data analysis began with close reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts; and the fragmentation of the data into specific categories (Bryman and Bell, 2015: ch. 24). These sections were then allocated codes, and relationships between the categories began to emerge as the data analysis progressed. A number of themes emerged that were relevant across all three organisations. The following sections focus on organisational transformations, WLB policies and the use of IT to control working time, rising workplace pressures and the articulation of work and life.

Organisational Transformations during the Onset of the Crisis
One of the most salient findings is the rapid impact of the economic crisis across all three organisations.   This creates heightened competitive pressures and cost minimisation initiatives; also identified by Felstead et al. (2013) and Van Wanrooy et al. (2013).   These pressures of work intensity, stretched staffing levels and budgetary restrictions impact on the experience of employment, working time and matters of work-life articulation.

CommunicationCom *used* to be regarded as a safe and secure job, with a long service culture – see table 1.   However, the organisation operates in a highly competitive global environment and market turbulence creates workplace pressures and uncertainties. There are now relentless targets on sales and productivity in the call centres and administrative processing sections, and Felstead et al. (2013) argue that employers are using the crisis to drive up effort-levels and efficiencies. Furthermore, the appointment of a new Director of Human Resources exacerbates pressures on performance and attendance monitoring. The quote below highlights, in stark and abrasive terms, the new macho management culture – also identified by Taylor et al. (2010) – which now permeates the company.

> *We haven't exited enough people out of the business for poor performance. There's a lot of focus on that over the next 3 quarters, to really raise the game and make sure that people are delivering, because we want to be number one for customer service; especially in the environment that we're in. It's very, very competitive and we need to give the shareholders value for money. We were the best part of the business to manage individuals out, but that was mainly for attendance rather than performance. We needed to get that in order, because we had a lot of people that were on long-term sick. But we've a new performance management framework and if you don't deliver A and B, then as my new boss says, "you will be chucked underneath a bus."" (Paula, Senior Manager, CommunicationCom)*

This new hard HRM stance has changed experiences and perceptions of work.

> *If you'd asked me 6 months ago, I'd have said that I was proud to work for CommunicationCom. My husband works as an engineer for CommunicationCom, and everything's changed on his side. We seem to be treated more as a number now, rather than looking at you as an individual. (Susan, Call Agent, CommunicationCom)*

Call centre shift schedules at CommunicationCom cover 7am to 10pm and weekends, incorporating non-standard hours. However, there is declining flexibility for call centre and administrative workers due to productivity targets and 'business needs', and the combination of workplace pressures has led to some staff opting to 'volunteer' for redundancy.

> *Five people have took their redundancy, due to the pressure of work. There's not really any emphasis on enjoying work, it's just about getting the job done. It's very difficult to get time-off. Senior management don't take much concern over the staff, it's all down to what the business demands are, rather than the people that are actually doing the work. (Cara, Administrator, CommunicationCom)*

Senior managers are now seen as distant and do not understand life on the shop-floor, as performance targets are prioritised over flexible working and care responsibilities. There is a clear reassertion of the management prerogative, and one interviewee was abruptly told, "that's the way it is in business. If you went anywhere else, it would be exactly the same."

RetailCom operates in an increasingly competitive market. The company had struggled and been restructured, but in recent years has recovered and recently merged with a competitor. Market deregulation creates extended opening hours covering early mornings, evenings, nights and weekends, which has implications for staff scheduling and work-life articulation. Shop assistants at RetailCom are usually part-time and contracted for a minimum 10 hour/week – as opposed to zero hour contracts – but this is variable and changeable. These shifts often cover non-standard hours, but there is no longer a pay premium - in line with much of the retail sector (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2010). Strict store budgets and lean staffing increase the intensity of work at RetailCom.

> *We actually work with less staff now than we did 10 or 15 years ago and longer hours into the bargain. The job's getting harder, it's certainly not getting easier. (Fiona, Store Manager, RetailCom)*

The workforce in the stores is segmented, comprising working mothers and students who are trying to 'balance' work with their care duties and studies, respectively.

SocCare has a long-service culture with a supportive ethos and, as one interviewee explains, attracts "a certain type of person" committed to its social values of altruism. However, the organisation operates in a highly competitive sector and recently went through a major restructure due to funding cuts in the grip of the financial crisis. Similar employer responses are found by Van Wanrooy et al (2013), with cuts to labour costs, and Green et al. (2016), whereby employers use their strengthened bargaining power to reorganise work. At SocCare this involved 20 compulsory

redundancies as employees had to reapply for their own jobs, some staff were downgraded and a handful decided to leave the organisation.

> *If you'd asked me 18 months ago, I would have said it's a really good organisation. But we've just been through a quite horrendous restructure and SocCare hasn't been the organisation that it used to be. (Pat, Administrator, SocCare)*

Staff also had to endure pay cuts and there were criticisms that the restructure was not managed sensitively.

> *The very first round of redundancies, which affected the level of management that I was in, came out of the blue. People had letters dropped on their doorstep on Maundy Thursday to say that they'd been made redundant. So you were into the Bank Holiday and there was no support for them. That was really bad. People began to feel, this isn't SocCare any more, SocCare doesn't do this to people. (Sandra, Line Manager, SocCare)*

Interviewees feel that the organisation has lost some of the goodwill of staff and, as will be discussed later, this also has implications for work-life articulation matters.

Work-Life Balance Policies and Practices

All three organisations are developing policies and practices to facilitate work-life 'balance'. Yet, this is inter-related with the use of IT and how working time is managed, scheduled and controlled. Indeed, there are issues over management discretion, inconsistent practices and the prioritisation of 'business needs'.

At CommunicationCom there is a long tradition of flexible working arrangements, but this is uneven and unequal. The company had introduced a 'lifestyle programme' in recent years where staff could select working patterns to accommodate their care responsibilities. However, this was only made available to senior managers and then abandoned. Hence, senior staff enjoy far greater flexibility and autonomy than call centre and administrative workers. Call centre workers are on fixed shifts that are specifically tailored to meet demand, based on anticipated call volume predictions (see Hyman et al., 2005). Furthermore, shift patterns can change on a weekly basis, with very limited employee flexibility. IT systems are utilised to Taylorise work and the company are attempting to reduce the duration of calls from 320 to 290 seconds, and seize 'quick grabs' in order to maximise productive effort. Indeed, administrative staff are being forcibly redeployed to the call centres and express views that once you are moved "you are trapped". Furthermore, the attitude of certain managers to flexible working requests in order to facilitate care responsibilities is unsympathetic and fails to address 'choice' over rotas that are unilaterally set by management.

> *A problem we've got is that we're bringing in new call advisors on specific shifts, and a couple of weeks out of training they want to change their shifts because it doesn't meet their requirements. Then why did they take the job on in the first place? You have to earn your stripes before you can start to make demands on the company. (Paula, Senior Manager, CommunicationCom)*

The differing interests of managers and workers over WLB, are illustrated in the quote below. Furthermore, call advisors can only have their shifts changed on medical grounds.

> *We do deal with flexible working, it's pretty good. If you were to ask every call advisor whether they felt we did it pretty good, they'd probably say "no". They forget that they're here to answer the phone for the customer. (Paula, Senior Manager, CommunicationCom)*

Whilst some managers and administrative staff do benefit from flexible working, they must put forward a 'business case' as to how such arrangements will not be detrimental to the company. This practice not only prioritises "the need to deliver business objectives" over care duties, but is also dependent upon management support.

> *I don't have children, we haven't been blessed with them and I feel sometimes that I'm discriminated against because I haven't got children. People that have got children get the work-life balance arrangements they ask for, but I've got my mum who is still unwell and my grandmother who is unwell. So, I've got responsibilities and they are very real ones. (Tracy, Call Agent, CommunicationCom)*

The quote above illuminates issues of management discretion, but also inconsistencies and inequalities over caring responsibilities and obligations.

RetailCom are developing WLB policies, but there are issues over staff scheduling, management discretion and informal practices. IT is fundamental to the organisation of work and time, through the use of Electronic Pont of Sale (EPOS) systems to monitor and control sales, stocks, budgets and costs (see Price, forthcoming). Checkout work is Taylorised with staff expected to scan 19.6 items/minute and this data is used to enable management to match staff to the peaks and troughs in customer demand. Staff schedules are variable and changeable, with a diversification of arrangements. WLB practices are inconsistent as job share is available for managerial grades in the offices, but not in retail stores. Furthermore, some store managers are quite flexible regarding WLB, but others are inflexible in their approach. Accommodating staffing schedules with care duties and students' lectures and tutorials can be complex and challenging. However, 'business needs' remain paramount, particularly with tight budgets. Informal practices of shift swapping are used, as endorsed by Backett-Milburn et al. (2008), and need to be sanctioned by management, but there are issues over transparency and favouritism, as certain times, such as, Saturday evenings are unpopular.

The use of time-off in lieu (TOIL) practices at SocCare is a clearer and more consistent approach to flexible working. As evening and weekend work is often a requirement, staff can accrue extra hours, so workloads are effectively managed to ensure time-off. This is facilitated by an electronic diary system and there are monthly meetings to discuss workload. Managers ensure staff do not carry forward more than 12 hours/month, but this can be an issue due to the commitment and dedication of staff. SocCare offer a variety of flexible arrangements including part-time, job share, compressed hours and term-time only working. Managers state that

these practices enhance staff retention and commitment. However, staff have to put forward a 'business case' for flexible working that must be approved by management, including a trial period. There are also issues over management support for WLB, particularly during the restructure as staff had to reapply for jobs.

> *Staff who could only work part-time were having to apply for a job that was full-time. So they didn't apply, but then afterwards, other people who applied for the same job were able to do them on a job share or a part-time basis. So those little specific critical things weren't defined until it was too late for some people, because they'd thought, no I can't do it, so they didn't apply. (Sam, Line Manager, SocCare)*

Matters of clarity and consistency are raised again; although managers at SocCare have since reviewed and rectified such practices.

Workplace Pressures and Demands
There is clear evidence of work intensification in the context of the crisis due to competitive pressures and strategies to maximise efficiencies, which resonates with the arguments of Felstead et al. (2013). Furthermore, there is an extensification of work, particularly for managerial grades, which permeates non-standard hours and also encroaches upon home life. Across all three organisations there are instances of considerable 'flexibility' on the part of staff to the employer, but limited reciprocity.

At CommunicationCom there are ever-rising productivity and sales targets in the administrative processing sections and call centres, which staff state are very demanding and not always achievable. These productivity imperatives tighten the porosity of labour, and also impinge on requests for holidays or a long lunch-break on a Friday.

> *We're always asked to be flexible and we try to be as flexible as we can i.e. people changing their days off, working extra, doing overtime, but it never seems to be reciprocated. (Cara, Administrator, CommunicationCom)*

There is a long hours culture for managers due to heavy workloads and organisational demands. This is facilitated by IT, as managers are expected to respond to e-mails and phone calls at all hours, work during evenings and weekends to meet deadlines and travel long distances to attend meetings. Managers often find it difficult to switch-off and this has a negative impact on life outside of work. Engineers are now on results-based contracts and face similar challenges.

Due to the extended opening times and lean staffing at RetailCom, shop assistants work variable and irregular hours that can range from 10 to 35 hours/week. However, some feel pressurised by managers, on regular occasions, into covering shifts at very short-notice, which impedes non-work life (see McGinnity and Russell, 2013).

> *They've asked me to work this Friday evening and I said, that wouldn't really be suitable for me but they effectively said, we've nobody else to cover it, you're doing it. It's not particularly a two-way street. (Thomas, Shop Assistant, RetailCom)*

There is a long hours culture for senior managers and store managers, who are contracted to work no more than 45 hours/week, but often work much longer and have to take work home due to workload pressures. Managers are also often called at short-notice to cover shifts or be available for a store refit, which means working 50, 60 or even 70 hours/week. Dan, a senior manager, said that they "need to be flexible" for the company, but that extra hours are not fully reimbursed, retorting "but that's life". However, this unpaid overtime and work extensification eats into quality family and social time. Similarly, job share is available for HR managers, but there remains an expectation that all staff work the Monday to Friday 'norm'. Hence, Eva, a HR manager, can receive work-related phone calls during days off and is often "running around like a headless chicken" trying to clear work before handing over to a colleague.

As SocCare operates beyond standard hours, staff need to be accessible and available to attend meetings with carers on evenings and weekends. There are growing workplace pressures, but the TOIL policy is effectively managed to ensure that this accrued time can be taken at a later date.

Articulating Work and Life
Across all three organisations workers and managers face complexities due to working non-standard hours, which are documented by other scholars (see Craig and Powell, 2011; Presser and Ward, 2011). This section adds qualitative depth and detail, covering the challenges of attempting to reconcile organisational pressures and diverse working hours with familial care responsibilities. All of the interviewees unanimously want more flexible working and control over their working hours to enable more time for care, studies, exercise and leisure pursuits.

At CommunicationCom flexible working practices are inconsistent and uneven, as some grades and employees receive management support to change working patterns to accommodate child and eldercare. This is typically gendered and there are instances of parents making use of patchwork care arrangements (Warren et al., 2009), including extended family networks and after-school clubs.

Whilst work-life 'balance' is regarded as a key HRM issue (Galea et al., 2014), work in the call centres and administrative sections is increasingly inflexible due to the imperatives of 'business needs'. Shift patterns in the call centres can change weekly and incorporate non-standard hours, as late shifts impinge on quality family time. The quote below exemplifies the impact of new results-based contracts (see Rubery et al., 2005) on an engineer and his partner – who also works for the company – which disrupts basic daily routines of the evening meal.

> *I don't know what time he's going to come home, so it has an impact, you can't really arrange anything. It's pointless even trying to cook a meal, as he might be home at 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening, rather than eating at a normal dinner time like 6 o'clock. Plus, he's not happy as it's very target-orientated; but you can have one engineer that works in the city who can do 5 jobs within a small area, whereas he's rural and he's going from one farm to another. (Susan, Call Agent, CommunicationCom)*

These long days and shifts covering non-standard hours generate additional complexities for workers and their families in arranging caring duties and domestic tasks.

Long hours is also a challenge for managers at RetailCom, and the use of IT to complete tasks blurs the spatial boundaries of work and home; Linda, a store manager, complained about rarely seeing daylight hours. Variable and unpredictable hours also affect shop assistants and their competing priorities, such as, care duties and studies. Whilst there are opportunities to progress, the student workers interviewed regard this as "just a part-time job" and plan to leave soon after graduation; a significant factor in their decision-making is the long hours culture.

Flexible working arrangements at RetailCom are typically gendered, and in the quote below a manager explains how she juggles work and care.

> *My mum does the childcare for me on the days that I'm working. But we're about to move house and the boys will change school and that's all going to be a bit strange. I've spoke to my boss about it and I'm going to start at half 9 so that I can drop them off every morning. My mum will pick them up after school on 2 of the 3 days that I work, and there's an after-school club until I can pick them up at 6pm. (Eva, HR Manager, RetailCom)*

The temporalities of care are articulated, along with how managerial discretion and family support can facilitate new arrangements.

Similar issues are illuminated by employees at SocCare who explain how care duties transform over time and space. In this instance, the employee is part of the sandwich generation, and working part-time is the best pattern to facilitate work and care responsibilities.

> *I'm in a position where I can't work full-time, I have caring responsibilities for my elderly mother and I also have a daughter who's still at school. So I indicated that I wouldn't be able to work full-time, but my manager was actually very supportive. (Linda, Administrator, SocCare)*

Whilst working hours at SocCare span evenings and weekends, there can be management support for an array of patterns to accommodate caring responsibilities. The use of TOIL enables staff the time and space to organise caring obligations, as this manager explains.

> *I've got 3 elderly relatives to look after and we have a phase of going to hospitals left, right and centre and I've usually got TOIL because I also work evenings and weekends. So I just agree with my line manager that I'm taking some time-off and it just goes down as part of my TOIL. (Susan, Manager, SocCare)*

Whilst care duties are often gendered, TOIL policies enable parents to attend the significant events in the school calendar.

Discussion and Conclusions

This article critically examines the experiences and challenges of articulating work and life for those who work in three organisations that operate beyond the 9am to 5pm 'norm'. The research was undertaken during the onset of the financial crisis and involved two private sector businesses and one third sector organisation. It is claimed that the development of WLB policies and practices are part of a progressive human resource management agenda aimed at 'reconciling' work with familial commitments, which improve employee engagement and morale (Clutterbuck, 2003; Galea et al., 2014; Smeaton et al., 2014). However, the reality is more complex and contested than such functionalist accounts pertain. The concept of work-life articulation, developed by Crompton (2006), is utilised to examine employment and household strategies, organisational policies, the navigation of work and care issues, and lived experiences. In addressing the research questions, the article contributes to current debates on work intensification, working time arrangements and the challenges of articulating work and life for those who work beyond standard hours.

The onset of the recession has, in a short period of time, had a significant impact, with evidence of an intensification of work. The organisations studied face heightened competitive pressures and market turbulence, corroborating the arguments of Felstead et al. (2013) and Van Wanrooy et al. (2013). At CommunicationCom there are very demanding sales targets, with a new hard HRM stance of performance and attendance management. There are constant pressures on cost reductions and lean staffing at RetailCom. Whilst at SocCare, there has been restructuring and redundancies; also uncovered during the crisis by Green et al. (2016).

Whilst Green et al. (2013) claim that there is an improvement in working time quality and Tipping et al. (2012) report that the majority of employees are satisfied with their working hours, the findings from the private sector businesses present a stark contrast. This is significant, given the development of WLB policies and flexible working arrangements (Galea et al., 2014; Smeaton et al., 2014). There are curtailed flexible working arrangements at CommunicationCom and RetailCom. These comprise changeable, variable and unpredictable working time arrangements that permeate non-standard hours. At CommunicationCom there is declining flexibility for administrative and call centre staff to meet customer demands. The shift patterns in the call centre are changeable, from week to week, based on IT and call volume predictions, with administrative staff being forcibly redeployed into call centre jobs. At RetailCom there are also changeable hours for shop assistants, but hours vary from between 10 to 32 hours/week and are unpredictable, as they can change at very short-notice due to market fluctuations. This is facilitated by EPOS technology to monitor and control sales and stocks, in order to carefully match staffing schedules to sales. These unpredictabilities also affect managerial grades at RetailCom and CommunicationCom, with demanding workloads and results-based contracts, which generate long hours cultures (see Grimshaw and Rubery, 2010). In both organisations there is an employer-led model of working time (see Rubery et al., 2005), with a reasserted management prerogative over working time and performance. This is in contrast to SocCare, where IT is used to aid and support work-life articulation.

Regarding the implementation of WLB policies and flexible working practices, Messenger (2011) claims there can be a 'dual logic' to meet organisational and

employee needs, which can be reciprocal. However, this raises questions of 'flexibility' for who and on whose terms? Across all three organisations the term 'business needs' are referred to time and again in interviews, and take precedence over the childcare and eldercare responsibilities of employees. Indeed, staff have to put forward a 'business case' to ensure that this is not detrimental to organisational goals. This resonates with the research of Den Dulk et al. (2011) in that 'business needs' are prioritised in the UK, with rhetoric of employee needs. In both CommunicationCom and RetailCom there are examples of inconsistent, uneven and unequal flexible working practices. Yet in all three workplaces there is evidence of considerable 'flexibility' on the part of staff to the organisations' demands, but limited reciprocity. Galea et al. (2014) purport a supportive culture to enable flexible working, but in this study there only seems to be an empathetic ethos at SocCare.

This study corroborates many of the arguments made by quantitative researchers that working non-standard hours generates more work-life 'balance' complexities and challenges (Presser, 2003; Baines et al., 2006; Craig and Powell, 2011; Presser and Ward, 2011), but also adds more qualitative depth and uncovers new dilemmas regarding organisational transformations, working time arrangements and WLB practicalities. Issues of working time arrangements and employee decision-making strategies are central to the articulation of work and life (Crompton, 2006; Crompton and Lyonette, 2011). The recession has had a rapid impact with increasing work intensification in all three workplaces. Presser (2003) states that non-standard hours are typically mandated by employers, and there is now constricted flexible working at both CommunicationCom and RetailCom. Indeed, at RetailCom there is overtime at short-notice with variable and unpredictable hours, which creates work-life conflict (see McGinnity and Russell, 2013). Furthermore, store managers at RetailCom work beyond their contracted hours, often involving up to 20 hours of unpaid overtime per week. Managers at CommunicationCom also work long hours, due to traveling to meetings around the country and the expectation to reply to e-mails at all hours. Moreover, managers at RetailCom and CommunicationCom often have to complete work at home and this extensification of work blurs the work/home boundary (Hyman et al., 2005). This also creates additional complexities for managers who are attempting to achieve some form of WLB for their staff and themselves (Smith and Elliott, 2012). The quantitative research of Presser (2003), Baines et al. (2006) and Craig and Powell (2011) highlights how work encroaches on quality family time and domestic routines. This qualitative study reveals the day to day reality with the spillover of work into family life, as workers try and juggle domestic responsibilities with 'business needs'; which resonates with the research of Gold and Mustafa (2013) in that 'work always wins'. Indeed, all of the research participants sought more control and choice over working time arrangements in order to facilitate the practicalities of articulating work and life.

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Table 1 – Respondent profiles

Participant pseudonym	Grade	Gender	Working time arrangement	Length of service (years)
CommunicationCom 1 - Tom	Senior Manager	Male	Full-time with flexible hours	32
CommunicationCom 2 - Alex	Senior Manager	Male	Full-time with flexible hours	30
CommunicationCom 3 - Paula	Senior Manager	Female	Full-time	20
CommunicationCom 4 - Linda	Line Manager	Female	Part-time 4 days/week	15
CommunicationCom 5 - Carol	Line Manager	Female	Full-time	6
CommunicationCom 6 - David	Engineer	Male	Full-time	22
CommunicationCom 7 - Debbie	Administrator	Female	Part-time 4 days/week	35
CommunicationCom 8 - Cara	Administrator	Female	Full-time	10
CommunicationCom 9 - Susan	Call Agent	Female	Full-time shifts	11
CommunicationCom 10 - Tracy	Call Agent	Female	Full-time shifts	11
Communicatio6Com 11 - Sharon	Call Agent	Female	Full-time shifts	8
RetailCom 1 - Dan	Senior Manager	Male	Full-time	16
RetailCom 2 - Eva	HR Manager	Female	Part-time job share	17
RetailCom 3 - Fiona	Store Manager	Female	Full-time	24
RetailCom 4 - James	Store Supervisor	Male	Full-time	1
RetailCom 5 - Alice	Shop Assistant	Female	Part-time variable hours	7
RetailCom 6 - Thomas	Shop Assistant	Male	Part-time variable hours	1
SocCare 1 - Trevor	Senior Manager	Male	Full-time with flexible hours	5
SocCare 2 - Sandra	Line Manager	Female	Full-time with flexible hours	6
SocCare 3 - Sam	Line Manager	Female	Part-time 4 day/week with flexible hours	3
SocCare 4 - Jane	HR Officer	Female	Part-time job share	7
SocCare 5 - Linda	Administrator	Female	Term-time only with	10

			flexible hours	
SocCare 6 - Pat	Administrator	Female	Part-time 3 days/week with flexible hours	10