Work-Life Balance in Times of Financial Crisis and Austerity in Europe
Implications of austerity for gender equality, health and well-being, care and care-giving and employment relations?

- Although WLB remains on workplace and social policy agendas, economic crisis tends to shift the focus more towards employer needs with reduced emphasis on care, choice and gender equality considerations.

- Raises concerns for individual WLB, organizational effectiveness and social justice.
Working-time capabilities during economic austerity across Europe

Colette Fagan
University of Manchester
Working-time Capabilities

• Application of Sen’s capability framework: Individual’s capacity/ freedom/ability to change their working time patterns

• Conversion factors: public policies, social norms, workplace practices, personal socio-economic situation…

• Individual capability emerges through articulation of organizational setting with their household-level circumstances

• Example: The ‘Right to Request’ reduced or adapted work schedules
Dimensions of Working-time arrangements

**Volume of hours worked**
- Long full-time (over 48 hours)
- Standard full-time (36-48 hours)
- Reduced full-time (30-35 hours)
- Standard part-time (20-30 hours)
- Marginal part-time (below 20 hours)

**Schedule: When?**
- Largely within daytime, weekdays?
- Exposure to non-standard work rhythms (evenings, nights, weekends, rotating shifts...)?

**Schedule: Type of flexibility?**
- **Fixed hours**
- **Employer-led flexibility** (employer can and does vary hours, e.g., changes to rotas, extra hours)
- **Worker-led flexibility** (flexitime, discretion to vary start/finish times, options to work from home, etc)
Working-time under austerity... so far

- Job losses & increased insecurity, reduced mobility, pay cuts, growth in involuntary part-time jobs, in temporary work, informal work...
- Decline in average working hours ....but increases in work intensity & unpaid overtime
- Widening inequalities in WLB and capabilities
  - Unemployment, widening income inequalities (hollowed middle)
  - Inequalities in working-time capabilities - managerial/professional strata and manual jobs
- More acute in some countries than others – role of collective bargaining, policy & social actors
Public sector austerity cuts and the work-life balance agenda: Under threat or a burning platform for change?

Suzan Lewis, Middlesex University, Deirdre Anderson, Cranfield University, Clare Lyonette, University of Warwick, Nicky Payne, Middlesex University, Stephen Wood, University of Leicester
Background and research question

- WLB polices generally well established in UK public sector
- Public sector worst hit by austerity budget cuts
- So how are WLB policies discussed and enacted in practice in UK public sector organizations in times of austerity?
- What is the relative influence of economic and institutional influences?
- Increased budgetary constraints leading to cutbacks in provision of WLB initiatives or resilient WLB policies developed to manage financial crisis?
Method

- 26 in depth telephone interviews with senior HRM professionals – personal contacts and snowball sampling
- A range of UK public sector organizations
Findings

- Cultural embedding of WLB amid financial pressures
- Evolutions in practices and discourses: FWAs as a strategy for managing austerity
- Changing practices, changing discourses: promoting flexible working
- Evolving practices, changing discourses: the case of evolved remote working
- Evolutions in practices and discourses: mutual benefit or a step too far?
- Practitioner concern about health and safety issues
Recession, work-time and work-life balance: class inequalities in the UK

Tracey Warren
University of Nottingham
Recession, work-time and work-life balance: class inequalities in the UK

Temporal is core to WLB debates:
• ‘too many’ hours prioritised
• ‘too few hours’?
• Class inequalities in hours and hours preferences
• Impact of recession and crisis?
Work-time and the impact of the crisis

1. Paid work-time reduction?
   a. Unemployment
   b. Work-time underemployment

2. Work-time expansion?
   a. Longer hours for those who remain in work
   b. Paid and/or unpaid work-time expansion
   c. ‘Housework’

3. Aggregate fall in paid hours UK 2008-
   1. Work-time underemployment feature of the UK in crisis

4. Economic ramifications of ‘too few’ hours?
   a. Rising levels of financial insecurity in the UK
   b. Widening class gap in reported financial insecurity
Conclusion

- WL debates
  - Time dominates/Economic under-researched
  - Middle class dominate/Working class under-researched
- Recession and austerity in UK
  - Increase in classed work-time underemployment
  - Increase in classed financial insecurity
- Barbara Ehrenreich (1990) the middle class ‘star in’ and ‘write the scripts’ for academic debate and mainstream politics.
- being able to ‘disregard money’ is one of the key attributes that differentiates the middle from the working class (Bev Skeggs 2011).
- different forms of WLI by class
- financial security should be fundamental to any understanding of what a ‘balanced work-life’ might look like.
Caring in a Time of Recession: A Legal Perspective

Professor Nicole Busby
Strathclyde University Law School
nicole.busby@strath.ac.uk
The UK Coalition Government’s Austerity Measures

- Effect on labour market regulation
- Deregulation of equality laws – The Equality Act 2010

BUT

- Continuing focus on ‘work-life balance’ – The Children and Families Act 2014
  - Fathers AND mothers
  - Impact on carers?
Ideology over Access to Justice?

- Employment Tribunal fees regime – July 2013
- Challenges through judicial review process – lack of success
- Social engineering?
- Commodification of access to justice?
- A feminist agenda for the future
WLB and gendered assumptions during the recession in an ICT company in Malta

Anna Borg
University of Malta
The focus of the case study

- **Recession** (how it affected Malta + the organisation).

- **Ideal Worker + Work Life Issues** in an **ICT setting** in a traditionally gendered society (Malta)

- **Qualitative methods within a case study approach** - 3 cycles of Action Research (CIAR)25 Interviews, 3 Focus Groups (mostly men -Directors, Managers, Workers)
Outcome in relation to the recession

- Workers were expected to do more with less – as workers were not being replaced.

- More focus on time keeping, little focus on output – controls tightened.

- Conceptually the term flexibility has different meanings to the employers and to the employees.
Outcome in relation to the recession

- This led to **work-intensification** – more **work-life pressure** to maintain ideal worker profiles – accepted as a sign of the times.

- Deliberations to improve working conditions to allow **WLB felt rather risqué** in the given economic scenario- **WLB was not a priority**

- Overall recession reinforced and intensified gendered workplace norms
Work-life balance and quality of working life in Greece in times of financial crisis

Dr Rea Prouska
Middlesex University
r.prouska@mdx.ac.uk
The Greek context

• **QWL**
  - The worst hit country by the economic crisis with falling GDP and rising unemployment.
  - Job insecurity: 31% (increase from 8%) thinking that they are very/quite likely to lose their job in the next 6 months.
  - One of the worst affected countries in terms of life satisfaction, happiness and satisfaction with standard of living between 2007-2011 in EU27.
  - Optimism about the future was expressed by fewer than 30%.

• **WLB**
  - 1 in 3 workers reported unsatisfactory WLB.
  - More than 20% of workers reported problems fulfilling family responsibilities because of the amount of time spend on their job.
  - Often reports of difficulty to concentrate at work because of family responsibilities (several times a week/a month).
The findings

• Quality of Working Life
  • Anxiety, stress, uncertainty
  • ‘Here and now’ vs. future orientation
  • Professionalism and professional identity

• Work-Life Balance
  • Working more for less: working hours, overtime hours and financial rewards
  • Maternity/paternity leave: still exist, but the employed feel pressure not to take full entitlement due to high unemployment and competition for jobs and this is stronger for the self-employed
  • Family relationships: deteriorated, no time for family, pressure from work, inability to spend money on travel, shopping & entertainment, inability to live on their own
  • Pressure on work relationships: competition for work
Conclusions

• The crisis has affected not just individuals but also relationships at home and at work among professional workers.

• This has potential implications for subordinates and clients.