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Work-Family Balance Practices Among Irish Hotel Employees in a Human Resource Management Context

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Introduction

The hotel industry is a very important sector which makes a major contribution to economic development (O'Neill *et al*., 2009). Tourism is a people centred industry, where staff are an integral part of the consumer experience. Therefore, tourism must look to the employees, to serve as a principal source of competitive advantage (Barney, 1997, Failte Ireland 2005, p. 4). However, people management practices and HRM in tourism and hospitality do not seem to show the significance of effective HRM (Blomme *et al*., 2009, Kusluvan *et al*., 2010).

In relation to the hospitality industry many establishments lack family-supportive work environments which are necessary for both the benefit of the employee and the organisation (Cullen and McLaughlin, 2006, Deery, 2008, Farrell, 2012). It has been found that employees in the hospitality industry experience challenges in achieving a work-life balance (Karatepe and Magajc, 2008, Lewis, 2003). There can be a culture of long hours and presenteeism attached to many jobs (Cullen and Mc Laughlin, 2006, Deery, 2008, Harris *et al*., 2007,).

There is a dearth of research in relation to work-family balance (Kusluvan *et al*., 2010, O' Neill, 2011). Karatepe (2008) and Mulvaney *et al.* (2006) found that in the hospitality

management literature there is lack of research relating to work-family facilitation.. Lucas and Deery (2004, p. 470) highlighted how most hospitality research is based on quantitative analysis and the "relatively small amount of research drawn from employees as opposed to managers, suggests there is considerable scope to undertake more employee-based studies" The aim of this paper is to examine the issue of work-family balance in the Irish hotel sector from an employee perspective. For the purpose of the paper work-family balance and work-life balance will be used interchangeably as, in the context of the research done, work-life balance deals with issues of work-family balance.

Literature

Human Resources

The hospitality industry is a people centred industry where people are essential to all aspects of the service sequence (Failte Ireland, 2005). The development of people is a central element in human resource management (Connolly and McGing, 2007). According to Boxall and Purcell (2003) who present the "resource based view of the firm" human resources can be a source of competitive advantage.

There is some evidence that established HR departments with innovative practices are only to be found in the larger hotels with a dearth of HR practices to be found in the smaller hotels (Hoque, 2000). Head and Lucas (2004) refer to a hard form of HRM in evidence in the hospitality industry with pockets of good practices to be found.

The 1991 General Social Survey randomly selected workers in the United States and assessed the impact of family-responsive human resource policies, such as parental leave, flexible schedules, and child care assistance on organisational attachment. Employees who had access to family-responsive policies showed significantly greater organisational commitment and

showed significantly lower intention to quit their jobs. Also child care information referral had a greater impact on affective commitment among employees eligible for that benefit. The practical implication of the study for human resource management professionals is that providing comprehensive family-friendly policies may have a positive impact beyond the individual employees who tap these benefits (Grover and Crooker, 1995, p. 1-2). In a study of a national survey of employees measuring the impact of family-responsive fringe benefits on affective commitment to the organisation (Grover and Crooker, 1995, p. 7) found that people are more attached to organisations that offer family-friendly policies, regardless of the extent to which the people might personally benefit from the policies. Perry-Smith and Blum (2000, p. 1114) investigated the relationship between bundles of work-family policies and organisational performance. They found that establishments with a greater number of work-family policies have higher levels of organisational performance, market performance and profit sales growth. Work-family bundles may promote interest in organisations as they have a symbolic value for employees. In addition they may be a source of competitive advantage in a business climate in which their adoption is limited. They signal the need to explore the extent to which work-family bundles are part of a broader innovative HR system. Beauregard and Henry (2009) found that work-life balance practices are often linked to positive job-related attitudes, engagement in high quality management practices and increased employee interest in the establishment.

Work-family interface and conflict

Work-family conflict and family-work conflict can arise. Work-family conflict refers to "a form of interrole conflict in which the general demands of time devoted to, and strain caused by the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities", and family-work conflict refers to "a form of interrole conflict in which the general demands of time devoted to, and strain caused by the family interfere with performing work-related responsibilities"

(Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996, p. 401). While conflict is a common element in life, certain levels of work and family conflict can have negative consequences for both (Hsieh and Eggers, 2010). In hospitality a significant factor in work-family pressure is time-based conflict (Magnini, 2009). The main element of time-based conflict is where time given to one role makes it difficult to carry out another role (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Negative effects of time-based conflict such as a lessening in productivity have been noted (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2005).According to Allen, Herst, Bruck and Sutton (2000) there is a link between increases in conflict and lower job satisfaction, organisational commitment and job performance as well as increases in turnover intention and absenteeism. In a study involving 1.200 food service managers Ghiselli, La Lopa and Bai (2001) found that longer working hours caused disruption in their lives. Workplace flexibility can offset some of the negative effects

of working long not-standard hours typical of the hospitality industry (Staines and Pleck, 2007). In relation to work and family, certain conflicts can arise such as absenteeism, negative mental and physical health (Frone *et al.*, 1997, Hsieh *et al.* 2009, Tromp and Blomme, 2012). It is argued that there needs to be a certain separation between work and family while at the same time allowing for interchange between them (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000). Frone *et al.*, (1997) tested Frone *et al.'s* (1992) model of work/family interface which shows that work at times conflicts with family and vice versa.

The literature refers to the emotional labour and stress characteristics of the hospitality industry (Deery and Jago, 2008, Karatepe and Bekteshi, 2008, Karatepe and Kilic, 2007). There can be a high incidence of exhaustion and job burnout in the latter resulting in high turnover (Deery, 2008, Wang and Wallumbwa, 2007). Inflexible shift work can cause a lack of balance between work and family (Root and Wooten, 2008). Some employers understand the HR benefits of work-life balance programmes and have started to engage with the same (Xiao and O' Neill, 2010). In relation to factors that can positively

effect work-life balance, Deery and Jago (2009) mention more use of flexible work practices such as flexible scheduling, having access to both paid and unpaid leave and job sharing.

Work-family balance in hotels

According to Doherty (2004) previous research shows there are some flexible work options for people working at operational level but this is not the case at management level. In her study Doherty (2004) found that most of the women needed flexibility because of childcare commitments. .Deery (2008) made recommendations for the Australian hospitality industry which included flexible working hours, job sharing, various types of leave such as carer's leave and family-friendly practices. According to DiPietro *et al.*, (2004) in research of fast food restaurants it was found that flexible working hours was one of the reasons given to encourage employees to stay. Namasivayam and Zhao (2007) did a study examining the relationship between work-family conflict (WFC), job satisfaction (JS) and organisational commitment (OC). It was found that WFC related negatively to JS, but this is not the case if the employee is very committed to the organisation. . Cleveland *et al.*, (2007) conducted rerarch on three hotel groups: new employee entrants, hotel managers and their spouses. It was found that time demands and the need to be available at all times was a contributing factor to their level of stress. O' Neill (2011, p. 878) in a focus group study of hospitality management students refers to the working time practices which are " long, unpredictable and non-standard". In relation to their study of the Korean hotel industry, Choi and Kim (2012, p. 1023) proposed that establishments invest more in "flexible work schedules, regular working hours, family-friendly programmes, and additional useful benefits and support related to family". Wong and Ko (2009, p. 202) in their study of employees' perceptions of work-life balance issues propose an effective management system and culture that enables employees to deal more effectively with their "personal and family matters". The latter includes "Providing workplace support on family matters" and "Provide more free time and increase

flexibility on work schedule". In work there is more emphasis on productivity and efficiency which is tending to obscure other values (Crompton *et al*., 2007, Gambles,*et al*., , 2007). According to (Burris, 1993, p. 19) some change is needed to accommodate work and family

> Some of the needed changes are obvious: greater scheduling flexibility, more available and affordable childcare, more options for viable part time work for men and women, more generous maternity and paternity leaves.

O'Connor (2003) found that achieving a work-life balance was ranked as the number one personal challenge facing Irish managers. Also, Clinch, Convery and Walsh (2002) found that Irish people attached high importance to family relationships. The importance of benefits for employees has been highlighted as a recruitment tool (Dulebohn *et al*., 2009). The role of a positive organisational culture which facilitates work-life balance can lead to positive effects on employee performance (Root and Wooten, 2008, Ten Brummelhuis and Van Der Lippe, 2010). A study conducted by Lewis (2011) suggested that work-life balance initiatives at the Italian hotel studied were not experienced as such by employees.. Nevertheless, according to employees, work-life balance factors clearly influences them as they reflect the underlying factors which can positively affect their lives. (Di Nicola and Rosati, 2008).

The research questions (RQ) therefore are:

RQ1 What are employees' preferred working time arrangements?

RQ2 What are the reasons for taking up working time arrangements?

RQ3 Do employees' current work arrangements suit their family/personal commitments?

RQ4 What work-life balance supports are available to employees?

RQ5 Is there a link between work-life balance supports and other HRM practices?

 Methods

Procedure

This paper is part of a larger study on work flexibility and work-family balance (Farrell, 2012). A survey was distributed to 1118 hotel employees. The latter included employees of a 5*, 4* and 3* unionised hotel group, a non-unionised hotel group and two family-run hotels, including a 4* and a 3*. Reliability of the data was improved by surveying a large cohort of employees who could respond anonymously. The questionnaire was pre-tested prior to launch with a cross-section of industry personnel. This resulted in amendments being made to choice of language and structure of questions. Before the survey was carried out, its academic purpose was explained to the HR manager in each hotel. Questionnaires were sent out to the relevant HR manager who in turn distributed them to employees. A covering letter was included with each questionnaire. It had the logo of the Irish Hotel and Catering Institute. This is the representative body for hotel managers in Ireland.

The questionnaire was distributed to employees with their pay slip and an envelope for reply was enclosed. They were also asked to return it in a sealed envelope and place it in a box convenient to the HR manager's office. A difficulty experienced was that a lot of staff are casual and do not work every day. This resulted in a lower response rate. The response rate was 22% which included 246 valid questionnaires. This is considered to be within the norm for a postal questionnaire (Murphy, 1997).

Response Rate Employee Survey

The response rate achieved was as follows:

- F3 (three* family run hotel): 62 completed questionnaires out of 147 employees with 127 full-time and 20 permanent part-time

- F4 (four* family-run hotel): 44 completed questionnaires out of 180 staff including 100 permanent and 80 casual

- NU3 (Non-unionised three*): 21 completed questionnaires returned out of a total of 100 staff including 35 full-time and 65 part-time and casual

- NU4 (Non-unionised four*):17 completed questionnaires returned out of a total of 46 employees including 20 full-time and 26 part-time and casual

- NU5 (Non-unionised five*): 20 completed questionnaires returned out of a total of 70 staff including 50 full-time and 20 part-time

- U3 (Unionised three*): 13 completed questionnaires returned out of a total of 40 staff including 10 full-time and 30 part-time

- U4 (Unionised four*): 20 completed questionnaires returned out of a total of 300 including 200 full-time and 100 part-time

- U5 (Unionised five*): 49 completed questionnaires returned out of a total 218 employees including 125 permanent and 93 casual staff.

Participants

The majority (69%) of the respondents were female and 57% were between 20-29 years old. Approximately one third (30%) of employees had their leaving certificate (final exam at second level) while 20% had a degree. One third of employees were approximately one year in their current employment and 31% were between one and three years in their present jobs. In relation to those who work full-time, 64% were front-line employees, with the balance in supervisory/management work.

Measures

The survey was made us of twenty seven questions. Section A dealt with current employment details such as work arrangement and preferred work arrangement. Section B dealt with working time arrangements and had four questions; Question B1 asked What are the reasons

why working time arrangements were taken up (part-time, job share, annualised hours, flexitime): To combine work with the care of children or other dependents, To have more leisure time, To have time for education or vocational training, Health reasons, Because I could not find a full-time job, Source of supplementary income, For social reasons, Other reasons (Please give details). Question B2 asked: Do your current working arrangements suit your family/personal commitments? The choice of answers ranged from very suitable, quite suitable, unsure, not very suitable and not suitable at all. Question B3 asked Do any of the working time arrangements (part-time, job share, annualized hours, flexitime) create any problems in your department? yes or no. Question B4 asked Would it make any difference if you were working with all part-time or all full-time staff? A big difference, some difference, unsure, little difference, no difference at all.

Section C dealt with other flexible work practices while section D covered work-life balance and had three questions. Question D1 asked: Does your hotel provide you with any of the following supports to assist in achieving work-life balance? Are these available to you and availed of by you: Employee assistance programmes, staff counselling service, education scheme, childcare supports (e.g. crèche), career planning and guidance, pre-retirement advice and support, stress management courses and any other care supports. Question D2 asked In relation to your current employment in your hotel to what degree would you agree/disagree with the following statements? (Please tick one of the five boxes for each statement - if you have no view please leave box(es) blank). Work-life balance is a very important issue in this hotel, I have to work beyond official hours to keep up with my workload, I have been able to balance home and work-life without hindering my career progression, My life and commitments beyond work are respected by my colleagues, Part-time working slows down career progression, My family does not suffer as a result of my working hours, Putting in

extra hours helps career prospects. Question D3 asked Are you responsible for the care of other people? Yes or no and if yes please specify for children, for parents or for relatives. Section E covered personal details such as age and education and had six questions. Section F dealt with unionised hotels and had five questions.

The questions on work-life balance issues were based on a survey conducted by the Industrial Statistics Unit, Trinity College Dublin in 2002, as they satisfied the research aims (Industrial Statistics Unit, 2002).

Analysis

The statistical package SPSS 17.00 was used. Frequency charts, cross tabulations, significance tests and regression analysis was used.

Results

What are employees' preferred working time arrangements?

Table 1 showed that while 77% of employees worked full time, 67 % preferred working arrangement was full-time. 2% of employees were job sharing and 11% preferred working arrangement was job share.

What are the reasons for taking up working time arrangements?

The number one reason given for availing of work-family balance arrangements was time for educational training. (Table 2). Thirty eight per cent of employees were responsible for the care of other people, twenty three percent were responsible for the care of children and thirteen per cent for the care of parents. Childcare concerns was the second most important reason   given by employees for the demand for work-life balance arrangements (Table 2).

Do employees current work arrangements suit their family/personal commitments?

Twenty nine per cent of respondents agreed strongly and thirty six per cent agreed that their family does not suffer as a result of working hours (Table 3). Half of employees either agreed strongly or agreed that putting in extra hours helps career prospects (Table 3).

What work-life balance supports are available to employees?

Table 4 shows the composite figure of work/life balance supports available for employees . There was a considerable range varying from hotels with no supports, hotels with one support and hotels with all eight supports available. The supports available are as follows: employee assistance programmes, staff counselling services, an education scheme, childcare supports, career planning and guidance, pre-retirement advice and support, stress management courses and other supports.

Is there a link between work-life balance supports and other HR practices such as company benefits?

Table 5 shows the employee regression equation for both functional flexibility(team-working, multiskilling) and work-life balance supports. In both cases the regression was significant (p<.05). For functional flexibility, also, two variables were significant, i.e. job description (p< .05) and company benefits available (p<.05). This shows that there is more functional flexibility at management level.

For work-life balance supports, hotel classification and company benefits available were found to be significant (p<.05). In hotels with a higher star rating, there were few work-life balance supports.

In conclusion, company benefits were not associated with numerical flexibility, but company benefits were associated with functional flexibility and work-life balance supports. This would suggest an integrated approach to human resource management, whereby some

companies engage in a modern employee-focused approach, whereas other companies tend to be more traditional.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study contributes to the research on work-family balance and advances the literature on the link between work-family balance programmes and other HRM practices (Grover and Crooker, 1995; Perry-Smith and Blum, 2000, Beauregard and Henry, 2009). There is an integrated approach to human resource management evident in some hotels. This could echo Enz (2009, p.14) "Innovation in human resource management is needed to gain a sustainable competitive advantage...". It is important for the hotel industry to keep pace with HR development and in particular the emphasis on human capital management (Connolly and McGing, 2007, Nankervis *et al*., 2008).

The results show that there is more functional flexibility at management level; this is in keeping with the flexible firm thesis that functional flexibility is more likely to be developed with core workers (Atkinson, 1984).

One third of employees preferred working time arrangements were part-time work and job share. This could be an indication of changing priorities for employees where life outside work is assuming greater significance (Craig *et al*., 2010, Lewis, 2011).

The results showed that employees had considerable caring commitments. This reflects the view that family relationships are a high priority for Irish people (Clinch *et al*., 2002). There is a consensus that working women have to manage the dearth of time within the family (Baxter , 2002, Maher *et al*., 2008). Facilitating employees' work arrangements to enable them to care for their families is a very practical and economical way of dealing with the

issue of care. Hotel managers need to appreciate the elements involved in helping employees balance work and family (Choi and Kim, 2011, O 'Neill, 2011).

Approximately one third of employees cited educational reasons as to why they availed of work-family arrangements. Also approximately two thirds of employees were 1-3 years in their current employment. This is an indication of the high turnover characteristic of the hotel industry. Also it could indicate that people are using it as a preparation for another career (Failte Ireland, 2003).

The majority of hotels have no work-life balance supports. Supports for work-family balance could be put in place for employees such as time management, stress management and home management courses. Cullen and McLaughlin (2006) refer to the notion of" presenteeism", which can be an issue in hotels. A tension exists between organisational policies that are presented as family-friendly and work practices that assume dedicated employees work long hours (Deery, 2008, Harris *et al.*, 2007). It would be important to foster a culture whereby employees are rewarded for their work achievements rather than for presenteeism. Work-family programmes need to be integrated into the overall strategic plan for the organisation. There must be a sense of commitment starting with top management and working its way down to operational level. Managers need training in the importance and implementation of family–friendly work practices.

The results showed that there were few work-life balance supports available in hotels in the higher star category. (Lewis, 2011) found contradictions between policies that HR managers claim exist and policies employees perceive as existing. Other studies found that employers mentioned insufficient demand as the main factor for not providing family-friendly/work-life balance arrangements (Fisher, 2000; Poelmans et al., 2003).

People work best when there is a balance between work and life. However, this has to be reconciled with employers' financial and business targets. There are inherent costs involved

in being a flexible employer. However, the overall cost of replacing an employee involves recruitment, selection, training and some temporary cover. It may make more business sense to accommodate the employee's work demands, rather than lose all that talent and skills. A positive organisational culture which is family-friendly can have a positive effect on performance (Root and Wooten, 2008, Ten Brummelhuis and Van Der Lippe, 2010).

Limitations and suggestions for further research

Although this study made some contribution to the literature, it is important to recognise that the study had some limitations. First the data was gathered at a single point in time and thus causal inferences need to be viewed with caution. Secondly, the sample chosen was limited to eight hotels. Even though the hotels chosen were representative of the hotel industry i.e. a unionised group, a non-unionised group and two family run hotels, further research is needed to generalise for the larger hospitality industry. Thirdly, the hospitality industry employs a large number of casual workers and it could be interesting to compare work-family balance perceptions and practices between casual employees and full-time employees. Finally, It could be insightful to look more closely as the effects of star rating and family ownership on work-family balance using qualitative methods.

Table 1: Employees' Working Time Arrangements (WTA) and Employees' Preferred Working Time Arrangements (WTA)

	Employees' WTA (N=246)	Employees' preferred WTA (N=245)
Full-time	77%	67%
Part-time	20 %	21%
Job-share	2 %	11%
Flex-time	1%	1%

Table 2 Reasons why Employees Take up Working Time Arrangements (N=94)

	Percentage Yes
To combine work with the care of children or dependents	26
To have more leisure time	23

To have more time for educational or vocational training	31
For health reasons	10
Employees could not find a full-time job	2
A source of supplementary income	10
For reasons of sociability	6

Table 3 : Employees' Perspective on Family-friendly/Work-life Balance Issues

I have to work beyond official hours to keep up with my workload (N=204)	
	Percentage
Agree strongly	10
Agree	19
Unsure	17
Disagree	40
Disagree strongly	14
I have been able to balance home and work life without hindering my career progression (N=207)	
	Percentage

Agree strongly	19
Agree	45
Unsure	19
Disagree	13
Disagree strongly	4

My life and commitments beyond work are respected by my colleagues (N=207)	
	Percentage
Agree strongly	22
Agree	52
Unsure	15
Disagree	9
Disagree strongly	4

Part-time working slows down career progression (N=202)	
	Percentage
Agree strongly	15
Agree	22
Unsure	30
Disagree	27
Disagree strongly	5

My family does not suffer as a result of my working hours (N=224)	
	Percentage
Agree strongly	29
Agree	36

Unsure	15
Disagree	14
Disagree strongly	5

Putting in extra hours helps career prospects (N=216)

	Percentage
Agree strongly	19
Agree	31
Unsure	20
Disagree	22
Disagree strongly	9

Table 4: Composite Number of Work/Life Balance Supports According to Employees (N=244)

Work/life Balance Supports	Yes percentage
None	63
1.00	12
2.00	3
3.00	4
4.00	1
5.00	1
6.00	5
7.00	7
8.00	4
Total	100

Table 5 : Multiple Regression of Functional Flexibility and Work-life Balance Supports by Company Characteristics, HRM Practices and Individual Characteristics according to significance at p<.05*, p< .1**

Organisational Factors Dependent Variables Standardised Beta		
	Functional flexibility	**Work-life balance supports**
Company characteristics		
Family ownership	.078	-.140
Hotel classification	.030	-.173*
Individual characteristics		
Age	-.076	.044
Gender	-.027	-.030

Highest educational qualification	-.044	-.040
Pursuing an educational qualification	-.015	-.082
Job description	-.156*	.096
Length of time in present employment	-.083	.095
HRM practices		
Company benefits available	.253*	.370*
Whether the organisation is unionised	.068	.098
R	.336*	.419*
R Square	.113	.175

*P<.05

**P<.1

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