

**Leadership
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for Higher Education

Leadership Styles for Work-Life Balance

A project funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

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Foreword

This study, which was set up to identify, in a very practical way, the leadership styles that promote work-life balance, builds on an earlier project which was acclaimed as a model for the whole of the higher education sector.

The initial project, published in November 2004 as *A Guide to Work Life Balance and Good Practice at Oxford Brookes University*, established a systematic policy framework for implementing and supporting work-life balance throughout the university for all categories and grades of staff. It was a fundamentally collaborative project, with external funding from the DTI's Partnership at Work Fund, the full support of the trade unions, and extensive contributions from the staff themselves. Yet the project leaders immediately recognised that, vital though it is for the university to have a wide-ranging and imaginative work-life balance policy that is actively promoted from the centre, what really matters to individuals is what happens in the day-to-day working group. And so a proposal was put to the Leadership Foundation for funding to support some further investigation about what behaviours and practices were most effective in supporting the full and equitable implementation of work-life balance. The present report is the outcome, and its findings will inform the various ways in which the university's work-life balance policies will be promoted.

We see in this report that 'leadership' is not just about what happens at the top of the university. It is also about how people behave as leaders of departments, offices, teams – units that may be very large or very small. It is the 'local' experience that matters for the individual and so the concepts of leadership and good management have very wide relevance, and a very broadly based importance.

The earlier study demonstrated clearly that good practice in work-life balance makes a major contribution to the promotion of equality of opportunity, since it recognises and responds to the diversity inherent in the workforce. The present study emphasises this even more strongly. Increased flexibility in the workplace brings the greatest benefit to those previously under-represented in work or in promotional grades because it begins the process of reducing the rigidity of unexamined policies and practices which try to squeeze everyone into one mould. One size – one pattern of work – does not fit all, in the workplace any more than in any other area of life. Yet in the employment context we often behave as if there *is* only one size, and as if everything that does not easily fit the mould is invalid, unsatisfactory, questionable. Good work-life balance policies, supported by appropriate management and leadership in all parts of the institution and at all levels, show that many options are possible, delivering benefits both to the individual and to the institution.

What, then, can we take away from this project? It is difficult to sum up, but if I were to list three things, it would be that: the successful implementation of work-life balance is a partnership; it is about achieving a harmony in individuals' roles; and it is about empowering people. For it to be embedded in the employment context, and to be available to all on a fair and equal basis, it must be embedded in institutional belief, as well as being supported by effective structures that give it a robust operational context. Above all, as anyone reading this report will quickly recognise, the management and leadership styles that are most supportive of work-life balance are the kind that are also the most likely to put people at the centre, and to promote diversity and equality of opportunity in all aspects of the institution's work.

Professor Joyce Hill
Former Director, Equality Challenge Unit



Executive Summary

1. This report presents the findings of an action research project conducted at Oxford Brookes University to investigate whether there are leadership characteristics that facilitate the promotion of a work-life balance culture and management styles that facilitate the take up and use of flexible working. Qualitative data was collected at Brookes through semi-structured interviews based on 'triads' made up of an employee, their immediate line manager and their line manager's manager. In total 35 one to one interviews were conducted. This approach enabled us to investigate how leadership styles and attitudes towards work-life balance filter down through different levels of management and how they influence working practices. The data collection in itself was used as a form of staff development intervention to encourage the participants to reflect on their leadership and management styles and to involve them in the process of change to create a more flexible working environment.

Half of the sample was based on existing examples of 'good practice' within the university, while the other half was based on 'neutral' examples where it was not known whether work-life balance practices were used.

2. The notion of work-life balance suggests a dichotomy between paid work and life. As indicated by the participants' own definitions of work-life balance, this may mean different things to different people and this expression may not be adequate to capture the complex process of changes in people's lifestyles and expectations and an organisation's adaptation to it. Although it might be difficult to provide an alternative definition, it is suggested that the emphases should be placed rather than on the concept of 'balance' between work and life, on the notion of helping people to achieve a sense of 'harmony' among their different roles, at different stages of their life, by enabling them to be more in control of their working time.
3. All the managers who took part in this project were asked to reflect on how their working practices and attitudes might impact on their staff. Overall it appears that staff in management roles, including the most senior ones, who have young families, are more likely, whether male or female, to be concerned about their own work-life balance. They are also aware of the importance of sending a positive message through their own behavior and attitudes to their staff.
4. A wide range of flexible working arrangements were used in the schools, directorates and departments that took part in this project. One of the main advantages of flexible working experienced by support staff managers is staff's retention, while academic managers did not see this as being a main issue. This is not surprising as the University figures show that turn over among academic staff is rather low, about 7%, a year, unlike among support staff where it is much higher- between 15-17%.

Both academic and support staff managers believe that flexibility and autonomy can increase staff's motivation, loyalty and effectiveness. It is argued in this report that some of the reasons given by the managers for increased staff's motivation appear to resonate with Maslow's theory on motivation. Maslow's hierarchy of human needs identified in his theory seems to provide a good explanation about a link between work-life balance and increased staff's motivation.

5. An attempt was made to investigate whether managers had experienced any increase in staff's productivity as a result of flexible working. However, it was not possible to come to any conclusion in this respect as there does not appear to be, particularly among support staff, a clear and reliable way of measuring staff's effectiveness. Thus, not surprisingly many support managers were unsure whether flexible working could improve staff's effectiveness. Academic managers instead were able to point to clear performance indicators such as the Research Assessment Exercise and students' feedback and exams results with regard to teaching. Many academic managers believe that working from home helps to enhance staff's quality of work as it minimizes the amount of interruptions. In any case the great majority of all the managers are confident that flexible working has not had any adverse impact on their staff's work and performance.
6. Hardly any disadvantage was associated with flexible working by managers. None of them reported an increase in staff's costs as a result of flexible working while few of them stated that having staff working flexibly has offered them the opportunity to make some savings on staff's costs. Only very few managers are concerned about the possibility of staff abusing flexible working while the majority of them does not see this a major concern. Those leading relatively small teams feel that any abuse of staff's time would be easy to detect.
7. Previous research carried out at Oxford Brookes showed that one of the main concerns for managers in the application of flexible working is to ensure that all staff are treated fairly. In order to explore this issue managers were asked to consider some hypothetical situations and explain how they would go about to resolve potentially conflicting requests from staff for flexible working. Two different scenarios were presented, one relevant to support staff and one relevant to academic staff. All managers indicated that they would seek to reach a compromise and were clear that in the end they would have to take responsibility for making a decision. However, it is interesting to note that their responses differed in the way they would go about seeking a compromise. Some managers would consult with the rest of their team before making a decision, while others would only consult with their fellow managers. Some managers would be inclined to give priority to requests for flexible working from staff with caring responsibilities. Others instead, stated that they would not be influenced by people's reasons for wanting flexible working as they feel that it is not up to them to make decisions about "people's personal life".

8. The great majority of the managers saw a clear distinction between the concept of 'leadership' and that of 'management'. Broadly speaking, they associated leadership with 'having a vision' – where the department/school or directorate should be going – and working towards it – as well as inspiring and motivating staff; whilst 'management' was associated with the 'operational side of things'.

Two main conceptual frameworks on transformational leadership, respectively based on the Bass (1985) and Bass and Avolio (1990) theory of transformational leadership and on the Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2005) theory of 'nearby' transformational leadership, were used in this project to explore a possible relation between managers' leadership styles and work-life balance practices. This led to some interesting findings as many managers expressed serious reservations about the applicability of the Bass and Avolio model of transformational leadership to a Higher Education context. The main criticism was that this model appears to rely heavily on the notion of a single leader who is able to turn around an organization while managers see their leadership role as working with people and enable them to perform to the best of their abilities. Instead, by and large, the managers' views on leadership qualities needed in a Higher Education context appear to match better the 'nearby' model of transformational leadership identified by Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe.

9. The project's findings indicate that there seems to be a strong correlation between managers whose style appears to be very people-oriented and supportive of work-life balance and some of the leadership qualities identified by Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe in her model of 'nearby' transformational leadership. These are associated with 'valuing individuals', 'enabling', 'developing staff potential', 'acting with integrity and consistency', 'being accessible and in touch', 'being decisive' and 'prepared to take risks'.

A consultative management style is also important to implement and manage flexible working effectively in a way that benefits both the needs of individuals and those of the organization. In those examples where issues were found about the use of flexible working these seemed to relate to wider issues around communication and management styles rather than work-life balance practices. It appears that the challenge of creating a more flexible working environment is more likely to expose poor management practices.

10. This research also showed that leadership characteristics and management styles appear to be more relevant to the implementation of flexible working among support staff, where there is a more hierarchical line management structure and where, overall, staff tend to have less autonomy in the way they organise their work and working time.

While in the case of academic staff, what seems to impact more on their work-life balance is the degree to which the 'the locus of control' over their workload is 'internal' or driven by 'external' factors such as, for example, the requirements of professional courses. Nonetheless the triads also show that leadership characteristics such as, for example, 'encouraging change', 'being decisive' and 'risk taking' are important to academic managers with regard to the introduction of innovative approaches to working practices. This is demonstrated by the examples of some academic managers

who participated in this project, that were prepared to try and support different working arrangements, such as designated homeworking or 'compressed part-time' for academic staff, in spite of resistance and reservations from other colleagues about the introduction of new working arrangements.

11. This research also offered the opportunity to gain a better insight into work-life balance issues for managers. This group has a key role to play in promoting and implementing the university work-life balance agenda and it is important to understand their issues around their own work-life balance and how they can be supported – if they are expected to set an example. It is also important to make more explicit some of the coping strategies adopted by some managers to deal with heavy workloads and show that senior management jobs are not incompatible with the demands arising from family life or other interests.
12. From a staff development perspective, this work has enabled our institution to gain a better understanding of managers' beliefs and behaviours that drive 'good practice' with regard to work-life balance arrangements. It has also enabled the participants in the research to reflect on their management practices and their contribution towards the implementation of the work-life balance agenda within the university. It is recommended that staff development initiatives on work-life balance and flexible working aimed at managers should focus on getting managers to understand the leadership characteristics and management styles that support work-life balance and flexible working and how these link to the broader concept of leadership and management that a university needs to adopt to achieve its goals. Based on the triad interviews a number of case studies have been developed which form part of this project. These together with other instruments developed as part of this project are included in this report and may be used by other Higher Education institutions that wish to promote work-life balance and create a more flexible working environment.

Introduction

The project presented in this report and funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education builds on previous research and development work aimed at improving work-life balance at Oxford Brookes University which was partly funded by the Department of Trade & Industry under their Partnership at Work Scheme. The work was carried out in partnership with the University's recognised trade unions – NATFHE (The National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education) and UNISON – and with the University's Administrators' Forum, which provides a cross university co-ordination and information exchange function for administrative staff.

It was based on an action research change management approach, aimed at making the participants feel involved in the process of change and the data collection was used as a form of intervention. Similar approaches have been successfully adopted in the past to promote work-life balance within organisations, as evidenced by the work of Rapoport et al (2002) with several US organisations. The Oxford Brookes project followed the Action Research Cycle, as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2001) which can be represented as a circular process, as shown below:

- Diagnosing the issue
- Planning action
- Taking action
- Evaluating action



The 'diagnosing' stage included a detailed survey of staff experience and staff views relating to work-life balance through a questionnaire to staff and focus group discussions (Manfredi and Holliday, 2004). On the basis of this, in the planning stage, both a 'business' and an 'equal opportunity' case were made and an action plan was formulated to promote the university's work in this area.

Action was taken to implement the project's objectives, which included improving communication about existing policy and practices, providing training for key groups and reviewing and improving existing policies. That project was completed in 2004 and it was evaluated through feedback from the participants and through the university staff satisfaction survey.

The research on flexible working arrangements undertaken within the university, as part of that project showed, similarly to other studies (see for example Wise and Bond, 2003; Clutterback, 2003; Doherty, 2004; Coussey, 2000 and the Flexible Options Project 2003 supported by HEFCE), that line managers' attitudes are crucial to the success of work-life balance policies. Line managers can either be a major barrier to diffusing good practice or they can be the most important innovators of leading practice. Through the workshops conducted with line managers as part of the Work-Life Balance Partnership Project, we formed the impression that there seemed to be a relationship between leadership and management styles and flexible working that needed to be investigated further. Work undertaken by the National Work-Life Balance Forum (2000) has shown that leadership characteristics associated with the ability to empower employees, adapt to change and take innovative approaches to work are instrumental to ensure that both organizations and individuals can enjoy the full benefits of work-life balance practices. Thus, in this study we intended to investigate the following research questions:

- Are there leadership characteristics which facilitate the promotion of a work-life balance culture supported by flexible working practices?
- Are there management styles that facilitate the take up and use of flexible working?

The underpinning themes to these questions are that leadership is important to integrate work-life balance into an organization's human resource strategy and to embed it in the organizational culture. This requires a vision about how it can be achieved, the will to modify organizational norms and a preparedness to introduce new approaches to work.

Good management skills are important to ensure that work-life balance is pursued as a 'dual agenda' which links flexible working to organization goals.

Research design and methodology

This study took place within Oxford Brookes University and it involved collecting qualitative data through semi-structured interviews based on 'triads' made up of an employee, their immediate line manager and their line manager's manager. All participants were interviewed individually and managers had no prior knowledge of which member of their staff had been included in the sample.

Construction of the interview sample

The reason for basing the interviews on 'triads' was to investigate leadership styles through different levels as it was hypothesized that senior line managers' leadership styles and attitudes towards the notion of work-life balance may influence middle managers and ultimately their staff's perceptions and experiences of work-life balance practices within the university. It was decided to base half of the sample on 'known cases of good practice' of work-life balance arrangements as previously identified through the Oxford Brookes Work-Life Balance Partnership Project. The other half of the sample was based on situations where similar work is carried out in broadly similar contexts, but where it was not known whether work-life balance practices were used. Half of the sample was referred to as 'good practice examples' and the other half as 'neutral examples'.

In the case of the 'good practice examples' the sample was already available and known to the researchers who could choose from a number of cases which were selected to represent different working environments. These were then matched up with triads in broadly comparable working contexts. For example as part of the 'good practice examples' a triad was based on a small IT team which was matched with another small IT team performing broadly similar tasks, identified in another part of the University. Using broadly comparable working contexts was important in order to identify possible job related limitations or opportunities for the use of flexible working. To construct the 'neutral' sample a member of staff was randomly selected and asked to take part in the study. If the person selected accepted, then his/her immediate line manager would be asked to take part in the study, as well as the line manager's manager. This process was facilitated by the internal knowledge that the researchers, who carried out this study, had of the institution as they were both based at Oxford Brookes.

Overall the researchers planned to conduct twelve triads, six involving academic staff and six involving support staff. The previous research conducted at Oxford Brookes clearly showed that administrative staff and academic staff experience different work-life balance issues, so it was felt important to continue to investigate the two groups separately. In practice however, it was not always possible to put together a 'triad' for two reasons:

- a) In a couple of cases two management positions were vacant, so it was possible to interview the immediate line manager but not the line manager's manager as an appointment still had to be made.

- b) In the case of academic staff there was not always a clear line management structure in place that could be used to construct a 'triad'. The reason for this is that in some academic schools academics are line managed directly by the Dean while in others line management responsibilities for academic staff have been delegated to Heads of Departments.

Ultimately the sample included nine triads, four with academic staff; five with administrative staff; plus two pairs with academic staff and one pair with administrative staff. In order to protect the participants' confidentiality we cannot be more specific about the different working contexts selected, as this might lead to participants being identified within the university, but we can say that overall they were chosen to ensure that they were broadly representative of the different types of work done within the university. With regard to support jobs, we included the areas of IT, student services, estates and facilities and university internal administration. With regard to academic staff, all academic Schools except one were included in the sample.

In total 35 interviews were conducted. These included 13 members of staff and 22 managers. It is not possible to establish with any precision what percentage of university managers our sample represents because responsibilities for line managing staff within the university are highly dispersed and they are not reflected by the institution's workforce statistics. For example, a principal lecturer could have line management responsibilities for staff if he/she happens to be a Head of Department, but there is no way to ascertain from the information currently available how many principal lecturers have line management responsibilities throughout the university.

Although this is a small study, a number of themes have emerged consistently throughout the course of this research, which provided some clear indications about the leadership characteristics that appear to be associated with the support of work-life balance employment practices. Based on this sample a number of case studies were designed that can be used for staff development purposes.

The research instruments

A Schedule of Interviews was designed to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews with staff (Appendix 1). The questions covered the following areas:

- The work context:
Questions in this section aimed to understand the nature of the job done, factors which might affect working patterns, the degree of autonomy participants have in their work, to what extent they can openly discuss their working patterns and whether they feel that they are consulted about decisions concerning workload planning and working patterns.
- The job:
Questions in this section aimed to understand what motivates participants and what they value most about their job and how their work performance is monitored.
- Own experience of work-life balance:
Questions in this section were aimed at understanding participants' current experience of work-life balance ~ whether they work flexibly; have they used other university policies which support work-life balance.

A different Schedule of Interview was designed to be used with the line managers which covered the following areas (Appendix 2):

- The work context:
Questions in this section aimed to understand the line management structure, the specific requirements of the service and how these impact on staff working patterns, the extent to which line managers feel in a position to adopt new approaches to working practices and the extent to which staff might be involved in the decision making process relating to working practices.
- Line managers' own experience of work-life balance:
Questions in this section aimed to understand managers' personal experience of work-life balance, whether they use any flexible working arrangements or have sufficient autonomy in their work to get the flexibility that they need to achieve a work-life balance; to what extent they think their working patterns and attitudes to work affect their staff and whether they feel affected by their staff's working patterns and attitude to work.
- Line managers' views on current university work-life balance practices:
Questions in this section aimed to understand whether they feel that promoting work-life balance is important to the work done in their Department/School/Directorate; whether they see themselves as having a role in promoting work-life balance; how they respond to requests for flexible working and whether they encourage staff to talk openly about work-life balance issues.
- Line managers' views on leadership/management styles:
Questions in this section aimed to capture their views on leadership and the qualities that count most when leading people.

Although the same Schedule of Interview was used for both middle managers and senior managers, there were very few questions which were aimed specifically at senior managers or middle managers as appropriate.

In order to capture leadership characteristics and management styles which might be associated with the support of work-life balance employment practices, the participants were also asked to fill in two short questionnaires.

A short questionnaire based on the Bass and Avolio (1990) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was used. This measures the degree to which transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles may be used by the respondents. We chose to test this instrument because at the time when this study was planned, some staff development initiatives for managers within the university were informed by the Bass and Avolio transformational leadership model. Thus, this research offered an opportunity to explore how, in practice, this model reflected managers' leadership styles within the university. However, in the end, the data collected through this questionnaire could not be used as it was patchy and unreliable. This was due to the fact that a significant number of participants were highly critical of the questions included in the MLQ and found it difficult to relate them to their experiences and working context. Consequently answers were not provided to all the questions and in one instance a participant did not wish to answer at all. Nonetheless we found that the participants' comments about the MLQ and the criticism raised provided an interesting finding in itself which will be fully discussed later in this report. We found, instead, that the Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2005) revised model of

'nearby' transformational leadership offered a more appropriate conceptual framework of leadership to be applied in a university context and in particular it seemed to match better the leadership characteristics that emerged from this study.

The second short questionnaire was designed to capture preferred management styles and it was broadly based on the Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) Continuum. This conceptual framework was chosen because it focuses on the relationship between the level of authority used by managers and the level of autonomy that they are prepared to give to staff. We thought that this model was useful to explore the extent to which managers are prepared to give trust and autonomy to their staff. It was important to investigate this because previous research on work-life balance at Oxford Brookes found that trust and autonomy are key to flexible working practices that support work-life balance.

This instrument was complemented by two short hypothetical case studies designed to understand how management styles would in practice inform the approach taken by managers to deal with work-life balance issues. In order to be consistent with the approach taken throughout this study to investigate support and academic staff as two separate categories, one case study reflected work-life balance issues likely to occur in an academic School, while the other reflected issues likely to occur in a functional department. Both cases were used separately with the two groups.

During the course of the interviews with line managers, we also used a card, which listed a number of flexible working arrangements and possible advantages and disadvantages associated with them (Appendix 3). We asked the managers to comment on these in the light of their experiences of managing flexible working.

The Actual Sample

A short questionnaire was used to gather some biographical details about the participants. The following tables show the actual sample of participants by gender and age group. It also shows whether they have young children or not. It can be noted that most of the managers who took part in this study have young children and several of them indicated, during the course of the interviews, that they have childcare responsibilities and make use of some form of flexibility either formally or informally. None of them indicated on the form as having other types of caring responsibilities but it was clear from the interviews that some of them had some eldercare responsibilities.

STAFF

Female	Male	With Children	No Children	Married	Single	Div	Co Habit
58%	42%	42%	58%	33%	42%	8%	17%
7	5	5	7	4	5	1	2

FEMALE STAFF

Have Children	Have children Under 16	No children	Staff Age 16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65
43%	29%	57%		43%	28.50%	28.50%	
3	2	4		3	2	2	

MALE STAFF

Have Children	Have children Under 16	No children	Staff Age 16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65
40%	40%	60%	40%		40%	20%	
2	2	3	2		2	1	

MANAGERS

Female	Male	With Children	No Children	Married	Single	Div	Co Habit
41%	59%	91%	9%	77%	9%	9%	5%
9	13	20	2	17	2	2	1

FEMALE MANAGERS

Have Children	Have children Under 16	No children	Staff Age 16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65
89%	62%	11%			45%	45%	10%
8	5	1			4	4	1

MALE MANAGERS

Have Children	Have children Under 16	No children	Staff Age 16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65
92%	69%	8%			46%	38.50%	15.50%
12	9	1			6	5	2

Analysis

All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and they were thematically analysed. In order to do this we used the Nvivo software which enabled us to identify clear themes in a rigorous and systematic way. Based on the triads we compiled some case studies. Managers' behaviours and attitudes towards work-life balance and flexible working emerging from the case studies were related to the Alimo-Metcalf and Alban-Metcalf revised model of 'nearby' transformational leadership to understand whether there is a correlation with some of the leadership characteristics outlined in that model. Finally staff's views on their managers' management styles and managers' own perceptions of their management styles were related to the Tannenbaum and Schmidt Continuum to explore a possible relation between management styles and flexible working.

Findings Overview

In this section of the report we present an overview of the main findings which emerged from this study. These provide further understanding of what work-life balance means to people and how they experience it. We also present a summary of the most commonly used forms of flexible working and the advantages and disadvantages experienced by line managers with regard to flexible working. We then look at managers' views of leadership and management and discuss how these relate to the theoretical models of leadership of Bass (1985), Bass and Avolio (1990), Alimo-Metcalf and Alban-Metcalf (2005) and to the Tannenbaum and Schmidt Continuum (1973) that have informed this study as explained in the methodology section.

Work-life balance, life-work balance, or should it be called something else?

Throughout this study we have used the expression work-life balance as it is widely used among HR practitioners and academics. However, the definitions of work-life balance provided by some of the participants in this research, have highlighted the need to question the validity of this concept.

The notion of work-life balance suggests a dichotomy between paid work and life. Yet paid work is an important part of people's life as it provides a way to express themselves, realise their aspirations and contribute to the social and economic progress of the societies they live in. One of the participants in this study, when asked to define what work-life balance meant to him, replied:

"I am not very dogmatic about something called work-life balance, I think work-life balance is about achieving something that complements someone's non working life and that varies. You know it is not an even percentage, it is not a 50/50%, it is not even a 70/30% split. For some people it might be 80% and 20% leisure, for other people you know the balance may be different. I think it is about working to achieve some kind of harmony as an individual".

(Male academic manager)

It has been argued by Johnson (2004) that by using the expression work-life balance, organizations start from the wrong perspective, as this definition has stemmed from the 'corporate perspective' which prioritises work. He points out that, from an individual's perspective, life comes first and suggests that the expression life-work balance should be used instead by organisations to engage with these issues. The following comment from another participant, partially supports Johnson's claim. However, it also shows that inverting the order of the words does not change the fact that life and paid work are presented as potentially conflicting priorities:

"I have to say I don't like the phrase work-life balance, work is as much life as family life or any other kind of activity. And also the word balance I don't like it because my family is absolutely my priority and always will be so. To me it means finding a relationship between the time that you spend away from your family earning money and expressing yourself as a member of a society through your work and your role as a member of a family unit, those two things and making sure that they are in harmony"
(Male support manager)

Furthermore, it is argued that work as part of an individual's life might take priority at some point. People may prioritise their work as they wish to achieve a particular career goal or perhaps satisfy the need to save up money, or they may feel that their work is their main interest and passion in life. For example, the attitudes of many academics towards their work are a good case in point, as evidenced by the following quotes:

"There need to be space in my life for doing things with my family, doing things that I want to do for myself, although things that I want to do for myself overlap with my academic interests."
(Male academic manager)

"People are passionate about researching their subject so it spills over everything"
(Female academic manager)

People play a number of roles in their life which may vary at different stages. Working women have brought with them into the workplace their role as carers. Their increased participation in the labour market has generated enough critical mass to create an expectation for work-family issues to become part of organisations' human resource management agendas. Furthermore, lowering the barriers between gender roles has opened up more opportunities for both men and women to take on many more different roles throughout their lives. It is important for individuals to be able to 'harmonise' their different roles, as stressed in some of the comments cited above and key to this process is the use of their time. The more in control of their time, the more likely they are to be able to harmonise their different roles rather than having to choose between conflicting demands.

The importance of being in 'control' of one's own time is clearly demonstrated by the following comment:

"What it means to me (work-life balance) is that I can be more in control of my time at the university and I can choose when to do certain aspects of my role. So, for example, I might not attend the university for half a day or a day because it is most efficient for me to work at home or at another site of the university... the benefit of that is that my home life – my personal life – doesn't get unduly interfered with by the university work. Inevitably I do work in my own time but that is through choice rather than necessity, that's the difference I think."

(Male support manager)

Another academic manager explained that his work life balance is driven by how much control he has over his work. He said that he does not mind being stressed and overburdened as long as he has made the decision to take on more work. Conversely if more work is imposed upon him, without him having very much control, this would make him feel that he has lost the 'balance'.

These testimonies clearly support Barling's argument (cited in Brannen and Lewis, 2000) that 'feelings of control' are important to avoid stress and maintain individuals' well-being.

As the examples above demonstrate, having enough autonomy in one's work may enable people to carve out the flexibility that they need to achieve a better sense of 'harmony' in their lives. In other cases they may need to use specific working patterns such as part-time work or compressed hours to use their time more flexibly. This is the point where organisations have an important role to play in responding to people's expectations and in return to win employees' commitment and help them to perform to the best of their abilities.

It is difficult to provide an alternative definition to capture this complex process of changes in people's lifestyles and expectations and organisations' adaptation to it. Although for practical reasons the expression work-life balance is used throughout this study, the learning generated by the participants' definitions, discussed above, clearly shows that work is part of people's lives and the place that it occupies depends on what stage of life they are at and on a number of variables – such as family responsibilities; personal interests; types of jobs that people do; changes in personal circumstances; and other reasons. Whatever happens in people's lives the focus should be on helping people harmonise their different roles by enabling them to be more in control of their time.

What does work-life balance actually mean to people?

In order to promote the notion of work-life balance as an organisational value and to help individuals to achieve 'harmony' in their life, it is important to understand what work-life balance actually means to people, what their expectations are and how these can be met by organisational policies and working patterns. During the course of the interviews participants were asked to define what work-life balance meant to them and to what extent they felt that their current working patterns helped them to achieve their idea of work-life balance. Not surprisingly their answers were influenced by facts such as the stage their working lives are at, whether or not they have caring responsibilities and their job roles.

Almost half of all of the participants in this study had young children and/or caring responsibilities for adults, usually elderly parents. As it might be expected their definitions of work-life balance revolved around their caring responsibilities and are well summarised by the following quotations:

"To me personally it means the ability to fit in the needs of my family into a working environment...it simply means that if anything comes up which is important to my family, I know that work will be willing to listen to a solution".

(Male support manager)

"If I have a crises with my parents it would not be a problem if I have to disappear."

(Female support manager)

"To ensure that I have enough quality time with my children"

(Female academic)

"For me work-life balance is to get the perfect balance of both sides. I want to do a job, I am a conscientious person. I want to do a good job. I love this job because I am able to see much more of my family than I had done when in industry".

(Male academic)

What matters most to staff with caring responsibilities is to have the flexibility to be able to make some adjustments to their working hours, often of a minor nature, in order to fit in with family needs such as collecting children from school or take time off in the event of a family emergency. The evidence collected through this study shows that all those interviewed who fitted into this category are able to this. For example one male support manager with young children said: "I feel I have a lot of support both in terms of the flexible hours and the opportunity to go elsewhere and develop as a professional." One female academic who works full-time explained that in the past when her children had just started school she was able to take some afternoons off until they started to attend a full school day. At present, she appreciates the fact that she can occasionally attend her children's school assemblies when she is not teaching.

Definitions of work-life balance from staff who do not have caring responsibilities and are in the younger age bracket, between 20 and 30, highlighted the importance of having time to study. For example one member of staff commented: " I generally worked and studied at the same time, so work-life balance to me is not just sort of knowing that everything is going ok at work... it is also 'do I have time for my studies'?". This corroborates the evidence that

emerged from the university-wide audit of staff experience of work-life balance at Oxford Brookes (Manfredi and Holliday, 2004) which showed that taking a course of study or undertaking training is one of the main interests outside work for employees in the younger age bracket of 16-26 years.

Job roles can also impact on people's perceptions of work-life balance, and this seems to be particularly the case for staff who hold management responsibilities. These roles can potentially be "all consuming" and it can be particularly challenging for individuals doing these jobs to balance the demands of their work against whatever else is happening in their life. As one senior manager put it, "one has to work at it."

All the managers interviewed, with the exception of one who worked four days a week, worked full-time and the great majority of them had childcare responsibilities. They all enjoyed sufficient autonomy in their work to be able to have some flexibility to suit their needs. For example all of those who have childcare responsibilities can adjust their finishing and starting hours to take or collect children from school or nurseries. Our findings also indicate that the more senior the roles, the greater the degree of control that managers have over their working time. For example, one senior manager explained how being in 'control' of his working time enabled him to achieve a work-life balance but he also pointed out "It is control but I think it is also, I have to say, seniority that has enabled me to do so. I don't think I could be so much in control of my own time if I wasn't a senior manager. In a sense one feels slightly guilty about that because, you know, a lot of my staff can't exercise that control because they have to be attending the counter services or even some more senior level of administration. Middle managers have to be around a lot more than senior managers do in terms of answering immediate questions and dealing with immediate issues, whereas senior managers do have more flexibility".

Autonomy and control over their work appears to stem from a high level of trust which is linked to these roles. This is clearly illustrated by the example provided by another senior manager who explained that contacts with her line manager are quite infrequent and if she has an emergency and needs to take time off work, it would be up to her to make arrangements. She commented "people are sufficiently trusted provided that they tell someone what's going on".

However, to make the best use of this position of 'control' over one's own time, it is partly down to the individual's perceptions of what is expected of them from organizations and their ability to prioritise. One senior manager commented:

"since I have been here, I have been much more effective at doing that (time management). So I carve out time in my diary when I don't allow appointments to appear when I can be more effective".

Another senior manager explained that her strategy to cope with her heavy workload is to do a lot prioritising to make sure that the important parts of her job gets done while the less important one do not get done, she said:

“My self-imposed working patterns help me to achieve that (work-life balance), but my current workload does not help me to achieve that. I have a workload that is well beyond what one person should be doing. I manage that, but actually not doing it all. I have got a family who get cross with me if I take work home”.

On the other hand it is also important that organisations send a clear message particularly to senior managers to discourage the ‘long hours culture’. The university staff work-life balance audit (Manfredi and Holliday, 2004) showed that in some parts of the university there was a ‘long hours culture’.

A male senior manager who took part in that audit made the following comment:

“Eliminate the ‘long hours culture’ that exists in part of the university. Senior management are prone to perpetuating this culture.”

It is interesting to compare this comment with that made by two other senior managers who took part in this study.

The first one, a senior support manger, thought that the Contract of Employment for support staff is “specific about hours and that is a good thing and in his view “if everybody stuck to this, work-life balance would not have appeared as an issue and work would have not been ‘distorted’ by the long hours culture.” He explained that he has young children and he is rigid about only working 40/42 hours per week and he is able to self-regulate his work in order to achieve this. However, he has a feeling that his approach is seen as a ‘weakness’ by some of his staff.

A female senior academic manager commented that “I think that there are people who think that if you are in a job like this you ought to be in work from 7am until 9 or 10 at night and anybody can see you that you are working hard, which I think is daft and I don’t do that. I do work hard... at week-ends I work at home rather than coming here so that people can see that I am here; and I do think it is a particular macho culture.”

However, the ‘long working hours’ that these jobs often require are not always seen as the main issue. For academic senior managers, in particular, it seems to be important to maintain a balance between different tasks and responsibilities within their roles. Academics are usually promoted to senior management positions because of their scholarly achievements. The findings of this study show that once they take up a senior management role they have little time, if any at all, to do the very things which characterise an academic job – teaching and learning – and where they achieved excellence. As we have already seen, for academics research and other scholarly activities often coincide with their main interests and passion in life which are a source of fulfillment and enjoyment. Thus, finding themselves in a position that leaves very little time for those activities can result in a sense of loss of work-life balance. An example of this is well illustrated by the experience of one senior manager who, when asked about what work-life balance meant to him, replied “If you want an honest answer I don’t apply it to myself. I am in a fortunate position that my children

are grown up. I don't think that I would be able to do this if my children were not grown up and also my wife has a similar demanding job." He explained that he works very long hours and this was discussed in his Personal Development and Review where it was suggested that he should give more consideration to his work-life balance. He thinks that the way he could improve his work-life balance is "probably not change the hours but diversify into possibly more satisfying areas; probably substituting some of those hours to actually doing research which I sacrificed to be in this job."

The same issue was raised by another senior academic manager who, commented: "I think that the greater the management and administrative burden the harder it is to do research, I think there is an issue that many of the people we want to have management responsibilities are also potentially our best researchers, it is a balancing act which is difficult to get right."

Another academic senior manager thought that moving certain activities, such as strategic planning and staff development to outside the semester time, when it is less busy, would result in a better distribution of the workload throughout the year and hence help people to have a better work-life balance.

One senior academic manager pointed out that, at his level, work-life balance can be a psychological issue. He explained that his idea of work-life balance is "I suppose being in a position to live a life that is psychologically free, at some point, of the pressure and concerns of the role – which is difficult because it is a psychological issue". He added "to cut off is not easy".

Lack of resources can also make it very difficult for some managers to have a work-life balance. This problem seemed to be particularly acute in the case of one support manager who felt that his current working patterns prevented him from having a work-life balance. In particular he felt that there was a lack of appreciation in his department of how staff 'down the line' had taken on the burdens of the duties of staff who left and had not been replaced. He thought that his working patterns could improve only if additional staff were to be employed.

The role of line managers in promoting and implementing work-life balance policies and practices

Research by Drew (2000) has highlighted the importance of securing senior managers' commitment towards the promotion of a work-life balance culture. However, a distinction should be drawn between commitment from senior managers to the principle of work-life balance for their staff and their personal commitment as well as their willingness to set an example to their staff. The overall picture of the institution, probably similarly to other organisations, shows that there are plenty of examples of staff working flexibly among employees in lower and middle level jobs but none of these flexible working patterns seem to apply to more senior roles. During the course of the interviews both senior and middle managers were asked how their working practices and attitudes might impact on their staff. In discussing their responses it is useful to distinguish between the replies provided by the middle managers who, by and large, are closer to the staff they manage from those provided by the senior managers who are less involved in the day to day management of staff.

Most senior managers (7), the majority of whom have young families, appeared to be well aware of the importance of sending a positive message to their staff and be perceived as valuing work-life balance, even if their working patterns may not be so visible as those of middle managers. For example one participant commented:

"I think of any senior manager that their attitude in the way they view their work has to be important, I would argue, that although I may not be on public display – you know to the extent that some people are – I am still working with people who will be looking for set examples. If you have a workaholic boss it is very difficult to get any kind of balance, so I try, we try, on the whole to look at the importance of balance".

One senior manager, as seen earlier, makes a point of not working more than 40-42 hours per week. While another tries to take a leadership role in promoting a more flexible and autonomous way of working among his senior staff, that he directly manages. He said:

"I hope I take a leadership role and actually set standards for work but also my philosophy at work, which I think it is now shared with my senior staff, is that I promote autonomous working and delegate as much as I possibly can in terms of responsibilities... generally speaking, I think – yes, my own working pattern does influence my staff. For example, my deputies never worked at home previously, but they do now at selected times of the month or whatever, which is extremely effective because it takes them out of a very, very busy office environment and allows them to develop skills they wouldn't otherwise have developed".

The rest of them (5) did not seem to have given much thought about the possible impact of their working patterns on their staff. The following is a good example of their attitudes:

"That's interesting. I don't know, I would hope the fact that they don't see that I am here at 7 in the morning until midnight, shows them that I don't expect them either but I also hope that they recognise that I do work hard and that I am actually very committed to it. But I think that's about the work that you produce and the ways in which you work with people rather than the hours you put in and actually as I said I do work long hours, I just choose not to spend them all in here".

This response, similar to those given by the other 4 senior managers, appears somehow contradictory. On one hand all of these 5 admitted working long hours and felt that they do not have much of a work-life balance themselves. On the other hand however, they stated that they do not want to promote 'a long hours working culture' and do not expect staff to work excessively. However, it was not clear how they articulated this message to staff, particularly when their working patterns seem to suggest the opposite.

Instead, all the middle managers seemed to be more aware than their senior colleagues of the potential impact that their working patterns could have on their staff, one commenting " I think the way in which I work and people's perceptions of that has an enormous impact on other people and you cannot underestimate it."

They also want to send a positive message about work-life balance by setting themselves as an example:

"I want staff to have a good work-life balance and I hope they can see that I have one. I do not do late hours, I hope it gives colleagues confidence to work in a similar way if they wish, I mean I have no problem if someone wants to work until 7 pm if that suits them but I have no expectations that they should be doing that."

This is not surprising as middle managers are likely to be more in close contact with their staff and deal with the day to day practicalities of managing people. They are likely to be the first person staff would go to if they need more flexibility in their working arrangements or intend to make use of any special leave. The case studies presented in this report show that it is important that line managers feel empowered by senior managers to introduce more innovative approaches to work. Otherwise they might find themselves 'squeezed' between their staff's requests for more flexible working and their own line manager's concerns about "opening the flood gate".

The sample is too small to look for any significant gender differences in these responses. However, overall it appears that staff in management roles, including the most senior ones, who have young families, are more likely, whether male or female, to be concerned about their own work-life balance and the importance of sending positive messages through their own behaviours and attitudes to their staff.

Types of flexible working currently used across the sample

During the course of the interviews line managers were asked to look at a card which listed a number of flexible working options, (see Appendix 3) and indicate which type of flexible working is currently used in their department. The most common arrangements amongst support staff are informal flexi-time (we found only one instance where the formal university flexi-time scheme is used); part-time; working from home occasionally; and compressed hours. It is interesting to note that in the work-life balance staff audit, mentioned earlier, support staff indicated a lot of interest in the possibility of working from home occasionally and doing compressed hours. These research findings seem to suggest that working from home and compressed hours have become more common practice among support staff since then. Only one example of shift work was found and that involved manual staff. Nobody reported using self-rostering. With regard to this arrangement it is worth noting the comment of one senior manager who said: 'self-rostering? – I am not sure whether we are brave enough to do that actually at the moment. We would need some support on that. I think that's where my middle managers would find the amount of trust involved quite difficult, not that they don't trust the staff generally speaking, but I think it has to be managed very carefully. I've had no personal experience of that... interesting; we would be willing to discuss it". This open and honest comment seems to confirm that trust is often key to the introduction of new flexible working arrangements.

The most common forms of flexible working mentioned by academic managers were informal flexi-time, home working¹ (including 'designated homeworking') and compressed hours particularly for staff living far away from the university. One senior manager however, felt that the latter can be 'tricky'. If done well, it could be a very efficient way of working, but, if not, it could be construed as a form of "part-time work for a full-time wage." It was also agreed by virtually all academics who took part in this study, that flexible working is not so much of an issue for academic staff as they have enough autonomy in their work to have some flexibility in the way they manage their time. Although this might be true for most academics, this research shows that the degree of flexibility academic staff have in their work may vary depending on the extent of their teaching commitments, the number of student contact hours and, the extent to which their work is driven by external professional requirements. This point was articulated by academic managers in the more vocationally oriented schools. As one senior manager put it there is an issue about "the differential across staffing groups" as for academic staff teaching on professional programmes "the opportunity for being flexible is much diminished compared to people teaching on modular courses".

¹ Designated Homeworking – Staff are officially designated as home-workers and are provided, by the University, with adequate facilities in order to work from home. Office accommodation is shared when working on-site.

Advantages of flexible working

All managers were presented with a list (Appendix 4) of possible advantages and disadvantages associated with flexible working and they were asked to comment as to whether they had experienced any of those when managing flexible working.

All the support line managers saw staff recruitment and retention as the main advantage associated with flexible working. Most of them were able to provide specific examples where this had been the case. One line manager was very clear that “since we have been very open about work life balance there is virtually no turn over”. Academic managers however did not see staff’s retention as a main issue. This is not surprising as the university figures show that turn over among academic staff is rather low, about 7% a year, unlike among support staff where it is much higher – between 15-17%.

The other advantages experienced by the great majority of managers were increased staff motivation, loyalty and effectiveness. It is interesting to consider the reasons given by the managers in support of these claims as they resonate with Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of human needs identified in his theory on motivation. This theory is based on the core argument that people’s motivation is driven by a hierarchy of needs. The most basic needs at the bottom of the hierarchy, broadly speaking, involve physical and emotional well-being, and have to be satisfied before ‘energy is released for the satisfaction of higher needs’ (Rowley, 1996: p.13) which will lead to self-actualization. Although the discourse on employees’ motivation has evolved since Maslow’s theory was articulated – for example through the work of Herzberg et al (1959), and other scholars who have further elaborated on motivational theories – Maslow’s hierarchy of needs seems to provide a good explanation about a link between work-life balance and increased staff motivation. For example, the following quotations show how consideration for individuals’ work-life balance is important to help them satisfy some of their basic needs such as securing accommodation as well as family and emotional needs:

“If we did not have a flexible and relaxed approach to work-life balance... we would not be as active as a team as we are...the fact is that if X needs to go off and arrange his mortgage he can, it’s part of that, because if he doesn’t he won’t be effective in his work, he will be worried about it”.

“Staff work more effectively if they do not have to worry about ‘the rest’ of their life.”

Similarly the increased autonomy that flexible working can bring to a job helps to satisfy higher needs, such as ‘self-esteem’ as evidenced by the following comments made by some other managers:

“I think the issue of flexibility makes people feel that they have more autonomy. More autonomy generally speaking, brings motivation.”

“I am very much of the view that if you give the majority of people more autonomy in terms of what they do in their working life they will respond well and the majority of them actually will work more effectively.”

Flexibility and autonomy were also mentioned, particularly by academic staff, together with interest for teaching and research, when asked what motivated them most in their job. Some support staff also felt that that the flexibility and autonomy they had in their job is a major motivating factor, as one member of staff commented: "I think it's definitely the flexibility and the autonomy because my job is quite low responsibility and I could feel a bit demoralized about it but I feel that I can own my job, yeah I feel it's my job".

We also tried to establish whether managers experienced any increased staff's productivity as a result of flexible working. In order to investigate this possible benefit, it was important to understand first what kind of performance indicators managers used for different jobs. Thus, during the course of the interviews we asked them how they measured staff effectiveness. We felt that the word effectiveness was a more appropriate term to use in relation to work done in the HE context, where highly intangible services are delivered, as opposed to productivity which may suggest the idea of more tangible and quantifiable types of output. The managers' answers show that performance indicators depend on the nature of the job and sometimes of the different tasks. In relation to academic jobs managers were able to point to clear performance indicators such as RAE research output and, with regard to teaching, students' feedback and exams results.

By comparison there was less clarity about performance indicators used by support managers in different contexts. Most commonly used forms of performance indicators appeared to be feedback from users and one to one meetings with individual staff, including the Personal Development Review. By and large support managers appear to rely on their intuition to evaluate staff. Only one senior manager spoke about a system in use in his department which records tasks and time needed for completion, and is used by middle managers to evaluate their staff effectiveness as well as to monitor staff workload. Another senior manager explained that one way of evaluating his staff effectiveness was through the low number of complaints received about their services as well as "shared standards" about what is expected. These answers overall show a patchy and unclear picture with regard to performance indicators in relation to support staff. Thus, it is not surprising that the great majority of support staff managers were unsure whether flexible working could lead to any improvement in the quality and in the quantity of staff's work. Many academic managers believed that working from home helped enhance their quality of work – as it minimizes the amount of interruptions. In any case the great majority of all the managers are confident that flexible working has not had any adverse effect on their staff's work and performance.

Hardly any disadvantage associated with flexible working was reported by support staff line managers. Only three of them agreed that having to manage flexible working can cause them some additional work particularly when new working arrangements have to be put in place. One of them commented: "in the first instance there is always additional work for the manager because it is making it slightly more complex but it is only a slight disadvantage". However, two of them felt that the additional work was outweighed by the advantages that flexible working can bring. By contrast the third one reported that flexible working not only caused additional work to him but also to other staff who had to cover when people were not at work. This manager also commented that in his experience flexible working can cause some resentment among staff as evidenced by "some troublesome body language".

The issues of additional costs associated with flexible working and that of the possibility of staff abusing the flexibility were explored in depth since they could be possible concerns. None of the managers reported an increase in staff costs as a result of flexible working. On the contrary a few line managers said that having staff working flexibly offered them the opportunity to save on staff costs or create additional posts with the money saved from staff working reduced hours. With regard to the issue of abuse among support staff, only one manager reported some experience of staff abusing the flexi-time scheme, where someone built up too many hours. It is interesting to note that this was the only case that we found in this study where the university's formal flexi-time scheme was used. In all the other cases where flexi-time was used informally, or self-managed by employees, none of the managers reported having had issues about staff abusing these arrangements. This suggests that trust and good working relations are more effective at preventing possible abuses of working time than formal schemes. Some line managers had experiences of staff abusing their working time but they were not related to flexible working. However, the possibility of staff abusing flexible working was acknowledged, by some as a potential concern particularly if they were responsible for large departments. It was hardly a concern for those managing small teams as they felt that any staff abuse, whether or not relating to flexible working, would be very easy to detect in a small team. One manager thought that home working makes it easier to detect possible abuses when it is outcome based. Another line manager offered an interesting view about the possibility that flexible working can help to avoid the possibility of staff abusing their working time, " There is a lot of flexibility, people have time to sort out their own private matters and that's how it must be, because if not they will abuse the time that they have."

The issue of abuse seemed to concern more academic managers than support staff managers and this was entirely linked to the greater degree of autonomy that academic staff enjoy in their work, rather than to any particular flexible working pattern. However, it is seen as a minor issue as the managers who mentioned it were also eager to point out that it only applied to a very small minority of staff and that overall most academic staff do more hours than they are contracted to do. One manager felt that it was almost a 'generational issue' as he said that " at the moment it tends to be perhaps more with the late career people that have been used perhaps to a more comfortable academic life than the younger people, many of whom, certainly in our department, are working well beyond the level that is expected".

With regard to possible disadvantages, half of the academic managers experienced difficulty communicating with staff working part-time and in particular with the organisation of meetings. These managers were of the view that academic staff who work part-time should be flexible and be prepared to attend meetings or be contactable outside their working days. This was an issue that emerged from another piece of research that the authors of this report conducted at Oxford Brookes, to investigate the causes of women's under-representation in senior positions in Higher Education. A few academic women working part-time resented the fact they were expected by some of their colleagues to be available outside their working days. Childcare was their reason for wanting to work part-time and they felt that their colleagues' attitudes put them under some pressure. Nonetheless some were not prepared to complain about this as they were almost 'hiding' their part-time status for fear of being perceived as less committed to their work. This clearly appears to be an area of actual tension.

Homeworking too was mentioned by some managers as making communication more difficult. One line manager however, felt that often these difficulties are caused by staff being reluctant to contact their colleagues when they are working from home, she said: “when they come to my office and complain, I say ‘have you tried to contact them at home?’ and they say no and I say why don’t you try and if you can’t let me know” as the University policy on homeworking requires that staff working from home should be contactable during working hours. Designated homeworking can raise issues about communication as one manager said “sometimes we have to be quite explicit, it does not mean to say that someone can be a virtual colleague rather than a colleague you meet.” Another manager pointed out the importance for designated homeworkers to be flexible and understand that there might be some weeks when they need to be on campus most of the time.

How can managers ensure fairness when implementing flexible working?

Our previous work showed that one of the main concerns for managers in the application of flexible working is to ensure that all staff are treated fairly. With regard to flexible working one ought to be clear that it will not always be possible for managers to deal with staff's requests equally, as the applicability of flexible working arrangements may depend on a number of operational requirements and resources, but what is important is that managers can demonstrate that they treated their staff in an equitable way. This largely depends on, and comes down to, managers' skills, their relationship with their staff and whether they are perceived to act fairly and reasonably.

In order to understand how managers would go about resolving potentially conflicting requests for flexible working, those who participated in this study, were given a short case study and asked to explain how they would respond to the situation described in the case. We designed two different scenarios, one for support staff and one for academic staff, which presented managers with the challenge of ensuring that staff would be treated equitably.

Below is the case that support managers were asked to comment upon:

Albert submits a request to you to work compressed hours (4 days a week) so that he can spend more time looking after his elderly parents. Susan also asks to work compressed hours (4 days each week) to do some voluntary work for a charitable organisation. Due to operational reasons you can accommodate only one of these requests.

How would you deal with this situation?

Possible responses (you may want to combine some of these behaviours):

- You treat them equally and refuse both applications.
- You ask them to sort it out between themselves and with their colleagues and decide who should work compressed hours.
- You spoke to both of them to explore whether a compromise can be reached e.g. both of them work 4.5 days or they work compressed hours on alternative weeks.
- You ask them what would they do in your place.
- You agree the request of the member of staff who you think need the flexibility most.
- You agree the request of the member of staff who you think ought to be rewarded most for his/her work.
- You consult with the rest of the team before making a decision.
- Other, please specify

All the managers indicated that they would be seeking to reach a compromise between these two requests and they were clear that in the end it would have to be their decision. However, their responses differed in the way they would go about seeking a compromise. The great majority of them (7) would consult the rest of the team before making a decision whilst two of them would consult with their fellow managers only. Three of them made it clear that their decisions would not be influenced by the reasons given by staff for wanting flexible working as they felt that it would not be up to them to make decisions on "people's personal life".

While two managers felt more inclined to accommodate the request from the staff with caring responsibilities as this might be more “compelling” or “urgent”. It is interesting to note the answer of one of the managers who said: “I think my natural response (would be) to question these operational reasons, because our operation is what we created and so I certainly would want to look at that operation and, it is possible, as we did, arrange some strategic adjustments so both can be accommodated over a period of time. I certainly would not want to give precedence to one over another because, I believe, the great reward of flexibility is the greater commitment to the work is the happiness in the working relationship and the work-life balance”.

We also asked staff to comment on the same case study and say how they thought their line manager would respond. All the staff’s answers broadly matched those of the managers. In a few cases the staff could predict very accurately how their line managers would respond.

Academic managers instead were asked to comment about the following case:

Due to changes in the structure of the academic year it is necessary to extend the working day. This will involve more staff teaching in the evening. You know that some staff members are anxious about this, as they have regular personal commitments in the evening, e.g. caring responsibilities, social activities.

Possible responses (you may want to combine some of these behaviors)

- You consult with staff and try to take into account their preferences as much as you can when deciding on the allocation of evening teaching but you know that some will feel unhappy and think that they have been unfairly treated.
- In order to avoid controversy and that some staff may feel unfairly treated you take full responsibility for deciding allocation of evening teaching without consultation with staff.
- You state clearly the requirements of the course and ask staff to agree among themselves a viable distribution of the evening teaching.
- Other, please specify.

This was a scenario that many academic managers had to deal with as a result of an increase of evening teaching. Their responses were exactly split between option number one and number three. However, three of them who chose the latter option made clear that they would intervene either in the event of a disagreement, or if they felt that some staff were more likely to obtain what they wanted as they had better negotiating skills. One senior manager said, “I would prefer option 3 as long as I was sure that there was nobody in the group who was in a position to put undue pressure on others. and if I were not sure of that than I would use number 1.”

Similarly to support staff, the responses of academic staff matched those of their immediate line managers, except in a couple of cases. It is worth noting that most of the staff indicated that when their line managers had to deal with similar problems in reality, they always consulted the staff and acted fairly in sorting out potential issues.

Views on leadership and management

All managers, with the exception of two of them, saw a clear distinction between the concept of 'leadership' and that of 'management'. Broadly speaking they associated leadership with 'having a vision' – where the Department/School or Directorate should be going and working towards it – as well as inspiring and motivating staff. Whilst management was associated with the 'operational side of things' some of the interviewees believed that a good manager should combine both roles.

They were also asked what qualities they thought counted most when leading people and they were asked to fill in a short version of the Bass and Avolio (1990) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. As explained in the section on methodology, this is designed to measure the degree to which transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles, may be used by the respondents. It reflects the transformational model of leadership developed by Bass and Avolio (1990). This is based on the notion that the distinguishing characteristics of leaders are their ability to inspire people "to perform beyond expectations" (Bass 1985: p.21).

Four main features are associated with these characteristics:

Idealised influence	Ability to hold followers' trust, maintain their faith and respect, show dedication to them, appeal to their hopes and dreams and act as their role model
Inspirational motivation	Ability to provide a vision, use appropriate symbols and images to help others focus on their work and try to make others feel their work is significant
Intellectual stimulation	Ability to encourage others to be creative at looking at old problems in new ways, create an environment that is tolerant of seemingly extreme positions and nurture people to question their own values and belief and those of the organization
Individualised consideration	Showing interest in others' well being, assign projects individually and pay attention to those who seem less involved in the group

When we asked the participants to fill in the MLQ, several of them were highly critical of this instrument. Some did not respond to all the questions as they felt that some of them were based on 'assumptions', they were 'loaded', they were probably 'culturally' and 'gender' biased. One participant said that the tendency to look for the "right answer" was very "pervasive" and, another one did not wish to fill it in. Consequently the data obtained through this instrument was patchy and unreliable and could not be used in any meaningful way.

Many participants had serious reservations about the applicability of the Bass and Avolio model of leadership to a Higher Education context. It was felt that this model is mainly based on the notion of a single leader as highlighted by this manager's comment, "suggesting the notion of the single leader who is out in front, others have complete faith in me, it's ridiculous because actually what you should be doing in a job like mine is working with people. It is not about you, it is about getting the best, it's about enabling people to work to the best of their potentials, that's what we are supposed to be doing". Such views seem to echo the criticism recently raised by scholars like Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2005), of the American

'heroic' models of transformational leadership. The construction of this model, as Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban Metcalfe point out, is very much based on top managers in commercial organizations 'who are glorified for apparently single-handedly 'saving' or 'turning around' global companies' (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2005: 54). They also point to another line of criticism of the 'heroic' model by quoting the work of Gronn (2002) and Mintzberg (1999), 'who strongly challenge the concept of leadership residing in one individual and contributing uniquely to organizational success' (ibid: 54). It can be added to this criticism that the 'heroic' models of transformational leadership are likely to be gender and culturally biases as by and large they are based on studies of white male American leaders. This represents a serious clash with the explicit commitment to equality of opportunities and diversity. Furthermore such individualist's notions of leadership are at odds with the collegiate model of governance which is still very much part of the organizational culture in Higher Education.

Overall the participants' views of leadership qualities needed in a Higher Education context appear to match better the 'nearby' model of transformational leadership. This was developed on the basis of extensive research conducted in the UK with public and private sector organizations. Based on this work six factors have been identified that describes leadership qualities, which are:

Valuing individuals	Genuine concern for others' well being and development
Networking and achieving	Inspirational communicator, networker and achiever
Enabling	Empowers, delegates, develops potentials
Acting with integrity	Integrity, consistency, honest and open
Being accessible	Accessible, approachable, in-touch
Being decisive	Decisive, risk taking

When asked what qualities counted most when leading people, the majority of the managers' answers broadly related to the factors mentioned above. 'Valuing individuals' and 'enabling' appeared to be the factors that reflect best what managers think are some of the most important qualities to lead people, as demonstrated by some of their comments:

"I think interpersonal skills are hugely important...the job is essentially about fundamentally human people skills, about understanding other people context"

"To care about the individuals"

"Above all, making individual persons feel valued"

"Give people belief in themselves"

"I think you have to be an empathetic person to be an effective leader... you need to be able to understand where your staff are coming from, why they are expressing the views they are, why they are working they way they are".

The importance of trust was also mentioned by most of them.

Some of them felt that taking an interest in their staff's work-life balance and considering 'the whole person' not just the worker, was a way of establishing a good relationship with their staff and to show that they care about them. For example one manager said: "I make sure that I know what's going on in their life – not in a nosey way – just so that I can support them... I usually find that if you are very supportive of staff and if you try to help them out then they repay you."

Most of the respondents also mentioned qualities which are encompassed in the 'acting with integrity' factor, as they talked about the need for 'fairness', 'consistency', 'honesty' and 'openness' in their relationship with their staff.

A few managers also thought that qualities, such as having an 'open door policy', an 'open mind' and 'being approachable' which, can be associated with the 'being accessible' factor, were very important to leadership. One manager in support services who had a very diverse workforce in terms of age, cultural and religious background, felt that being approachable is a very important quality to lead such a diverse group of staff.

The interviews conducted with staff, confirmed that managers' approachability was seen as a very important feature in order to discuss work-life balance issues openly and feel entitled to ask for flexible working.

Most managers mentioned the importance of consulting their staff when making decisions to try to secure as much consensus as possible, although they were also clear that in the end they had to be prepared to make decisions even if people disagreed with them and this relates to the 'being decisive' factor.

What can be learnt from the case studies?

In this section we focus on a couple of case studies – one based on triads involving support staff and one based on triads involving academic staff. These two case studies have been selected because they present an interesting contrast between the ‘good practice example’ and the ‘neutral example’. Furthermore they are both representative of the most significant findings which emerged from the triads as a whole. A selection of the case studies are presented in Appendix 5.

Case study 1 – Support staff

This case study includes two triads involving administrative departments that have a lot of interaction with students and other staff across the university.

Good practice example

Managers’ attitude towards work-life balance and flexible working

Senior Manager

He feels empowered by his own line manager to introduce innovative approaches to work. He commented: “I think because our Dean has a very generous attitude towards staff...he is always happy for me to introduce whatever will make life easier or work easier”. “I think in the same way my authority to promote work-life balance stems from my line manager, then the people who I have working for me, who are also line managers, would obtain their authority to promote work-life balance from myself”. He explained, most staff in the School benefit from some form of flexibility. In his experience this does not cause any problem to the services that they have to deliver, but to the contrary it can enhance them. For example, they have a secretary who used to work part-time and now job-shares her role with another member of staff. They agreed to this arrangement as they do not want to lose a good member of staff but at first they were a bit anxious as to whether it would work. He commented: “Actually it turned into a positive thing because it now means that if one of them is ill then the other one is often quite happy to come in and give cover”.

Middle Manager

She is very people-oriented and thinks it is important to treat staff as a “whole person” and pro-actively promote flexible working to ensure staff retention. When new staff are employed they are made aware that the department is open to consider flexible working.

Staff’s experience of work-life balance and flexible working

She was able to keep her job and pursue her interests. She took three months career break – “When I told my boss that what I wanted to do was to go away and do a bit of travelling, she came up with the idea that I could take unpaid leave” and commented “that would be a way around it rather than having to leave the job”.

When she came back from her travelling she went part-time to undertake a PhD and fulfil her “broader aims in life”. She now job-shares her secretarial role, she works split shifts everyday to fit in with her study commitments: “As long as the job is done she (the line manager) does not mind how we do it.” She commented about her experience: “The flexibility and the respect that we are given makes us feel that we are able to own the job. This is a personalised kind of job rather than something that anyone can do. I think they realise that it is important to have trust.”

She indicated that the staff in her team are always consulted about decisions that affect workload planning and or working patterns and they can influence decisions.

Neutral example

Managers’ attitude towards work-life balance and flexible working

Senior Manager

His attitude is rather task-oriented, thinks that there is a tension between “having to be a champion for flexible working” and the demands of providing a service. He thinks that the “childcare imperative” is more important than other claims for flexible working” and he “always bends backward to accommodate people returning from maternity”. He is concerned that other claims may open the “flood gate”. However, he is prepared to consider them and explained that a request for flexible working from a member of staff who does not have caring responsibilities has prompted all the managers in the department to discuss the situation collectively. It has been agreed that before making any decision on this case, all staff in the department should be given the opportunity to express their wishes about working patterns to ensure that decisions about flexible working are made from a “point of equity”.

Middle Manager

She believes that work-life balance should be for all not just for staff with family commitments and she tries to accommodate staff’s requests. She asked to work flexibly herself but she was “given a flat refusal” by her own line manager. She thinks that flexible working is a big issue in her department that ought to be tackled collectively by the managers in the department and she would like: “to see us thrash it out and to get to grips with it...we should not be scared to go there”.

Staff’s experience of work-life balance and flexible working

She does flexi-time and thinks that her immediate line manager is open to discuss alternative patterns of work and she is “very hands off” and trusts her staff. She thinks that flexi-time is a “touchy subject” in her department. Other managers are concerned about possible abuses but they use it themselves which “seems unfair, they say their job requires it more”. She feels that the department “it is now so rules-oriented you can’t do anything” and staff are hardly consulted but “just told” what to do. She thinks that there is a lot of support in the department for work life balance around maternity but the University should do more for people who do not have caring responsibilities. She was denied time off work to take a job related course and she thought that this was “a bit poor”.

Key findings

The managers' behaviour in the 'good practice example' appear to be very people-oriented and both the senior and the middle manager in the 'good practice example' show 'genuine concern' for individual staff by having consideration for 'the whole person', valuing their contribution and wanting to retain them. They 'enable' their staff by trusting them to make decisions about the organisation of their work and about achieving their objectives. They are 'accessible' and make staff feel comfortable to discuss their plans openly with them. They are prepared to encourage 'change' by using university policies to introduce new approaches to work that present clear business advantages such as staff retention. They are also 'decisive' and prepared to take risks, as demonstrated by their positive attitude towards the adoption of new working arrangements, such as job-sharing. Their behaviour seem to have a lot in common with the characteristics associated with 'leading and developing others' outlined in the Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe model of 'nearby' transformational leadership. Their attitudes also show a balance between the need to be people-oriented and job-oriented.

By contrast the attitude of the senior manager in the 'neutral example' appears to be more focused on being job-oriented compared to that of his colleagues in the other triad, as he feels that there is a tension between flexible working and the service demands. The accounts from the other interviewees seem to suggest that there is some reluctance in the department to question traditional work approaches. Deviations from standard working hours are seen as problematic from an operational point of view and there is a tendency to preserve the 'status quo' through strict adherence to rules and procedures. Nonetheless there is a perception that rules and procedures are not always being applied 'fairly' with regard to flexi-time. Some managers seem to apply this arrangement to their work, but are not prepared to let their staff use it, "seems unfair, they say their job requires it more".

However, the existence of a university policy framework on flexible working is helping to develop a culture that is strongly supportive of work-life balance and this is putting some 'positive pressure' on managers to take a more open view of flexible working. This is evidenced by the fact that the senior manager, together with the middle managers in his departments, have decided to engage with the idea of flexible working for all and not just for those who have caring responsibilities, by offering staff the opportunity to express their preferences in relation to working patterns.

Case study 2 – Academic staff

This case study includes a triad and a pair and it is based on two academic Schools.

Good practice example

Senior Manager

He is open to requests for flexible working and describes his attitude as follows: “If someone comes and asks for something then I think my starting point is let’s see whether we can achieve what they want without either students or the department suffering in any significant way and more often than not colleagues are willing to provide support, shift things around and in most places there is a sort of collegiate atmosphere”. Although teaching timetable slotting is fixed by the university, he explained that, individual staff can ask for changes through their departmental representative who will raise it with the Head of the Modular Programme.

In his role he manages both academic and support staff and he thinks that overall support staff have less flexibility as “academic staff to some extent manage their own time because they are not required to be here regular hours, providing they deliver their teaching commitments, provided that they are here for their working hours, participate in the committees ...then academic staff have much more flexibility”. In his view the main issue for academic staff is that they are now under greater pressure than ten years ago as their research work is now more focused towards RAE targets, the staff students ratio has deteriorated but the volume of assessment has increased. The School is highly research oriented and all new staff appointed are research active. They try to ensure that they are fully supported by allocating 30% of their timetable to research and by giving them a reduced teaching workload. This is complemented by an early career mentoring scheme, developed by the School and accessed by a special fund to buy additional time for research or pay to go to conferences.

He believes that many academics work long hours as they are driven by their research interests to do so, “They are motivated, they enjoy, they feel the internal pressure, self motivation to do well in their research. They want to be a professor, they want to have an international worldwide reputation, they want to be the best. It is a very competitive world in terms of research. So regardless of whatever I say to them... those sort of people are very difficult to stop doing what they want to do”.

Staff experience of work-life balance and flexible working

She is a Principal Lecturer, works full time and is highly research active. She does not see a big divide between her work and her personal life because her work is what she is interested in and what she wants to do. She feels that she has “a huge amount of autonomy” in her work and she sets the outcomes that she needs to achieve. She has a young family and since she has been at Oxford Brookes she has taken maternity leave three times. In her experience the School has been very supportive of her family commitments. For example in the past she was allowed a phased return to her full-time job from maternity leave. She was also able to have some half days off when her children started school. Working patterns and

allocation of teaching are discussed at departmental level. For example, staff decided collectively that no one would teach more than one evening a week and for more than one semester.

Neutral example

Senior Manager

He thinks that in general terms flexibility is not an issue for academic staff as a “ a lot of academics have always carved out a work-life balance because of the flexibility that’s inherent in the job so I think that in many cases work-life balance has been achieved without any particular focus as an issue”. However, he believes that one of the problems for academic staff is “the differential across staffing groups” as some staff are teaching on professional programmes “where the opportunity for being flexible is much diminished compared to people teaching on modular programmes”. Because of the nature of professional courses these staff need to have more contacts with students and he thinks that a “focus on work-life balance” would be particularly important for these staff.

He feels that overall pressure on academic staff has increased as a result of government policies and a reduction in the resources allocated to HE. The RAE is also putting additional pressure on staff as “the university wishes to play in the big league without the funding of the big league...Whereas here we want people to have effectively a much fuller teaching load than they would get at a Russell group university but also to have the same research output”.

Middle Manager

He thinks that overall academic staff flexibility is restricted by teaching timetables and other job requirements. Staff can informally express their preferences in relation to the workload but people’s choices are heavily constrained by teaching requirements. Tasks such as administration and research are, by definition, more flexible. He feels that the School partially supports work-life balance. He sees himself as having a role to promote work-life balance amongst his academic colleagues for example, by making sure that they use their full annual leave entitlement. However, he thinks that there is a “grey area between work and life for academic staff, because a lot of the work that they do is also their personal interest. He expressed some concern about a culture of “increased control” that is “sneaking” into HE. Although he agrees that people should be accountable for the work they do, he believes that as their work is driven by outcomes they should be judged by the latter.

Staff experience of work-life balance and flexible working

He is a Senior Lecturer and feels that he has a “good degree of autonomy” in the way he organizes his work except for his workload that it is decided by his line manager. He can openly discuss working patterns with his line manager but “nothing will change”. Although he thinks that the School supports academic staff autonomy and working from home, he is unhappy with the extent of his current workload which he thinks is excessive. He thinks that there is inconsistency in the way workload planning is implemented across the university. He does not feel that there is a balance between his work and life. He explained that “Work-life balance to me means that I can go to work, do my work, go home and be able to forget about my work until the next day...I have two separate lives, the autonomy allows me to have two separate lives, the workload doesn’t”. Given his current workload it is very difficult for him to

do research, “If I wanted to do research basically I have got to do it in my own time... I know of many colleagues that are working at week-ends to do their research”.

He indicated that although staff may be consulted about decisions that affect workload planning or working patterns, it is unlikely that they can influence decisions.

Key findings

This case study shows that what seems to impact more on academic staff's work-life balance is the nature of their role, rather than the attitude of their managers. Our previous research on work-life balance issues for academic staff at Oxford Brookes showed that there seem to be 'two different discourses about academic roles which could be conceptualised as Plato's Academy associated more with the pre-1992 elite universities and the Teaching Factory associated more with the post -1992 universities' (Doherty and Manfredi, forthcoming 2006). As discussed in that research "One of the fundamental differences between the two discourses is the relationship that academics have to their working time" as in the Plato's Academy academics have more control over their working time, they also do not place clear boundaries between 'work' and 'home' as their research is often one of their main interests in life. The issue for them is not so much about work-life balance but rather about 'balance within work' in order to have enough time to pursue their research. By contrast in the Teaching Factory academics are seeking clearer working terms to protect their 'home' time.

The academic school in the 'good practice example' is highly research oriented, employs many research active staff who do not place clear boundaries between their 'work' and their 'private life' because their work is one of their main interests in life. One of the main issues for them appears to be having enough time for research.

The positive experience of the member of staff in this example, shows that a highly research active career is not incompatible with having a young family. This example shows that 'a huge amount of autonomy' provided by a highly research active academic role, enables staff to exercise enough control over their working time and carve out the flexibility that they need to combine work with their family responsibilities. 'Collegiality' also seems to be important to accommodate staff's needs and to exercise some degree of control over their working patterns by making collective decisions, as in the example given about the evening teaching.

By contrast in the 'neutral example' where academic staff's working commitments are driven mainly by the requirements of teaching professional programmes "... the opportunity for being flexible is much diminished compared to people teaching on modular programmes". Staff's choices are heavily constrained by teaching requirements and there is a sense that not much can be done about this. Although the School supports 'autonomy' and 'working from home', the member of staff in this example is unhappy about his work-life balance.

The main factor in these two examples which appears to impact differently on the work-life balance experience of academic staff, is the 'locus of control' over the work done in both schools. In the 'good practice example' academic staff have a high degree of 'internal control' (Lashley, 1999) over their work, both on an individual and on a collective basis and to a certain extent, they can make decisions as a group about their teaching patterns. While in

the 'neutral example' the work of academic staff is much more 'externally controlled' by the requirements of teaching professional programmes and this reduces staff's flexibility.

What leadership characteristics support work-life balance and flexible working?

Examples of managers' behaviour

Although the picture about academic staff, as discussed above, appears to be more complex, the overall evidence collected through the triads shows that there is a correlation between managers' positive attitudes towards work-life balance and flexible working and most of the leadership qualities identified by Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe in their model of 'nearby' transformational leadership.

To demonstrate this association we have clustered examples of managers' behaviour under the factors highlighted earlier in this section, in the following tables:

<p>Showing genuine concern:</p> <p>Genuine interest in staff; values their contributions; develop their strengths; Has positive expectations of what their staff can achieve</p>	<p><u>Treat staff as a "whole person"</u> <u>Show interest and concern about staff's personal life</u> "I make sure that I know what's going on in their life not in a nosy way just as I can support them" <u>Responds positively to staff's requests for flexible working</u> "by listening and trying to organise it with them"</p> <p><u>Monitor staff work-load and act if he/she realises that staff are overworked/stressed</u> "we discovered staff who had not taken holidays for 6 months. This is not healthy"; "It became apparent that an individual was suffering with stress. I worked very hard with this person to change this pattern of work"</p>
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<p>Enabling:</p> <p>Trust staff to take decisions/initiatives on important matters; delegate effectively; develop staff potentials</p>	<p><u>Enabling and trust staff to make decisions about flexible working</u> "In a sense they were able to work it out for themselves, although I could help her to think through some of the options she had not thought of"</p> <p><u>Develop staff potential:</u> "we had a number of administrators who had undertaken some very routine tasks who wanted a challenge. We have allowed these staff to do that, taken them out of 'the box' and participate in a particular project and we see that as all part of work-life balance"</p>
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<p>Being accessible:</p> <p>Approachable and not status-conscious; prefer face to face communication; accessible and keeps in touch</p>	<p><u>'Open door' approach</u></p> <p><u>Encourage open discussion of work-life balance issues on one to one basis or at team meetings</u></p> <p><u>Communicates face to face</u></p> <p><u>Organises away days</u> where all departments get together to discuss their work, changes, issues including work-life balance</p>
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<p>Encouraging change:</p> <p>Encourages questioning traditional approaches to the job; encourages new approaches/solutions to problems; encourages strategic thinking</p>	<p><u>Introduces new approaches to working patterns:</u> Designated home-working scheme, 'compressed' part-time work for academic staff</p> <p><u>Prepared to question operational requirements:</u> "I think my natural response is to question these operational reasons, because our operation is what we created, so I would certainly want to look at that operation"</p>
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<p>Acting with integrity:</p> <p>Open to criticism and disagreement; consults and involves others in decision making; regard values as integral to the organisation</p>	<p>"I would never as a line manager see it my job just to tell somebody this change is going to take place without discussing it with them. Clearly you can't always have a situation where you discuss it and always come to an agreement, but you clearly need to talk it through with them and recognise that in doing their job probably have the best view of that job and how to get it done"</p> <p>"We discuss everything as a group"</p>
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<p>Being decisive, risk taking:</p> <p>Decisive when required; prepared to take difficult decisions, and risk when appropriate</p>	<p><u>Overcoming objections:</u> "I was in favour of that person working compressed hours ... but I felt resistance ... the objections made to me were not strong enough to stop that person working compressed hours"</p> <p><u>Prepared to take risks associated with the introduction of new ways to work:</u> A new scheme for designated home-working was introduced... "there was a lot of anxiety from managers who felt that they might lose control, but in fact it works quite well"</p>
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All these leadership factors appear to be equally important and often inter-dependent to promote a work-life balance ethos and an effective use of flexible working. For example, 'being accessible' and keeping in touch with staff is instrumental to enable managers to 'show genuine concern' for their staff. Similarly 'encouraging change' depends on a manager's ability to be 'decisive' and prepared to take 'risks'.

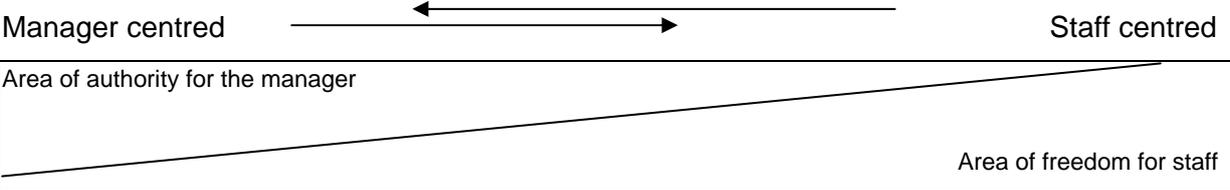
Management Styles

As mentioned earlier in the methodology section, previous research on work-life balance conducted at Oxford Brookes University (Manfredi and Holliday, 2004) found that trust and autonomy are key to flexible working practices that support work-life balance. In order to investigate the extent to which managers are prepared to give trust and autonomy to their staff, we found it useful to use the Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) Continuum.

We asked managers the extent to which staff would be consulted and likely to influence decisions with regard to working patterns. As the table below shows the great majority of them seem to favour a consultative style. While in a minority of cases the preferred management style appeared to be bordering on a democratic approach as some managers indicated that staff were more likely to influence decisions.

Manager's perception of their decision making style

Model of delegation and team development



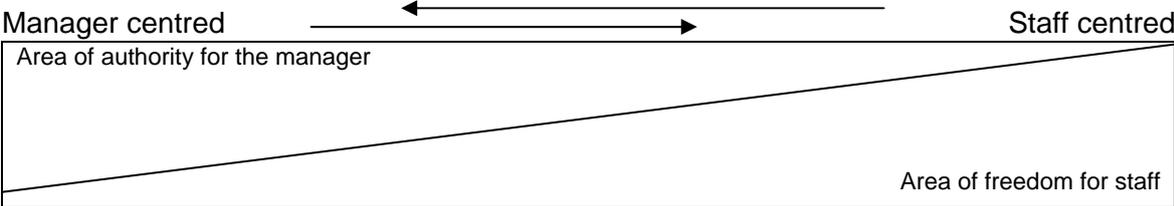
<i>Telling</i>	<i>Telling & Selling</i>		<i>Consultative</i>		<i>Democratic</i>
Staff not consulted	Staff not consulted; decisions clearly explained	Staff consulted but unlikely to influence decisions	Staff consulted – may influence decisions	Staff consulted – can influence decisions	Staff are involved in making decisions
			76%	24%	

Adapted from Tannenbaum & Schmidt Continuum (1973)

We also asked staff whether they are consulted with regard to decisions about working patterns and the extent to which they feel that they can influence these decisions. The table below shows their answers.

Staff’s definitions of their manager’s management style

Model of delegation and team development



<i>Telling</i>	<i>Telling & Selling</i>		<i>Consultative</i>		<i>Democratic</i>
Staff not consulted	Staff not consulted; decisions clearly explained	Staff consulted but unlikely to influence decisions	Staff consulted – may influence decisions	Staff consulted – can influence decisions	Staff are involved in making decisions
17%			25%	58%	

Adapted from Tennenbaum & Schmidt Continuum (1973)

The great majority of the staff felt that they are consulted and that they can influence decisions. This makes it an interesting contrast if we compare these answers with those given by the managers. It is a positive finding, as overall it indicates that managers are perceived by their staff as having a highly consultative and almost democratic management style.

Conclusions

Overall the findings from this action research project show an encouraging tendency towards good practice as we found many examples of flexible working and positive attitudes towards work-life balance. There seems to be a correlation between managers whose style appears to be very people-oriented and supportive of work-life balanced and flexible working and some of the leadership qualities identified by Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe in their model of ‘nearby’ transformational leadership. A consultative management style is also important to implement and manage flexible working effectively in a way that benefits both the needs of individuals and those of the organization.

By contrast, in the ‘neutral sample’ some examples were found where there were issues around the use of flexible working. In particular, for some managers trust was one of the main issues as they were concerned about the possibility of staff abusing flexible working or prioritizing their personal needs over teaching commitments. In these very few examples the interviews conducted through the triads seemed to indicate that there were wider issues around communication and management styles, not directly related to work-life balance and

flexible working but that, nonetheless impacted on them. A study undertaken by Henley Management College (Birchall, et al., 2005) on *Managing Tomorrow's Workers*, found that management processes to deal with flexible working are not very different from those that would be adopted in a situation where flexible working is not used.

However, the research concluded that to deal with flexible working or employees working remotely, managers “need a higher level of competence in key areas such as communication” (ibid: p.85). It can be implied, by these findings and from evidence that emerged from our work, that the challenge of implementing flexible working is more likely to expose poor management practices.

Another significant finding that has emerged from this project is with regards to work-life balance and flexible working leadership characteristics and management styles; they appear to be more relevant to the implementation of flexible working among support staff, where there is a more hierarchical line management structure and where, overall, staff tend to have less autonomy in the way they organize their work and working time.

In the case of academic staff, what seems to impact more on their work-life balance is the degree to which the ‘the locus of control’ over their workload is ‘internal’ or driven by ‘external’ factors such as, for example, the requirements of professional courses.

Nonetheless the triads also show that leadership characteristics such as, for example, ‘encouraging change’ and ‘being decisive’ and ‘risk taking’ are important to academic managers with regard to the introduction of innovative approaches to working practices. This is demonstrated by the examples of some academic managers who participated in this project and who were prepared to try and support different working arrangements, such as designated homeworking or ‘compressed part-time’ for academic staff, in spite of resistance and reservations from other colleagues about the introduction of new working arrangements.

This research also offered the opportunity to gain a better insight into work-life balance issues for managers. This group has a key role to play in promoting and implementing the university work-life balance agenda and it is important to understand their issues around their own work-life balance and how they can be supported – if they are expected to set an example. It is also important to make more explicit some of the coping strategies adopted by some managers to deal with heavy workloads and show that senior management jobs are not incompatible with the demands arising from family life or other interests.

A significant number of managers, including senior ones, who took part in this study have young families and talked openly about carving some flexibility in their working schedule to deal with childcare responsibilities. Interestingly enough among our sample of managers we did not find any significant gender difference in terms of commitment towards childcare responsibilities. Men with young families in full time management jobs, similarly to women, spoke openly about making adjustments to their working hours or using other informal flexible arrangements to deal with their childcare responsibilities. This is a positive finding

which indicates that a number of men working within the university feel that they can be open about their family commitments rather than having to face what Levine defined as the 'invisible dilemma'. This means that "where men are concerned, families make the adjustments, not the workplace" as evidenced by Levine's (1996:83) research on working fathers.

From a staff development perspective this work has enabled our institution to gain a better understanding of managers' beliefs and behaviours that drive 'good practice' with regard to work-life balance arrangements, by using the conceptual frameworks on leadership and management styles discussed throughout this report. It has also enabled the participants in the research to reflect on their management practices and their contribution towards the implementation of the work-life balance agenda within the university.

So far most staff development initiatives on work-life balance and flexible working aimed at managers have focused on getting managers to buy into the 'business case', training them to deal with the practical aspects of implementing flexible working or making 'strategic' use of case studies featuring examples of successful flexible working arrangements to demonstrate the validity of the 'business case'. Although this approach is useful to demonstrate the advantages of flexible working to managers, nonetheless it does not address the question of how to develop leadership and management styles which are supportive of a more flexible working environment. The experience of Oxford Brookes University to develop work-life balance best practice shows that in order to shape managers' attitudes into behaviors which are supportive of a more flexible and innovative working environment a combination of interventions are needed. These include the creation of a policy framework that conveys the university's commitment to work-life balance by supporting a range of flexible working practices and providing guidance to managers about making decisions on flexible working; effective communication through a range of media to raise staff awareness of work-life balance practices; the importance of giving visibility to examples of good practice across the institution, to influence managers' attitudes and lead by example. These interventions ought to be complemented by staff development aimed at:

- Being explicit about the leadership and management styles that a university expects to be adopted to support its value and achieve its goals.
- Getting managers to understand the leadership characteristics and management styles that support work-life balance and flexible working and how these link to the broader concept of leadership and management that a university needs to adopt to achieve its goals.
- Mainstreaming work-life balance and flexible working into leadership and management training.

In order to work with middle and senior managers at a deeper level and understand what drives work-life balance good practice, we have, as part of this project, developed a range of instruments. All of these and a series of case studies, based on the triad interviews, are attached as Appendixes to this report for the use of other Higher Education institutions which may wish to adopt our approach or use some of the materials that we have developed to embed work-life balance and flexible working in their employment practices.

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Appendixes

1 – Schedule of interview with employees

2 – Schedule of interview with line managers

3 – Interview with line managers – Card 1 and Card 2

4 – List of possible advantages and disadvantages

5 – Case studies

Appendix 1

Leadership Styles for Work-Life Balance

Schedule of interview with employees

Introduction

- To self and project – thank participant
- Explain purpose and structure of interview
- Reassure about confidentiality
- Obtain consent for recording interview
- Explain withdrawal procedure
- Ask to sign consent form

Work context

Can you describe the main elements of your current job?

How much interaction do you have with students, external contacts (e.g. other institutions, organisations, suppliers etc.) and other parts of the university.

Can you think of the specific requirements of your job and state how these affect your working patterns, for example you need to be available on campus at specific times of the day, work in the evening, at week ends etc.

Are there peak times in your work? How do they affect your working patterns?

Are there any external commitments that affect your working patterns? (E.g. membership of external committees, professional bodies or other work related activities)

Have there been any recent changes in your work context which have affected your working patterns?

What degree of autonomy do you feel you have in the way you organise your work and achieve your outcomes?

To what extent do you feel that the way your job is done is directed by your line manager/head of department/dean/director and/or specific requirements of the job?

To what extent do you feel that you can openly discuss changes to your working patterns with your line manager/head of department/dean/director?

To what extent do you feel that you can openly discuss changes to your working patterns with your colleagues?

Overall how would you define the decision making process which affects workload planning/working patterns in your department/school/directorate? Please choose one of the following:

1. Staff are always consulted and can influence the decision making process.
2. Staff are sometimes consulted and may influence the decision making process.
3. Staff are consulted but it is unlikely that they will influence the decision making process.
4. Staff are not consulted about decisions relating to workload planning/working patterns but the reasons for taking such decisions are clearly explained to them.
5. Staff are not consulted about decisions relating to workload planning/working patterns.
6. Any other scenario?

About the job

What motivates you most in your job? (Prompt if necessary: pay reward, feeling trusted, challenges, autonomy in the way you can do your job etc.)

What do you value most about your current job?

What do you value least about it?

How do you think your work effectiveness can be measured?

How is your work performance monitored by your line manager/head of department/dean/director?

Have you ever had any issue concerning the monitoring of your work performance? (Ask to expand)

If you have done a good job what response do you get from your line/manager/head of department/dean/director?

If there is a perceived problem with your work how is it tackled? (e.g. telling you what to do to rectify it, encouraging you to find a solution, asking you to sort it out etc.)

Own experience of work-life balance

What does work life balance mean to you?

To what extent do you think that your working patterns help you to achieve a work-life balance?

How well do you think the university commitment to wlb is communicated to staff?

To what extent do you think that the working culture in your department/school/directorate, supports wlb?

Have you ever requested flexible working or special leave (e.g. compassionate leave, leave for public duties, career break)? What were the reasons for your request and how did you go about it?

How did your line manager/head of department/dean/director respond to it?

Have you ever had a request for flexible working or for special leave (e.g. compassionate leave, leave for public duties, career break) rejected? If so what reasons were you given?

If you work flexibly, do you think that this enables you to work more effectively?

If you have not used university policies to work flexibly, do you feel that you have enough autonomy in job in order to get the flexibility that you need to combine work and personal life?

To what extent do you feel that you can openly discuss wlb issues with your line manager and with your colleagues? (E.g. ask to change the time of a meeting; ask a colleague to cover for you to enable you to combine better work and personal commitments)

If you work flexibly, to what extent do you think your working patterns affect your colleagues?

To what extent do you think that your colleagues and your line manager/head of department/dean/director working patterns and/or attitude to work affect you?

(Ask them about the case studies, card 3)

Anything else that you would like to add about wlb at Brookes, working patterns, line managers/heads of department/deans/directors' attitudes towards work in your department/school/directorate?

Leadership Styles for Work-Life Balance

Schedule of Interview with Line Managers

Introduction

- To self and project – thank participant
- Explain purpose and structure of interview
- Reassure about confidentiality
- Obtain consent for recording interview
- Explain withdrawal procedure
- Ask to sign consent form

Work Context

Can you explain the line management structure in your school/directorate? **(deans and directors or deputies only)** Who exercises the decision making power in the school/directorate in relation to working patterns?

Can you summarise the main elements of the work done in your department/team **(for middle management support staff only)**.

Can you explain how specific service requirements in your department/school/directorate affect staff working patterns? (E.g. need to work evenings, week-ends, being on campus on certain core hours, working from a flexible location etc.)

Are there any peak times in your department/school/directorate? How do they affect working patterns (e.g. need for overtime?)

Have there been any recent changes in the working context of your department/school/directorate that have affected working patterns? What kind of adjustments have they been made?

To what extent do you feel you are in a position to introduce new approaches, innovation to working practices in your team/department/school/directorate? Any example?

To what extent have you encouraged staff to express their preferences in relation to their working patterns?

Is there a mechanism in department/school for taking into account staff preferences when allocating teaching responsibilities? **(for academic staff only)**

In what way and to what extent do you encourage staff to take part in the decision making process of the department/school/directorate in relation to employment matters?

What kind of indicators do you use to measure your staff effectiveness? (Your answer may be different with regard to academic and support staff)

Own experience of wlb

What does work life balance mean to you?

To what extent do you feel that your current working patterns help you to achieve a work life balance?

To what extent do you think that the university commitment to wlb is communicated effectively to staff?

To what extent do you think that the working culture in your department/school/directorate support wlb? **(for middle management only)**

Do you feel that you have enough autonomy in your job to get the flexibility that you need to combine work and personal life?

Have you used or are you likely to use university policies in order to get the flexibility that you need to combine work and personal life?

If you work flexibly, do you think that the quality of your work is in any way enhanced by the flexibility?

To what extent do you feel that you can openly discuss wlb issues with your line manager and with your colleagues? (E.g. ask to change the time of a meeting, ask a colleague to cover for you etc.) **(for middle management only)**

Have ever requested flexible working or special leave (e.g. compassionate leave, career break, leave for public duties etc.) What were the reasons for your request and how did you go about it?

How did your line manager respond to it?

To what extent do you think that your working patterns and your attitude to work affect your colleagues/staff?

To what extent do you think that your colleagues/staff working patterns and attitudes to work affect you?

Views on current University wlb practices

To what extent do you think that promoting wlb is important to the work done in your team/department/school/directorate? (Prompt; e.g. help with retention, enable people to work more effectively etc.)

Do you see yourself as having a role in promoting wlb within department/school/directorate? What kind of example do you think you set to your staff?

How do you respond to staff requests for flexible working? Can you think of any specific example where you agreed to a request and one when you might have rejected it? (Find out

how the process was managed, formally, informally, whether other members of staff were requested to express an opinion, was HR consulted etc.)

Have you encouraged any member of your staff to consider working flexibly or to take special leave e.g. career break, compassionate leave etc.? Can you explain the circumstances?

Do you encourage your staff to talk openly about wlb issues within the department/school/directorate either at meetings or individually, for example in the context of the Personal Development Review?

(For the interviewer: Ask them to look at card 1)

What are the challenges for you of managing flexible working in your Department/School/Directorate? Can you give any example? (Prompt are there work activities/jobs that cannot be done flexibly, any issue about staff abusing flexibility?)

Leadership/Management style

Do you see a distinction between the concept of leadership and that of management?

In your view, what are the qualities that count most when leading people?

Can you think of any role model who has influenced you in a work context?

(For the interviewer: Ask them to fill in the leadership questionnaire)

(For the interviewer: Ask middle managers only to fill in leadership questionnaire relating to the line manager)

How do you communicate to your staff the objectives that your Team/Department/School or Directorate needs to achieve? (e.g. regular briefings, e-mails etc.)

How easy do you think it is to detect staff abusing their working time?
How do you deal with it? Any specific examples?

Which one of the following behaviors are you more likely to adopt if you had to deal with the following scenario? **(For the interviewer: Ask them to look at card 2)**

Anything else that you would like to add about wlb at Oxford Brookes, working patterns, leadership style with regard to employment relations?

Leadership Styles for Work-Life Balance

Interview with Line Managers – Card 2

(For Support Staff only)

Albert submits a request to you to work compressed hours (4 days a week) so that he can spend more time looking after his elderly parents. Susan also asks to work compressed hours (4 days a week) to do some voluntary work for a charitable organisation. Due to operational reasons you can accommodate only one of these requests. How would you deal with this situation.

Possible responses (you may want to combine some of these behaviours):

- You treat them equally and refuse both applications.
- You ask them to sort it out between themselves and with their colleagues and decide who should work compressed hours.
- You spoke to both of them to explore whether a compromise can be reached e.g. both of them work 4.5 days or they work compressed hours on alternative weeks.
- You ask them what would they do in your place.
- You agree the request of the member of staff who you think need the flexibility most.
- You agree the request of the member of staff who you think ought to be rewarded most for his/her work.
- You consult with the rest of the team before making a decision.
- Other, please specify

(For Academic Staff only)

Due to changes in the structure of the academic year it is necessary to extend the working day. This will involve more staff teaching in the evening. You know that some staff are anxious about this, as they have regular personal commitments in the evening e.g. caring responsibilities, social activities.

Possible responses (you may want to combine some of these behaviours):

- You consult with staff and try to take into account their preferences as much as you can when deciding on the allocation of evening teaching but you know that some will feel unhappy and think that they have been unfairly treated.
- In order to avoid controversy and that some staff may feel unfairly treated you take full responsibility for deciding allocation of evening teaching without consultation with staff.
- You state clearly the requirements of the course and ask staff to agree among themselves a viable distribution of the evening teaching.

Other, please specify.

Leadership Styles for Work-Life Balance

Interview with Line Managers – Card 1

Have any of the following flexible working patterns been adopted in your department/school/directorate? Please indicate as many as apply.

- Compressed hours
- Part-time
- Job sharing
- Shift work
- Self-rostering
- Working from home: occasionally, regularly, designated homeworking
- Working Term time only
- Flexi-time
- Others (please specify)

On the basis of your experience, do you think that the flexible working patterns currently adopted in your Department/School/Directorate help with one or more of the following:

- Help staff to work more effectively
- Help to recruit and to retain staff
- Help to cope better with peak times
- Improve staff motivation
- Increase staff quantity of work
- Increase staff quality of work
- Increase staff loyalty
- Foster better working relations
- Other (please specify)

On the basis of your experience, do you think that the flexible working patterns currently adopted in your Department/School/Directorate are causing any of the following problems:

- Staff abuse the flexibility
- Staff working less effectively
- Dysfunction in the work of the Team/Department/School/Directorate
- Additional work for some staff, who do not work flexibly
- Additional work for you by making it more complex to manage staff
- Resentment among staff who do not work flexibly
- They reduce staff productivity
- They substantially increase staff costs
- Other – please specify

Case Studies

Case study 3 – Support staff

This is based on two triads involving small teams providing a range of IT services.

Good practice example

Managers' attitude towards work-life balance and flexible working

Senior Manager

She is a senior academic and has recently been given the responsibility for managing the support staff team featured in this triad. She is used to having line management responsibility for academic staff and she pointed out that managing this group of staff is different. Academic staff are able to choose their own time to undertake their tasks against deadline, thus "with academics staff it is mainly a question of whether the job gets done rather than when the job gets done".

She described her management style as being consultative and explained that "I would never as a line manager see it as my job just to tell someone this change is going to take place without discussing it with them. Clearly you can't always have a situation where you discuss it and always come to an agreement, but I mean you clearly need to talk it through with them and recognise that in doing their job they probably have the best view of that job and how to get it done."

She supported the team's plans for introducing flexible working and said "in a sense they were able to work it out for themselves, although I could help her (the team's immediate line manager) to think some of the options she had not thought of".

She thinks that to have a good work-life balance is important to the jobs done in the university and to the team she manages: "I think that in a lot of the work that we do there is a need for creativity, and creativity tends to come out of having time to think. It is important not to be constantly in a productive mode; often it happens, you know, that when you are not thinking about a particular problem, you might suddenly think of some solutions." She also believes that flexible working can increase staff motivation – "I think the issue of flexibility makes people feel that they have more autonomy. More autonomy generally speaking, brings motivation."

She sees herself as having a role in promoting work-life balance. She responds positively to requests for flexible working and provided recent examples of this. She hopes that she is setting a reasonable example to staff in terms of work-life balance. Although she is aware of the fact that because she has a very heavy workload, people may imagine that she takes a lot of work at home. One of her staff was very surprised to hear that she does not work at week ends, so she acknowledges that she needs to be more public about her working patterns to ensure that staff get the right message.

Middle Manager

In response to the need to cover an extended day as a result of the university changes to the academic year structure into semesters, she had planned – together with her team – to introduce compressed hours. Before proposing this change to the School's senior management team, they sought feedback from the users of their services.

All members of the team currently work compressed hours during semester time, while outside semester they revert to 9-5 day, except one member of the team, who lives some distance from Oxford, and prefers to work compressed hours all year around. The effectiveness of the new arrangements will be monitored through a Customer Care Questionnaire that we will be circulated to all the groups supported by the team.

She said that her present line manager is supportive of this arrangement and more sympathetic to work-life balance issues, unlike her past line manager who was not so open. She believes her new line manager has a better understanding of the needs of those who use the services provided by the team.

She encourages staff to work flexibly and take up development opportunities. She thinks that choice and flexibility for members of the team can improve service for the users. The main advantages of flexible working in her experience are: that it helps with staff retention; enables staff to work more effectively; enables staff to cope better with peak times; and provide extended cover.

Staff experience of work-life balance and flexible working

This member of staff works compressed hours four days each week during semester and reverts back to 9-5 five days a week outside semester, when there is no longer a need for extended office cover. She finds the current arrangement “very good” and commented, “I thought it would be difficult working longer hours but it doesn't make much difference at all, plus it is quite quiet after 6 pm so you can get a lot of things done that you have not managed to do throughout the day and that's useful”. This arrangement also seem to fit her notion of work-life balance which involves “having enough time in the day to finish the tasks that you need to, but also to have a decent amount of time at home as well”. She can openly discuss work-life balance issues with her line manager and her colleagues. They are always consulted by their line manager about matters relating to working patterns and about the team's work and she feels that they can influence decisions. She values the team she works with and feels that they have a very good working relationship and work very well together.

Neutral example

Managers' attitude towards work-life balance and flexible working

Senior Manager

He feels empowered by the university's policies to support changes to working patterns. “I believe I have got the support of the university, so if there are opportunities for people to change their working times, then they are available. I don't feel particularly restricted in that way as long as the operational needs are being met.”

He uses face-to-face communication with his staff through individual meetings or team meetings where people can raise work-life balance issues. He is open to requests for flexible working and he actively encourages staff to work flexibly. His line manager appeared to have been a role model for him, he commented “Going back to my own line manager, for me knowing that he is very supportive about anything and it is not just anything to do with staff’s requests but that general approach – sort of ‘can do approach’ – makes it much easier for me ... So I try to do the same with my staff.” He also feels supported by the culture in his Directorate, saying “there is a very positive feeling about that – I know of colleagues who have applied for compressed hours for instance – and seems to be accepted... that would send very positive signs”.

He is currently working on a 9-5 basis, but in the past when he had young children he was allowed to adjust his working hours to fit his childcare needs. He has also used study leave, compassionate leave and paternity leave. He might be interested to work compressed hours in the future.

He sees clear advantages in flexible working. He believes it increases staff loyalty and fosters better working relationships, “I certainly see that as a benefit. I think people respect understanding and positivity.”

Middle Manager

He is very open about work-life balance issues. He responds to staff requests “by listening and trying to organise it with them.” He pointed out a few examples of staff working flexibly in his team. He described, in particular, a case where he had “to think hard and long” in order to accommodate one of his staff’s request to ensure that it would not cause problems to the team. In the end it was possible to accommodate it by working out a “strategy”, which also involved changing some aspects of this member of staff’s job description. He explained that if a request for flexible working appears difficult to accommodate, because of operational requirements, his “natural response” would be “to question these operational reasons, because our operation is what we created and so I would certainly want to look at that operation.” He also thinks that it is important to consult the team when making these decisions as they will impact on the team as a whole.

He works full-time but because he has young children he has adjusted his starting hours to fit with his childcare responsibilities. He has used paternity leave and compassionate leave when his children were sick. He is very clear that his family is his “absolute priority” and to him work-life balance means “finding a relationship between the time that you spend away from your family earning money and expressing yourself as a member of a society through your work and your role as a member of a family unit, those two things – making sure that they are in harmony”.

He thinks that work-life balance is very important to his team because “if we did not have a flexible and relaxed approach to work-life balance, we would not be as effective as we are and since we are under an enormous amount of pressure we need to be relaxed, we need to be able to let the off steam; we need to rely on each other... the fact is that if X needs to go off and arrange his mortgage he can, because if he doesn’t he won’t be effective in his work, he will be worried about it”.

Staff experience of work-life balance and flexible working

He works full-time but he has adjusted his hours and works from 9.30 am until 6 pm to take his children to school. He thinks that the university commitment to work-life balance is very good and the team he works in is a good example of this as every member of staff has some flexibility in their job. He commented, “our particular Directorate is pretty good. We work in small teams and my line manager is quite helpful and I know his line manager is quite helpful.” He finds it very easy to talk about his working patterns with his line manager and his colleagues if he needs to. Staff are always consulted about decisions concerning working patterns and he feels that they can influence the decision making process.

In the past he used compassionate leave for family reasons and he was “impressed” by the amount of support that he received.

Case study 4 – Support staff

This case study is based on a triad and a pair in two different university functional departments where opportunities for flexible working are considerably limited by the operational requirements of service delivery.

Good practice example

Managers’ attitude towards work-life balance and flexible working

Senior Manager

Although the demands of service delivery in his department limit opportunities for flexible working, they try to be quite creative and offer staff alternative working patterns “you know we work in a reasonably flexible environment in education... where staff might be asked to do extra hours or longer hours at certain times of the year, it can be quite easily compensated at other times of the year.” They do not use a formal flexi-time scheme but they are “flexible” and have allowed some staff to start and finish work at different times. He believes work-life balance is important to his department as he has observed that “the more flexible we have been with staff, the more open to ideas in terms of work-life balance and the better our retention has been. Our staff turn-over is considerably lower than it was three or four years ago.” He takes a wider view of work-life balance that includes opportunities for staff development, commenting “We had a number of administrators who had undertaken some very routine tasks who wanted a challenge. We have allowed these staff members to do that, taking them ‘out of the box’.” This can lead to “improved morale” and impact positively on staff perception of their work-life balance.

He is aware that his attitude to work can affect his staff, particularly his senior managers’ team saying “I hope I take a leadership role and actually set standards for work but also my philosophy at work – which I think it is now shared with my senior staff – and is that I promote autonomous working. I delegate as much as I possibly can... in the department we do trust our staff. Generally speaking I think, yes, my own working pattern does influence my staff. For example, my deputies never previously worked at home, but they do now – at selected times of the month; this is extremely effective because it takes them out of a very, very busy

office environment and allows them to develop skills they wouldn't otherwise have developed." He believes that middle managers have a key role to play in promoting work-life balance and flexible working, as they are the group of staff faced with the main challenge of implementing these principles. He commented, "Senior managers understand, they have bought into it (work-life balance). Of course we advocate it very strongly, I do in my senior management team and nobody is resistant to it, but I think middle managers are the ones who actually have to implement it and they are the ones with the greater challenge. It is very easy for me to say... we subscribe to work-life balance, we think it is a jolly good thing, we will offer it, we promote it in terms of diversity and equality of opportunities, but actually delivering at middle management and supervisory level it's quite challenging, I think those are the people who need support."

Middle Manager

She feels "reasonably" empowered to introduce changes to working patterns as her line manager "leaves heads of office to have a fairly autonomous approach to the way we work and manage our staff." Although opportunities for flexibility are restricted by the operational requirements of the front-line services that they have to deliver, provided that there is sufficient office cover, staff can express their preferences when they like to start work between 8am and 9 am. She thinks that work-life balance is important to her department and she is "extremely supportive of it" because "it can be used to retain staff and make their working lives better, more interesting, easier to manage." Although her department is supportive of work-life balance she noted that managers tend "do work long hours across the Directorate.". She is not happy about her own work-life balance, as she says "I do tend to spend long hours here and I do tend to take work home". However, she feels that she can openly discuss work-life balance issues with her line manager and colleagues and she is thinking about approaching her line manager to discuss how to improve her own work-life balance.

So far she has never refused a request for flexible working although in some instances she had to make some adjustments to what had been required. She sees some clear advantages associated with flexible working such as staff motivation, "it certainly enhances their motivation if staff are aware of the fact that there is some flexibility to change the way they do things or the way they work".

Staff experience of work-life balance and flexible working

This member of staff's job involves a lot of interaction with students. He has been allowed to change the time when he starts and finishes work so that it matches that of his partner who also works at Oxford Brookes. He thinks that he has a lot of autonomy in the way he organises his work, "we are pretty autonomous in terms of managing our work; she (the line manager) sets out the deadlines... but she knows we know our priorities." He indicated that staff are always consulted about changes and he feels that they can influence decisions.

He finds his department very supportive of the notion of work-life balance. His line manager is concerned that they do not work long hours and if it happens she would want to know why that is the case to see whether there is the possibility of re-distribution of work. The atmosphere in the office is probably one of the things he values most saying, "I found that being here, you enjoy coming into the office, if you need anything done you speak to X (the line manager) and it's done and you have a massive amount of support from your line

manager as well. Also it's an opportunity for development. I have been sent on a number of course, which I found very valuable." He explained that this is his first job after he graduated. Initially he was unsure of whether to take up this job as he was concerned about the costs of living in Oxford. When he eventually decided to accept it he thought that probably he would not stay in this job for very long and he would try to find something else in a less expensive part of the country. However, he is very happy with his current job; he has no plans to look for work elsewhere and feels well settled as it is – commenting that "it's a very flexible, very easy place to work here."

Neutral example

Middle Manager

In his department there is little scope for flexible working as most of the work has to be done at specific times. However, he has to be flexible when considering staff requests as this is an important contribution to staff retention in an area where there is a high turn over rate.

He pointed out that the profile of his staff is very diverse in terms of nationality, religious background and age. Six years ago he did not have any international staff while now 50% of them are from overseas. His customers too are very diverse as the number of international students attending the university has increased. In terms of his management style this means that he has to be "fairly open minded". He commented on the need to have "an open door approach to his office" and to be "approachable" to both staff and students.

He pointed out that there are a couple of staff in one of his teams that have passed the retirement age, but they are still keen to come into work as this has become part of their social life. They enjoy meeting the international students and the interaction with colleagues.

Staff experience of work-life balance and flexible working

He is a hall warden and his role involves dealing with aspects of security, health and safety, also giving some pastoral care to students. He works one day a week and one week-end a month from 6 pm until 8am. The latter is arranged through a rota. This is organised by his line manager who usually sends out a form to all the staff asking to indicate their preferences. Staff have a certain degree of autonomy as they can agree among themselves to change shifts, provided that the line managers is informed about it and has no objections. This flexibility is particularly important to him as he is taking a course of study. He feels that staff members are always consulted about working patterns and that they can influence decisions.

Case study 5 – Academic staff

This case study includes two academic Schools which are vocationally oriented offering programmes of studies that are often driven by external professional requirements.

Good practice example

Managers' attitude towards work-life balance and flexible working

Senior Manager

He feels that he is in a 'fairly good position' to introduce innovative approaches to working patterns. He was keen to introduce a scheme for designated home-working for academic staff that the School successfully piloted a few years ago, although he was aware that "there was a lot of anxiety from managers who felt that they might lose control, but I think it shows that in fact it works quite well." However, he pointed out that the downside of such a scheme could be the loss of face to face communication and that "sometimes we have to be quite explicit, it does not mean to say that someone can be a virtual colleague, rather than a colleague you meet." When in a team there are several staff who are designated home-workers, this can make communication more challenging but overall he thinks that "there are some disadvantages but by and large they are far surpassed by the advantages and I have not really come across people who abuse it. I think that if you allow people a certain degree of trust they work responsibly and I think productively".

He is aware of the importance of managers setting examples to their staff in terms of work-life balance as he thinks that "if you have a workaholic boss is very difficult to get any kind of balance so I try, we try, I think on the whole to look at the importance of balance." However, he feels that to achieve this in his School is not easy because "I think we have a culture which comes from a vocationally work ethic type of background, protestant work ethic. The service is driven by that kind of mission and sacrifice, with all its religious connotations... so I think as a culture it is very hard, we struggle sometimes. We discovered recently for example some staff who had not taken holidays for six months."

Middle Manager

She has children of school age and works four days a week. She feels that the autonomy that she has in her work is key to enabling her to manage her workload and her family commitments. She values her staff work-life balance and explained that "I make sure that I know what's going on in their life, not in a nosy way, but to support them." She believes that "if you are very supportive of staff and if you try to help them out then they repay that." She has been pro-active in encouraging staff to reduce their working hours to improve their work-life balance. She also thinks that line managers ought to ensure that staff take all their annual leave entitlement and she wants to be pro-active about this by asking staff at the beginning of the academic year how they intend to manage their leave.

Staff experience of work-life balance and flexible working

He is a Programme Leader and has chosen to become a 'designated home-worker' which means that his office is based in his home and when he works on campus he uses hot desk facilities. He is very satisfied with this arrangement; he thinks that it enables him to work more effectively, to achieve a work-life balance and to reduce the amount of travel. He commented: "certainly working from home enables me to do more. Three hours at home are almost like six hours in the office for me. I think there is also a personality aspect to this and I think that knowing myself it works better that I work that way... in the office you meet with people all the time and that certainly slows down my effectiveness."

His working patterns fit with the requirements of his students who are all distance part-time mature students and he does not think that the patterns affect his colleagues in any negative way, as demonstrated by the fact that the number of designated home-workers is growing within the School.

Work-life balance issues and changes to working patterns can be discussed very openly with his line manager and he feels that the School is supportive of flexible working as long as the job gets done and that people are aware of the university's commitment to work-life balance.

Neutral example

Managers' attitude towards work-life balance and flexible working

Senior Manager

In the School the work-load planning is generated by the Heads of Departments who circulate it to academic staff with an invitation to express preferences or raise issues. They usually try to do their best to accommodate staff preferences although they cannot always guarantee it. A number of academics are involved in field trips with students and this requires them to travel and be away for a number of days, sometimes including week-ends. Although they try to ensure that these commitments are fully reflected in the work-load planning of academic staff, he explained that "we do have work-load planning tariff and if they are correct and, it is always very difficult to work out whether they are correct or not, then theoretically a period of intense activity should be offset by a period of less intense activity. I think in truth we do rely on the commitment and dedication of our staff... I think many people work considerably more."

He feels that in his department there is a shortage of staff who can take on management responsibilities and this translates into a greater work-load burden for those who do. When asked what work-life balance meant to him he replied "Personally it means that I have a jolly understanding wife." He also felt that there is an issue about maintaining a balance within work as "the greater the management and administrative burden, the harder it is to do research and I think that there is an issue there; many of the people we want to have management responsibilities are also potentially our best researchers. It is a balancing act."

He believes that promoting work-life balance can help staff to feel more valued, saying “I think that our staff don’t feel as highly valued as they should, so I think it is important that we are seen to be sympathetic to their needs.” In the department they operate a sabbatical programme, which they manage in a ‘collegiate’ way. This enables academic staff to take it in turns to have substantial periods of time to dedicate to their research while the other colleagues are prepared to cover most of their role while they are away. On the other hand, he thinks that one of the disadvantages of flexible working is that sometimes staff can be ‘inflexible’ with their working patterns and this can make communication difficult particularly if they work from home.

Staff’s experience of work-life balance and flexible working

He is a senior lecturer who worked in industry before joining Higher Education. As part of his role he has to visit students on placements and do field trips with them. This involves some travel and having to spend three nights away from home when he goes on field trips. Some of this time spent away from home is compensated by taking an extra days leave. He feels that he has a lot of autonomy in his work “I know what I have got to achieve and I know what the main deadlines are and I know what we should be giving to students in terms of contact... I am not really being dictated to on how to go about things although there are professional guidelines. The profession has a large say in the content of the course”.

He feels that he can openly discuss working patterns with his colleagues and line manager. He does team teaching and this works very well for him as it means that occasionally he can swap teaching with one of his colleagues – this helps him to manage his childcare responsibilities during school holidays for example.

He is part of a teaching group where they can, together with their line manager, make collective decisions about their teaching.

He thinks that working in Higher education has improved his work-life balance and he made the following comment, “what is great about working in this environment is that you do have flexibility of time. For me work-life balance is to get the perfect balance of both sides. I am a conscientious person, I want to do a good job and I love this job because I am able to see much more of my family than I had done before when in industry.” He explained that his partner also works at the university and that between the two of them they are able to balance the demands of a young family.

