

TRADE UNION INTERVENTIONS IN WORK LIFE BALANCE

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INTRODUCTION

- * Two sectors: Print Media (NUJ) and Multiple Retail Grocery (USDAW and TGWU)
- * Qualitative method-46 semi-structured interviews with union representatives
- * Historic Data -2006/7 – pre- recession but Print Media already in recession
- * Literature positioning- union renewal, unionized workplaces associated with wlb policies, empty shell theory (Hoque and Noon 2004), impact of gender of union officials and membership.

PRINT MEDIA

- * Defined problem as working hours and upward pressure because of sector recession
- * Union pressure on staffing levels, legal intervention on stress related cases
- * Limited strategic profile and capacity/ firefighting
- * Flexibility had little role in union agenda sectoral culture seen as male dominated by women respondents- only option for women to go freelance

MULTIPLE RETAIL GROCERY I

- * Defined problem as shift flexibility and leave
- * Legislation and national collective agreements
- * Higher level of strategic profile and capacity on issue
– more resources, composition of membership/
officials/ reps., political levers
- * Also, in a difficult sector, progress possible, element
of mutual gains with employers.

MULTIPLE RETAIL GROCERY II

- * Slippage from national agreement to store practice
- * Line managers under pressure and, in turn, pressurize
- * Inconsistency of corporate approach and buy in e.g. Sainsbury's lean and mean campaign
- * Union member reticence
- * Need for union to lead on the campaign and rise membership awareness, police agreements, organizing emphasis (not only in terms of recruitment) .

CONCLUSIONS I

- * Major differences between unions in terms of definition of problem, strategic importance given, strategies adopted
- * Relatively narrow definitions of work life balance, reflecting national flexibility discourse – little evidence for re-organization of work agenda – greater comfort dealing with benefit/leave type claims
- * Importance of structural variables in explaining differences – sector/ market context, gender, power, nature of work organization

CONCLUSIONS II

- * Space/scope existed for union intervention/ limits of work life as an area for integrative bargaining/mutual gains
- * Lack of corporate coherence in retailing on WLB – limits of HR function, strategic and negative role of line managers.

RECESSION RELATED REFLECTIONS I

- * Sectoral /market context always important- not only during recession e.g. economic conditions in the retail sector - Williamson (2012),
- * Likelihood of minimalist/narrow wlb focus - in terms of staffing levels/ hours of work
- * Increasing problems of take up/ application because fears of career/job security implications
- * Work intensity increase since 2006 (2012 Skills and Employment Survey, Felstead, Gallie, Green and Inanc)- need for stronger focus on work itself- available resources/ working methods

RECESSION RELATED REFLECTIONS II

- * Change of employer discourse - Agile Working.
- * Definition of workforce agility (Agile Future Forum ,2013)
- * 'Flexibility has largely been positioned as an employee benefit rather than a benefit to business. Most companies' approach to agility sits in the employee value proposition space. It is rare for companies to take a business-focused approach to assess the business value of an agile workforce, and to use that assessment to define agile working that works for the businesses as well as for employees.
- * - Time: when do they work (eg part-time working; variable hours)
- * - Location: where do they work (eg multiple sites; working from home)
- * - Role: what do they do (eg multi-skilling)
- * - Who is employed eg direct employment or via contractors'.

PAPERS

- * Mike Rigby and Fiona O'Brien-Smith (2010)– Trade Union Interventions in Work Life Balance, *Work, Employment and Society*, 24,2,203-220
- * Fiona O'Brien-Smith and Mike Rigby (2010)-The work–life balance strategies of USDAW: mobilising collective voice, *Industrial Relations Journal*, 41,3,206-217