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.
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
* 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.
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).
**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
\* 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’.
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