

From Work-Life-Balance to Work-Life-Management



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UNI europa P&MS Conference 2010

2-3 December 2010

Budapest, Hungary

Conference Report

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id text, Berlin

December 2010

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Contents

Introduction	5
Opening speeches	6
Work-Life-Management from a research perspective	7
Work-life-balance: what makes people happy	7
Between enthusiasm and stress: knowledge work as a creative act	8
Any time, any place: the role of digital technologies	9
Discussion	10
<i>Interview with Andrea Kampelmühler, GPA-DJP, Austria</i>	12
Focus on work-life situations: reports from the field	13
L'Oréal: work-life balance programmes	13
Finansförbundet: unlimited work in trade union focus	14
DJØF: work-Life-Management in a trade union	15
Discussion	16
<i>Interview with Christer Forslund, Unionen, Sweden</i>	18
Workshops: Work-Life-Management for professionals and managers	19
The "young guns": work-life-management at the start of a career	19
Bringing up children, climbing up the career ladder: balancing career and family life	20
Heading towards retirement: work-life-management at the end of a career	20
Challenged from two sides: the situation of managers	21
<i>Interview with Denise McGuire, Prospect, UK</i>	22
Conclusion: work-life-management as a task for the future	23
The popularity of taking a career break: survey on work-life-balance	23
Different Levels: work-life-management as a field of action	23

From Work-Life-Balance to Work-Life-Management

Berlin-Tegel airport, 8:30 in the morning. There he is, sitting in the waiting room in front of the departure gate, waiting for his flight to Budapest. In his 30s, hasn't shaved this morning, close cropped hair, designer glasses. His cell phone rings. "I'll be there at 11:30", he tells the invisible caller, adding "Yes, sir, I'll take care of it right away". Out comes the laptop, two blackberries on the empty seat next to him, and he's ready for work. While the system boots up, a quick glimpse at the electronic calendar (where you'll often see two or three parallel entries). He frantically types in something. Laptop back in its case, we see him walking off to the gate, apparently having solved the problem.

Working while travelling is "the done thing" these days. "Anytime - anywhere - always on" - that would seem to be the motto of a mobile work philosophy devoid of any physical link to an office and devoid of regular working hours. Being reachable online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week is becoming a habit many professionals and managers are finding it difficult to kick. There is a risk of non-work periods completely disappearing from knowledge workers' lives. Whether just before going to bed, on holiday, during the lunch-break or on the train - those who love their jobs are online all the time. But this whole development is slowly becoming a cause for concern. In November 2010, a PR agent was shot dead on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. She had no enemies, it said in the paper, wondering who could possibly have wanted to kill her. Or was it perhaps one of her employees - the ones she bombarded day and night with messages sent from her smart-phone?

How can knowledge workers protect themselves from stress in a world dictated by urgency? How can they find time for partners, children, relatives and friends in spite of high job requirements? How do they manage to stay in good health and prevent work penetrating the very last corner of their private lives - or are they really not interested in preventing it at all? All these questions were the subject of the UNI Europa P&MS Conference "From Work-Life-Balance to Work-Life-Management", held in December 2010.

Some 50 participants from 13 countries in Europe came to Budapest to discuss how professionals and managers can achieve and maintain a balance between demanding work and their private lives. The need is obviously there. Despite their privileged positions and high dedication to their work, more and more managers and professionals are complaining about stress. Many feel themselves torn between work and family responsibilities. As a last resort, there are always the special clinics to take care of managers with burn-out symptoms.

Trade union delegates discussed several approaches to achieving and maintaining a successful work-life-balance, taking different levels into account: politics, employers, trade unions, and last but not least the managers and professionals themselves. The term "Work-Life-Management" was chosen with care for the conference, indicating a proactive organisation of work-life-balance. It is not something falling from the sky, but something needing to be negotiated and managed - each and every day.

Opening speeches

"Work-Life-Balance is a subject we are working on in all countries", said **Jean-Paul Bouchet**, president of UNI europa P&MS. "Professionals and managers are finding themselves particularly hit by imbalances between their work and private lives" - and this is not just being caused by digital communication technologies but also for instance by new customer demands. The question of balancing work and private life affects all generations. While people from the younger generation are often faced with starting a family, bringing up children and investing in their own futures, work-life-balance for the older generation has more to do with a successful transition into retirement. "We as trade unions need to look into such questions, finding ways of improving the situation". Yet it is not just a question of high-level action: "It is up to each and every one of us to achieve a balance between work and private life".

"Women in particular are suffering from the lack of a proper work-life-balance", said **Arlette Puraye**, a delegate from the UNI Women's Committee. Contributory factors were a number of work- and family-related inequalities specific to women. Isolated approaches were not enough: "In this question we need to take a perspective covering all areas". If the parameters for reconciling work and private life were right, then the benefits were felt not just by female employees: "the well-being of everyone involved is at stake, men and women alike".



Jean-Paul Bouchet



Gerhard Rohde, Christer Forslund

Work-Life-Management from a research perspective

Work-life-balance: what makes people happy

There is a number of current EU studies looking into work-life-balance. With regard to stress, they all paint a clear picture, said **Ulf Boman** from Kairos Future, Sweden: "Almost one third of people questioned in Europe experience difficulties in fulfilling their obligations towards their families due to their workloads. At the same time the number of people too tired to do any housework after a day in the office had increased greatly. Almost one half of people questioned just wanted to fall into bed and go to sleep when they got home from work". There was no time left for playing with the children or sitting down and talking with one's partner.

At the same time, the number of women working was increasing - in Europe it had risen almost 10% between 1997 and 2007. There were however major discrepancies in how household duties were shared, with the onus continuing to lie on women's shoulders in most families. Housework was done by men in only 2 - 4% of partnerships. This meant that work-life-management had a clear gender-specific dimension.

Those questioned in the EU study voiced relatively clear preferences on how work and private life could be better reconciled. Most of them pointed to flexible working hours and workplaces (for example via teleworking) as an important instrument able to contribute to a higher quality of work and life. "A wide range of options makes it easier to reconcile work and private life", Boman explained. "The whole idea is to be able to decide for yourself, when and where you would like to work. The main thing is that the work gets done." Better childcare opportunities were another issue often referred to by re-

spondents. A lot of people would like to see companies being forced to take concrete measures for improving work-life-balance. Other important points involved the expansion of parental leave with regard both to duration and pay, and a fairer sharing of household duties between partners.

Ulf Boman went on to say that it was not just work requirements that were increasing. Individuals' expectations of what they got out of their work and private lives were also increasing. Happiness in the eyes of today's 30 - 50-year-olds had a number of different aspects, including an exciting job, a fulfilled family life, keeping fit, and interesting hobbies. "What we are seeing now is a whole new 'ambition generation', busy with defining itself. They want to be fit, have a good-looking partner, and take their children to hockey, football and classical dance." Such high demands on one's own life naturally had an effect on balancing work and personal interests: "There's a lot of pressure from within".

Work-life-balance was therefore not something purely subject to outside influences. Stress and demands did not just come from outside, but were also being generated by individuals, for example in the form of excessive perfectionism or goals set too high. This made it all the more important to regard the person himself, looking at his individual wishes and abilities. Personal or organisational resources and "cushioning" could help prevent stress arising. "The problem is not about finding the balance between work and private life, but between pressure and resources."

In its analyses, Kairos Future referred to a range of factors influencing work-life-balance. High importance was attached to clearly defined responsibilities and a high degree of autonomy at work. Another decisive aspect was the quality of the relationship an employee had with his manager. It was the

job of the latter to give his team support, constructive feedback and the feeling that they were valued. "What we need are managers who are able to build up trust", Boman stressed. It was important to work in an environment where the focus was on motivation and personal relationships, rather than just relying on structures. Other important ingredients for achieving the right balance between work and private life involved having enough time to recuperate and think things over, and keeping fit. Apart from the ability to set priorities, a person should also understand that he might need help: "We should not always try to do everything ourselves". This applied to both work and private life: "Core importance is attached to support from family and friends." Kairos Future saw a harmonious partner relationship as another important factor in achieving the right work-life-balance: "A partnership, within which a person receives recognition and support, is a decisive factor for a happy life."

Between enthusiasm and stress: knowledge work as a creative act

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to make things slightly more complicated", said **Anders Buch**, a researcher from the Danish Technical University. "While it is obviously important to give an employee influence over his work and provide him with a motivating environment, problems associated with over-commitment still remain".

A large number of reports exist in Denmark on massive stress and health problems experienced by knowledge workers - right up to burn-outs. "We see ourselves confronted with a paradox. Which group is suffering from stress? None other than that privileged group of well-paid employees with high degrees of freedom." This finding contradicted traditional assumptions of stress research,

according to which stress was not supposed to occur when people had a high degree of freedom. If we wanted to start understanding the work situation of professionals, we needed first to adapt our theories. Buch went on to present the results of a study involving six Danish companies in which knowledge work predominated. In the study, engineers were questioned about the motivating and stressful factors of their work.

Knowledge activities were characterised to a great extent by ambiguity and by results not being known in advance - there were often a number of ways available for solving a problem. Employees often found themselves in situations with conflicting interests and perspectives. These could involve such things as customer wishes, social requirements, profit targets or professional routines. This meant that a great deal was dependent on the way individuals organised their work. Knowledge work was therefore also to be seen as "identity work", in which individuals were continually redefining their self-perception and their work, the methods used and their work relationships. "People are co-constructors of their work environment".

Within such an ambiguous work situation, employees had available a number of different reference frameworks which they could use for orientation. On the one hand there was the *professional framework*, providing them with certain standards, practices and values associated with their professions. Though *bureaucratic regulations* were often seen as creativity inhibitors, they could at the same time be helpful when professionals found themselves faced with a task with no clear contours and a high degree of complexity. Last but not least, knowledge workers could take orientation from *influences from their surroundings* - for example their perceptions of the usefulness certain products had for society. These three reference frameworks could help knowledge workers to or-

ganise their work, thereby potentially reducing stress. But they also had the potential to conflict with each other, thereby becoming a source of stress - for example when bureaucratic regulations or environmental requirements were incompatible with professional quality standards.

Interviews with engineers underlined how close stress and motivation were to each other. "The same subject can be both a source of motivation and a source of stress", said Buch. This was the case for example with regard to the open-endedness of any task, providing the majority of engineers with a great sense of fulfilment with respect to their inquisitiveness and enthusiasm. "A lot of engineers find work with predefined results boring". The same phenomenon could however lead to stress when giving a person a sense of uncertainty and when there was no clear feedback. The same ambiguity applied to work variety and interruptions, which could either be seen as stimulating or as a burden. What was seen as a challenge, what as a burden, differed from one person to the next. This made it difficult to improve any work environment: "If we start reducing stress factors, we end up sacrificing the motivating factors."

Buch saw clear limits to calling in outside help: "We should not be trying to protect professionals from stress. Instead we need to strengthen their awareness for the role they play in defining their work environment." Trade unions could help here by organising collective discussions, used for example to clarify expectations and standards hitherto often unspoken.

In Denmark, an online software tool supporting this approach would be made available in the first quarter of 2011. This application with its graphical interface and structured paths could be used by knowledge workers to find out "how they themselves shape their identity and work environment. We aren't

giving any predefined results, since people differ from one another. But they need to know and be aware of that."

Any time, any place: the role of digital technologies

Henri Isaac went into the technical side of knowledge work. "The world has become one big office", the scientist from the Rouen Business School in France observed. "Digital technologies have revolutionised work in the last 25 years. We are witnessing a new Industrial Revolution." The new ICT media - and in particular wireless networks - were providing us with work tools that could be used wherever we wanted. There were practically no more restrictions as to where we could go online. Isaac used "anytime-anywhere" effects to describe the consequences this was having on work-life-balance.

There were on the one hand immense *acceleration effects*. The availability of information within seconds meant that the time needed for a lot of activities - whether financial transactions or the reporting of business figures - had been greatly reduced. Short-term thinking was gaining ground, directly affecting employees. "A lot of employees have the feeling that they are being bombarded with too much information, with everything having to be taken care of immediately." The pressure of being available at any time to solve problems quickly was growing. The result was a culture of urgency, representing a major stress factor for employees, necessitating decisions to be taken under time pressure and often endangering the quality of work.

At the same time there was a trend towards *extending working hours* - or, to put it differently, to non-stop working. "Many employees check their emails before going to work,

while travelling, in the evenings or during breaks. Work is slowly becoming distributed over the whole day" - a situation hardly taken into account when measuring working hours. This led to the question of whether 24/7 working was being done voluntarily. "A lot of people feel themselves obliged to do so - even when they're on holiday", said Isaac. He criticised such behaviour, especially where managers were involved: "a good manager should be able to delegate responsibility." If work was so urgent that an individual became indispensable, then "such work would find its way to the individual without him having to go out and look for it", said Isaac. New collective practices were needed. There was for example a new discipline needing to be trained: switching off.

These changes went hand-in-hand with the *mixed time* phenomenon, whereby the former clear separation of work and private life had vanished into thin air. "Work is slowly invading the private sphere, and the latter is on the retreat." Whilst capitalism had previously allowed a separation of work and private life, thereby enabling employees to recuperate, this distinction was now fast disappearing.

What we were now experiencing was an increase in *parallel time*, recognisable by the simultaneous nature of a lot of knowledge workers' activities. "In most conferences and meetings now, we see participants busy with their laptops and checking their emails." Mobile devices allowed people to be present, at least mentally, in several worlds at the same time. The question whether they were actually able to deal with several things concurrently was answered cautiously by Isaac.

Closely related to these observations were the *spatial effects* of digital technologies, with electronic communications covering great distances within seconds. With the right equipment, we could work anywhere we wanted - in the office, in the living room

or outside. However Isaac did not yet want to speak of the death of distance. Predictions that physical mobility would completely disappear had turned out to be wrong: "People are travelling more than ever before." This could however still change through the use of broadband technology allowing videoconferencing and tele-presence - in a quality making teleworking more attractive than ever before.

These "anytime-anywhere" effects of communication technology facilitated the development of new forms of virtual companies, meaning that traditional forms were losing in importance. "The triangle of time, place and organisation has dissolved into thin air." Although such changes had enormous relevance for work-life-balance, societies were hardly prepared for it. "We need to reconsider measuring work solely in working hours", said Isaac, "And we need to use quality of life as the starting point."

Discussion

One of the discussion's central topics was the disputed **voluntary nature** of unlimited work. "Why are so many employees always online?", asked one delegate. He then came up with a possible answer: "There is a harsh spirit of competition reigning in companies, putting people under pressure to always be available." Deregulation of markets and high levels of competition between companies were being felt directly by employees.

Another question mark was attached to the **digital habits** of younger generations. One delegate expressed her fear that young people, motivated by the pressure of conforming with their peers, could further fuel digital acceleration. This would without doubt lead to further stress phenomena.

A number of contributions questioned the individualistic perspective of the analyses

carried out by Kairos Future. "The strong focus on individuals and their partner relationships means that Kairos has chosen a very traditional approach", said one delegate. One of the main questions concerned the role **trade unions should play in the area of work-life-balance**. Boman saw room for new trade union offerings here: "They can extend the services they offer, helping people to come to grips with their private lives - for example through psychological counselling." Other contributions called for trade unions not to lose sight of their traditional role and to put pressure on companies to meet up to their responsibility. "Trade unions should be making companies aware of ways they can support work-life-balance", said one delegate.

A number of participants expressed their doubts as to whether such a positive assessment of **flexible forms of work** pointed in the right direction: "There are a lot of employers also calling for it, but for completely different reasons", said one delegate from Austria. It was the job of trade unions to act in a steering capacity and make sure that positive approaches did not turn into new stress situations. With reference to teleworking, several contributions focused on the need to provide an adequate level of protection for home offices, for example with regard to ergonomic issues.

A further topic highlighted the **sandwich position of managers**, continually having to mediate between company targets and their team members. "This is a form of multiple stress", said one participant from Austria. "Managers are like tiger tamers - surrounded by owners, customers, competitors and colleagues", said Boman, illustrating the position fraught with tension managers found themselves in. This all made work-life-management a very demanding task. Trade unions therefore needed to put a special focus on the situation this highly-qualified cli-

entele found itself in. They could for instance offer tools helping professionals to recognise burn-out symptoms at an early stage and proactively work on curing them.

Health promotion within companies was another instrument to be used in improving work-life-balance. One delegate from Great Britain reported on such programmes in the company she worked for. Here, measuring blood pressure and weight reduction courses were examples of ways used to increase employee awareness for health and well-being. "The important thing is not to do everything alone, but as a team."





Andrea Kampelmühler from GPA/DJP in Austria works as a communications specialist at WienIT and is chairwoman of the works council there.

What is the role played by work-life-management in the company you work for?

In a number of points the company is reacting to employee wishes - for example one manager has been allowed to change to a 4-day week. But such things only take place on demand. There is no systematic approach. Positive effects on work-life-balance can for instance be expected from the mentoring system recently introduced for new hires. One of its goals is to keep colleagues on parental leave informed on what is happening in the company. In addition, there are a number of other "goodies": a masseur

comes in once a week, with the company paying half his fee.

What can managers do to promote a healthy work-life-balance?

First of all, managers need specific training in dealing with employee needs. These can vary greatly, dependent on which phase of life an employee is going through. In many cases, there is just no sensitivity towards the subject. There are quite a few managers choosing Fridays for "jour fixe" meetings, even though some colleagues only work Tuesdays to Thursdays.

Do you yourself manage to draw a clear dividing line between work and private life?

I am not too strict about separating my work from my private life. I am often busy doing works council work in my free time. I work about 45 hours a week. But if you add on the time I spend at night in bed thinking about my work, it's a lot more. I sometimes wake up at 4 o'clock in the morning - and then the solution to a problem occurs to me. I sometimes discuss business matters on the phone from home. But that's no problem for me - it's my own decision. However: When work takes up too much time, my private life sometimes suffers.

Focus on work-life situations: reports from the field

L'Oréal: work-life-balance programmes

What approaches were companies taking with regard to work-life-balance? One report on employer initiatives came from **Emmanuelle Lièvre-mont**, equal opportunities officer at L'Oréal. The company had a number of internal regulations targeting equal opportunities and work-life-balance, with a number of agreements signed with the trade unions.

There was a range of measures focusing on *parentage*. These were meant to help employees reconcile as much as possible work requirements with birth and the bringing up of children, without careers suffering. In addition to statutory maternity leave, L'Oréal offered mothers four weeks "Schueller" leave, named after the company's founder. These weeks were paid for by the company and could be taken in different chunks right up to the child's 3rd birthday. Women on maternity leave also benefited from wage developments in their reference group. Before the start and at the end of maternity leave, HR representatives had a talk with the employee concerned, with a view to facilitating re-entry under the right conditions. Employees with children were given the opportunity - subject to corresponding cuts in wages - of switching to a 4-day week and staying at home on Wednesdays. This rule applied until the child reached the age of 12. It also applied to fathers. "It is our intention to encourage men to become more involved in bringing up their children", said Lièvre-mont. The 11-day paternity leave is one of the measures going in this direction.

L'Oréal had developed a whole range of *services* focused on employees' family and private lives. The company's health service and doctor, as well as social workers, were avail-

able on demand to deal with employees' individual needs. There was a "concierge service" for taking care of routine household errands. A number of locations had their own gymnasiums. Up to now, L'Oréal had set up a total of seven company kindergartens for its employees' children. These were being run jointly with other companies. "The company obviously wants to know what this all costs and what benefits are derived. But we can see that this is a good investment - employees are highly motivated and show great loyalty towards the company." This was reflected in a high average length of employment, despite a relatively young workforce.

With the introduction of *telework*, L'Oréal wanted to support forms of work meeting the individual needs of its employees, in as far as they were compatible with company requirements. There were clear rules governing telework. It was only possible in certain areas, and how employee supervision was carried out by the company was clearly defined. Last but not least, teleworking was restricted to a certain portion of working hours, with the rest needing to be spent working on company premises. This was meant to help employees maintain intensive contact with their team colleagues. Following an initial pilot phase with positive results, the decision had now been taken to make teleworking available throughout the company. As yet it was being used most of all by colleagues from the R&D department, HR and accounts.

L'Oréal was working continually on new initiatives going beyond statutory requirements or what was commonplace within the sector. "We would like to be at the forefront of developments, setting standards in socio-political aspects as well", said Lièvre-mont. In work-life-balance questions other partnership forms were now being taken into account, with all family-related provisions applying to patchwork families and homosexual couples from autumn 2010 onwards. The next items

on the agenda were programmes targeting the care of relatives. "Up to now, the focus has been on children. But we are often asked about support for older relatives." L'Oréal wanted to come up with answers in this area by 2012.

Finansforbundet: Unlimited work in trade union focus

"Work-life-management is one of our strategic priorities", stated **Christine Jensen** from Finansforbundet, the Danish trade union for the financial sector. Starting points were the dissolving boundaries described by Isaac - including the disappearance of traditional working hours: "These are no longer determined by opening hours, but by individual situations, requirements and preferences." While knowledge workers were gaining increasing degrees of freedom, we were also witnessing a gradual erosion of the demarcation lines between employers and employees. "The wide range of participation opportunities has led to a new culture of consensus, in which there hardly seem to be any more diverging interests", said Jensen. The cornerstones of work relations had changed: "We used to sell a certain number of hours for a certain amount of money." Nowadays it was no longer working hours being exchanged, but willingness to perform, "and in exchange we expect career development opportunities and recognition." There was now little distinction between an individual's role as a private person and that of an employee.

This erosion of previously clear boundaries had a number of advantages for employees, with work becoming more flexible and more adaptable to individual circumstances. Young mothers for instance were able to pick up their children in the afternoon and carry on working at home in the evenings. Such high degrees of freedom made a lot of jobs interesting. But at the same time, this new free-

dom could also cause stress: "It is left up to individuals to draw the dividing line between work and their private lives. And not everyone was good at coming to terms with this situation." 37% of Finansforbundet members were showing symptoms of stress, and 12% had reached a stage where their health was in danger.

The union wanted to help its members to better manage the phenomenon of work without limits and their personal work-life-balance. Finansforbundet had started out with an analytic approach, carrying out a survey of its members in March 2010. What soon became apparent was that a 37-hour week was no longer really standard, with 55% of respondents working longer hours. The survey also showed that autonomy at work was often less than expected. "One cause for concern was the high level of identification respondents had with their companies in connection with the permanent pressure of competition. Under such circumstances a lot of people had difficulties saying "no" and resisting excessive demands. 64% of respondents frequently thought about work during their free time.

The union was running a number of measures aimed at promoting awareness for work-life-balance issues and helping individuals to take informed decisions. A brochure was developed, explaining the phenomenon of work without limits, highlighting its advantages and drawing attention to problems. Guidelines were made available, giving employee representatives arguments for use when negotiating with employers. Further campaign material was in the process of being compiled. Finansforbundet was cautious with regard to explicit action. After intensive discussions, it had for instance decided against any stricter regulation of working hours: "Quite a few of our members are having absolutely no problem with the lack of boundaries, while others are having diffi-

culties with it - this all makes it difficult to draw a distinct line." For most members it was important to find individual solutions suiting their specific situations.

One concrete suggestion from Finansforbundet was to clarify fuzzy expectations: "What does my boss want me to do when he sends me an email on Saturday afternoon? Does he expect me to answer it immediately?" These were questions many professionals thought about, without actually speaking them out openly. Bringing such questions to the surface was a first step in actively drawing a line. A further important factor in work-life-management involved the careful handling of one's own life. Cultivating interests and relationships outside work was one way of preventing work gaining the upper hand over the whole person.

DJØF: Work-life-management in a trade union

Trade unions are also employers. This meant that the whole subject of work-life-management is relevant for unions as well. **Thomas Bregnegaard**, senior consultant at the Danish DJØF, gave a report on a project being conducted by his union, which mainly looked after the interests of legal and business professionals. Some 200 employees worked at DJØF, most of them with university degrees.

The union carried out an in-house project in 2008 and 2009 focusing on its employees' quality of work and life: "Stress was a subject that management wanted to come to grips with". The number of employees on sick leave was seen as a sign of the urgent need for appropriate measures. The project started out with an internal survey. This clearly showed that the work atmosphere was good, that employees took pride in the content and meaning of their work, and that

they had good career development possibilities. There were however problems. What a lot of employees missed was clear feedback from their managers and colleagues. Unrealistic timeframes and high workloads often gave people the feeling of being stressed. At the same time people had difficulties working continuously, as they were often interrupted, for example by telephones continually ringing. "If a member wants to speak to us, it's difficult for us to say to him 'I'll ring you back in four days time, when I've finished writing my report.'"

This internal survey led to work being done in three main areas: frequent interruptions of work were to be reduced and clear priorities were to be set between operational and conceptual tasks. In addition a system of systematic feedback was to be anchored in the union. The first step here was to run intensive feedback courses. On completion of important tasks or projects, colleagues gave or received feedback. Meetings were given a defined structure, a measure found to be very helpful. A call centre was established with the responsibility of filtering incoming calls and directly answering simple questions put by members. A first performance measurement in 2009 showed clear results: approval for management had increased, and the number of employees experiencing work-life-conflicts had decreased.

Individual aspects, such as the increased effectiveness of meetings, had now become permanent features of office life. The call centre was also helping to reduce interruptions, relieving employees by answering standard questions. However, specialists were still frequently being interrupted by transferred calls. Workloads remained higher than those capable of being dealt with within normal working hours. The new rules on systematic feedback were in danger of succumbing to the pressure of routine business. "The financial crisis saw a lot of companies

going bankrupt or laying off staff. A lot of our members had an urgent need for counselling - and this meant that the whole project soon got bogged down."

Even in cases where management - as at DJØF - was seriously working on improvements for its employees, the benefit of isolated measures was limited. Bregnegaard was therefore calling for an integrated and well-anchored approach to stress topics within companies. Account should be taken of such an approach in all relevant decisions. "In most cases the whole issue appears on the agenda too late, when problems have already surfaced. We need to always question the stress factor before we do something, not afterwards." In the view of Bregnegaard, one area always needing an *ex ante* impact assessment was the introduction of new IT systems. Frequently announced as ways of making work easier, "we often end up seeing more and more possibilities offered by the system being discovered, leading to more work and increased stress levels."

Discussion

Several contributions underlined the fact that the often high **degrees of autonomy** in knowledge work were no guarantee for a functioning work-life-management - and indeed often resulted in the opposite. Managers and professionals had never before had so much influence on their work", said one delegate. "But whether this leads to a better quality of work or life is doubtful." Attention was drawn to the parallel problem of often unrealistic targets and the social pressure within companies to do everything to achieve them. The professional ambition and perfectionism of many specialists and managers often ended up causing their downfall. Here again, the demarcation line between enthusiasm and stress was fuzzy: "Quite a few of

them are so socialised that they always want to deliver top quality - they focus on the maximum possible, even in cases where this might not be necessary." A further tendency could also be observed. This involved giving high-performing colleagues more and more work. "Work is systematically given to high-performers who carry on working in the evening", said one delegate. Hardly a word was spoken about stress signals and health risks in such cases.

Drawing **dividing lines between work and private life** was, as the discussion showed, not just a personal issue, but also a question of company culture. New routines and conventions were needed in flexible structures too, clearly marking where professional responsibility stopped. One concrete demand involved putting a time limit on afternoon meetings. "Most meetings are open-ended", said one delegate from France. This made it difficult to make any private arrangements for afterwards. To protect employees, a change in behavioural standards was needed. As company delegate Lièvremont put it: "There needs to be a time limit put on meetings, allowing people to plan their schedules properly. It is important for colleagues to know when their day in the office is going to finish." In this area one could observe growing employee self-confidence: "These days you often get to hear someone say 'I've got a private date this evening and have got to go home now'."

One delegate from the Austrian union GPA/DJP explained how they were dealing with the **specific interests of professionals and managers**. They had set up a special forum (work@professional) exclusively dealing with the problems of professionals. In it, there was a toolbox containing a range of instruments available to anyone with a work-related problem. Work-life-management was one of them. In addition they were providing information and events on selected topics.

There was one brochure for instance on the relation between travelling time and working hours. An information campaign was focused on so-called "all-in" contracts, in which an employee's salary automatically covered all working hours including overtime. There was also a book on liability legislation intended to protect professionals and managers from having sleepless nights.



Christine Jensen, Anders Buch



Emmanuelle Lièremont, Thomas Bregnegaard



Henri Isaac



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Is work-life-management on your union's agenda?

It is an important issue, which we have to develop further. In the negotiations on working conditions and salaries we presently focus on working time issues. But maybe even more important is the reduction of workload. This is a topic we have to get a grip on.

What do companies need to do?

As a company, you cannot just set targets. You have to break it down to the individuals and be realistic. There needs to be space in the calendar of knowledge workers, because very often unexpected things come up. They also need time to reflect what they are doing and develop their competencies. We try to argue in economic ways. Companies profit from people being happy and healthy. Our advice to employers is: Think in longer terms – this helps you to save money and work more effectively. Don't press people for longer periods. If they are under permanent pressure or cannot sleep at night, they will produce less or be sick.

How do you experience Work-Life Management in your own life?

When our kids were small, I travelled a lot. It was difficult to accomplish work and get home early enough to have time for the children. I had problems with my stomach. When I was 28 years old I started a new way of living: I stopped smoking and began exercising. That was a real change. When I am jogging, I can reflect on things and often get new ideas. My retirement is just a few months ahead now. Certainly, I will not sit at home and watch TV. I will have more time for our grandchildren, my political activities and for cross-country skiing. But before I start new time-consuming activities, I will first look into my wife's eyes...

Workshops: Work-life-management for professionals and managers

There was no standard solution for successful work-life-management: there were a lot of factors involved such as one's career position, personal preferences, marital status, and age. "Work-life-balance can mean something completely different in each phase of life", explained **Gerhard Rohde**, head of UNI's department for professionals and managers, while presenting the workshops. There were four working groups looking into individual aspects of work-life-management: the relationship between work and family life, different needs at the beginning and end of a business career, and the role of managers.

The "young guns": work-life-management at the start of a career

While the whole topic of work-life-balance was often seen solely from the aspect of reconciling work and family life, younger generations frequently had completely different needs such as starting on a career or wanting to try out something new.

Young graduates often had problems gaining a foothold on the *labour market*. While some of them were able to select the company they wanted to work for and negotiate attractive conditions, for others, good working conditions were a luxury. This could become a significant disadvantage for one's work-life balance, observed one participant: "Young graduates working under uncertain working conditions often suffer from stress." Straight-line careers were becoming increasingly seldom, with many young careers characterised by frequent breaks - whether intentional or unintentional. The large amount of mobility demanded from professionals obviously had an effect on their private lives: "Six months

internship here, another three months somewhere else - how can anyone start building up a serious relationship?"

Unions needed to wake up to the fact that the younger generation had different wishes: "They don't want to be completely tied to a company", said one participant, "or they would like to work hard for a certain period and then go off to Australia for a couple of months." At work as well, young graduates were demanding *freedom* and resisting dictation from above. One delegate spoke of a young Japanese scientist, who, when asked about his own work-life-balance, said: "For me, work-life-balance means that I can work as much as I want."

To provide young graduates with effective support, unions needed to develop *services* specifically tailored for this target group, and to increase their presence in universities. Though graduates had little affinity to unions up to now, it was not impossible to win them over. DJØF in Denmark had for instance hired student "ambassadors" in universities to distribute material or invite students to union events. "This is a way of increasing our visibility in universities - and our success is there to see", said Bregnegaard. Students now represented the fastest growing membership group. In France, CFDT-Cadres was doing similar work, helping students find work placements and informing them on their rights. UNI P&MS had started a project with international scope, aimed at offering young union members work placements throughout the world

(www.globalplacement.com/en/206/1-home.html).

Bringing up children, climbing up the career ladder: balancing career and family life

One of the working groups was looking into different ways of better reconciling a career and family life. The agenda included changed *parental leave* conditions underpinning the joint responsibility of couples for their children. As the amount of parent benefit (the German "Elterngeld") paid was dependent on wage levels, fathers, usually earning more, tended to continue working, while mothers stayed at home. This just gave added weight to gender-specific differences. Lump sum payments were a way of neutralising this effect. A key factor in the work-life-balance of working parents was to have affordable *childcare facilities*. These needed to also be available for children of school age. To match current-day working conditions, childcare facilities needed to extend their opening hours. Companies also needed to take greater account of *parents' time schedules*, for example when planning meetings or training measures. The latter often took place outside normal working hours or at weekends, making it more difficult for parents to take part.

But family life was not the only dimension of a healthy work-life-balance. Delegates also discussed ways of fostering personal development - for employees both with and without children. These included the possibility of making *sabbaticals* generally available - these could be used for going on a long trip abroad, doing something with the family, or for further education. "At present you often get a dirty look when you say you want to take a break", said one participant from Belgium. What was needed here was a change in culture: "Most companies expect their employees to fully devote themselves to their work".

Heading towards retirement: work-life-management at the end of a career

Although there were quite a few studies on work-life-balance available, very little research had been done on the needs of older employees. This was quite astonishing, as demographic change could be expected to increase the importance of this aspect. An ageing society and longer years at work meant that an increasing number of people were being confronted with the challenge of maintaining their work performance and employability. With regard to work-life-management, employees around the age of 50 had concerns quite different to those of their younger colleagues. "Parental leave and childcare are no longer on the agenda. They are replaced by changing family circumstances, taking care of relatives, and sometimes certain impairments", said one representative from the working group. "And there are some who no longer want to focus their lives solely on their careers, but want to have time to read more or visit exhibitions."

Companies therefore needed to take the different performance levels and preferences of older colleagues into account. This was the only way of profiting from their know-how and experience in the long term. One important instrument was the possibility of employees *reducing their working hours* (whereby the problem of pension contributions needed to be solved in order to prevent major financial losses on retirement). *Job profiles* needed to be tailored in line with the experience and strengths of older generations - for instance by offering them coaching or mentoring work. Last but not least, older employees needed support in *further training*. At present, trends going in the opposite direction could be observed. "Companies prefer to get rid of older employees rather than supporting them." Taking the special needs of older employees into

account when dealing with work-life-balance issues and promoting age diversity within a company were however in the interest of a company. It was becoming difficult to find professionals on the labour market and the supply of young graduates was slowly drying up. "Companies will soon start regretting not having taken account of all generations."

Challenged from two sides: the situation of managers

Managers were both in the driving seat and passengers when work-life-balance issues were involved. As managers, they were responsible for staking out the field of manoeuvre for their employees. And as employees they found themselves confronted with the problem of balancing work and private life.

The working group was discussing managerial responsibility and the possibilities available to managers vis-à-vis their employees. *Close dialogue and relationships built on trust* were seen as important foundations for promoting employees' quality of work and life. Managers barricading themselves behind closed doors and overflowing schedules did not have much chance of noticing any major problems emerging on the working level. Management needed time - but all too often managers were full to the hilt with operational work.

Managers should not only be motivating employee to even higher performance, but instead *protecting them from becoming overloaded*. Two positive examples were discussed. One was from an English delegate: "I had one boss who came into my office one evening and asked 'Why are you still here? Go home!'" Another exemplary example involved a Danish manager, who invited employees in for a personal chat when they had chalked up more than ten hours of overtime

in one month. "This led to overtime becoming very transparent - and the manager helped us in finding ways to react. We sat down together and talked about the problem. This often ended up with new priorities being set or work postponed." Participants expected a competent manager to challenge higher levels of management when he considered targets to be unrealistic or insufficient resources to be available. "A good manager must be able to say that something can't be done, either by himself or his team."

As individuals themselves in search of the right balance between professional and private interests, managers had the same work-life-management problems as their employees - with a few more on top. "Managers are very lonely people", commented one delegate. They were sandwiched in between the divergent expectations of their superiors and their employees, and often exposed to internal battles for power; in many cases they just did not have anybody to whom they could turn to without having to filter what they said. *Mentoring systems* could help managers to overcome such isolation, as they could speak openly with mentors, discussing their questions, reflecting on their role and searching for solutions.

To prevent themselves from becoming overworked, managers needed to be able to *prioritise and delegate* work - an ability that some first had to acquire. There was one point that should never be forgotten - in spite of all pressure to perform, warned a French participant: "Even if somebody has an accident or drops down dead, everything will still go on without him". In a world where everything was urgent, we needed to readjust standards every now and then.

Denise McGuire is in charge of People Programmes at British Telecom and deputy vice-president of Prospect. She is also president of the UNI World Women's Committee.

What was the background of Work-Life Management initiatives at British Telecom?

The starting point was diversity. Many Work-Life Balance schemes were originally focused on women, people with disabilities or ethnic minorities. One of the early measures in the 80ies was that people who came from other parts of the world, like India, were able to transfer their holidays from one year to another. So they could visit their families for some weeks. For women, we introduced reduced working hours: They could agree with their manager upon a different number of hours or days. Another company driven initiative was teleworking from home – a programme which also served as a marketing tool: BT company wanted to sell this approach to other companies as well.



Has the focus been extended to other aspects of the Work-Life Balance?

Work-Life Balance has become a work stream of its own right. There is a variety of programmes. One of them is term-time working which allows employees to work only during school terms of their children. We have a scheme offering vouchers for discounts on childcare. It is also possible to give up some of your salary in order to get more leave. There is a programme for people who are approaching retirement to work in less stressful jobs. But the emphasis with these measures is on the individual – you have to ask for the facilities. A lot depends on your line manager and on how supportive they are.

In what aspects could the company do more?

The managers should actively promote and encourage these schemes. And, most important: Managers should be very clear that people don't have to work more than their contracted time. Many employees are pressured in different ways to work long hours, and this causes many problems. There are managers who arrange teleconferences during the weekend – as a regular meeting. This is a bad approach.

Is the topic of Work Life Management on the agenda of your union?

Very much. It is a health & safety issue. We give a lot of advice to our members on their entitlements and possibilities. There is a campaign on Work-Life Management called "work time – your time". We printed posters 'Does your blackberry make you crumble?'. We offer a spreadsheet where people can count how many hours they work. And we give hints and tips to employees for conversations with their manager on health and stress issues.

How do you manage your Work-Life Balance?

My work gives me a lot of pleasure and satisfaction, therefore it is easy for me to donate my time to this. I work around 50 hours a week, and when I visit my father, I use the time on the train. Other people would call it work, but for me it feels like a hobby. Perhaps I am not such a good role model – but as long as it does not become stressful, I think the Work-Life Balance is fine. When I am on a business trip, I try to have some additional hours to see the place around, not only the hotel. I am lucky that I enjoy most of the work I do so my work nearly always feels like pleasure.

Conclusion: work-life-management as a task for the future

The popularity of taking a career break: survey on work-life-balance

UNI's **Lorenzo De Santis** conducted a written survey of conference participants, asking union representatives to rate individual work-life-balance aspects. 20 people from 13 different countries took part. The most important factor in achieving a successful work-life-balance was seen by many as the opportunity of taking a career break, or a few days' holiday when family circumstances required. Paid parental leave also featured high on the list of priorities. Having companies offer their employees sports facilities was not seen as being so important (although a few delegates did give this item a very high rating).

Respondents listed individual instruments they saw as suitable for best implementing work-life-management. The list contained such items as flexible working hours and teleworking. When starting a new project, managers should systematically look at its work-life-balance effects. Another item mentioned involved training courses in stress management and personal organisation. Last but not least, the whole issue of work-life-balance should be included in collective agreements. An ethics code was also needed to give work-life-balance a stable framework of values.

Different Levels: work-life-management as a field of action

As the conference presentations and discussions showed, work-life-management affected nearly every aspect of knowledge workers' work - from the duration of meet-

ings, mobile work, childcare to sabbaticals. The diversity of the whole field made the search for concrete concepts difficult. This was compounded by the fact that a work-life-balance had different facets highly dependent on the phase of life an employee was going through, and his or her personal preferences.

A range of factors and possible instruments had been discussed at the conference. Compiling them in a systematic way and using them as the basis for concrete initiatives should be the focus of further union projects. There were many starting points available on different levels. Looking at the political and company level, there was a need to create better framework conditions. But it was also up to professionals and managers themselves to define their own work-life-balance. They were the ones in a position to determine to a great extent how they accomplished their workloads and what dividing lines they drew. In an environment where autonomy was both a source of motivation and of stress, external interventions were only effective to a certain extent. One way for trade unions to address individual needs for support was the range of information and advice they had on offer. But there was also a need for unions to exchange information more amongst one another.

At the same time, the constraints under which many professionals and managers worked needed to be taken into account. Unrealistic targets in companies, enormous time pressure and high levels of competition often led to employees having to work more, with longer hours, and wherever they might be. The whole issue was not just about strengthening individuals but also about changing conventions and performance standards of no long-term benefit either for employees or companies.

