a **working families** publication

Tomorrow's World

Perspectives on work and family life in the future

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Contents

Introduction

This collection of essays comes from a broad range of people: academics, writers and thinkers, campaigners, politicians and employers.

As they predict how work and family life will combine in the future, they examine the present from different perspectives. Yet as Duncan Fisher observes in his essay, "we are all bound together". This is true of this collection. You cannot examine child poverty, for example, without referring to childcare. And you cannot look at childcare without thinking about employment policies. And so it goes, with each essay resonating with others in the collection to build up an interconnected understanding of the present and a tangible vision of what work could be like in the future. It is encouraging that there is an affinity in this collection which was not sought, but which emerged as the contributions came in. People are coming together from different places to move in the same direction.

There are a few themes which recur through the collection, which form the central pillars around which a new relationship between work and family life in the future might be built. These are discussed below.

Work and life

How important is work to us now, and what is its place in relation to family and community life? These questions play out in all the essays in different ways, and some challenge us to directly address the issue. Have we got the balance right, or do we need to fundamentally rethink the relationship? Sue Lewis and Rhona Rapoport propose *"Shifting from 'how can we enhance work-life balance?' to 'how can we enhance fulfilment, happiness and social justice?'"* Such a shift will require enormous effort, not least because a change in thinking about work itself could lead us away from the present conflicts between work and 'non-work', to instead a real positive relationship, where one does not dominate the other. Certainly some essayists observe that culture and legislation see work in the ascendency at the moment. Is this really the right balance? As Richard Reeves asks: *"do we want economy-friendly families, or a family-friendly economy?"*.

The changing workforce

One thing that many essayists agree on is that the workforce of tomorrow is going to be different. Fathers, older workers, lone parents and carers are just some the groups who are looking for change today, and who will certainly shape tomorrow.

Some of these changes are demographic – with an ageing population (and the shortfall in pension funds) older workers will increasingly be participating in the workforce. Carers, too, will be a larger proportion of workers. Madeleine Starr points out the compelling figures – nine million will be carers in the future. So addressing carers' needs is not an option, but essential to continued economic success.

There are also social pressures which will change the workforce of the future. Fathers are increasingly visible in the work and family discussion, both at an employer level and at a policy one. As Duncan Fisher points out, there has been a long drift which has made it difficult for fathers: *"Men would take much more time off work in the UK if only their families could afford it. We are engineering men out of the home and women out of the workplace."* This is beginning to change,

although progress may be slow. The indications are that there will be stiff resistance to any legislative measures which offer men and women equal time out of the workplace for childcare, for example. Must we wait another generation for the young people, who claim to value work-life balance highly enough to make it a significant factor in their choice of career, to stick to their guns when they become employees and create the pressure for change? Or do we need more concerted policy pressure now, to change how we design and advertise jobs so that part time and flexible options become widely available?

Family and childcare

The central question of what place we should allow work to occupy, and what priority we should give it in our lives is addressed by some essayists. Penelope Leach observes that social change has huge implications for childcare and family life: *"The unsolved conundrum of child care … is that the needs of children have not changed but their societies have"*. For every adult to be an economic participant is the goal of much policy; people are encouraged to work. And of course, working is a necessity, if only to generate income, and work is, for most people, the best route out of poverty. But should it become the primary goal, or is a rebalancing called for? Is there room in the debate for child welfare that looks beyond poverty goals? And what will be the outcomes for the next generation if we focus exclusively on income poverty, at the expense of time poverty within the family? Joan Bakewell identifies a future where these questions can be answered by embracing and preparing for the ageing of the population which is already underway. Older workers will often be grandparents; is it not possible, she asks, for their own working and caring to be combined in such a way that extended family networks of care are possible?

Employers

The essays from employers here are interesting because we can see in them an understanding of the journey that they will make in the future. What they have recognized is that the need to engage and move with the changing lives of their employees is vital. Working with the grain of employees' aspirations, family circumstances and changing cultural expectations is how they see themselves in the future. It is surely employers who are preparing for the future now who will be most successful. As Cilla Snowball points out about the new generation of workers: *"Their comfort with change and natural expectation of choice also means that if you really get it wrong, they are ready to walk away from you much faster than previous generations, who grew up in the old job for life tradition."* It will be those companies who really engage with and understand their employees who will be the best equipped to prosper in an economy where, increasingly, your people are your advantage. This is not to say that it's going to be easy. The huge weight of employment culture and practice, built up over generations, will make progress to a more balanced society, where work and family are more naturally integrated, difficult. But, by looking at the changes over the last 30 years we can clearly observe that development is possible.

Encouragingly, this collection contains a wealth of positive ideas about how we can get to a better balanced, more inclusive, healthier and more fulfilled way of living and working in the future. This is important, as to concentrate on the detail of the difficulties and obstacles of combining work and family would simply rehearse arguments about life today. Our contributers have lifted their eyes to scan the horizon. Their essays, taken together, show that the future of work can evolve to satisfy our aspirations, social, familial and economic. Employers and policy makers will be interested in these, of course, but there is also much here for anyone interested in the debate about family life, working life and their wider place in our society.

Working Families would like to thank all the people who generously contributed an essay for this collection.

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Older workers and the future of work

Dame Joan Bakewell is a writer, broadcaster and advisor to the government on older people

Once everyone worked: in peasant communities they still do. But along came progress and the division of labour, and as centuries rolled by man had things called jobs with financial rewards and women worked at home and reared children without pay. The situation couldn't last. We're living with the attempt to climb out of this straitjacket of expectations.

In the clattering spinning and weaving mills of 19th century Lancashire there were as many women working as men. Indeed women were among the most active and vociferous of trade unionists, demanding better conditions and hours. Against this background it's not perhaps surprising that the ideal of family life was thought to be a man who could earn enough to allow his child-bearing wife – and they bore many children in those days – to live at home and care for the family. At the turn of the 20th century wage negotiations spoke of something called 'a family wage.' It seemed what we were all aiming for. It was into this background that I was born.

It turned out not to be ideal: by the 1950s in Britain, a generation of wives and mothers, keeping house for men working 8am to 6pm, found their lives intolerable. Some of them were highly educated, many of them were intelligent. The smiling happy housewife of post war advertising proved an illusion. There was a worrying boom in tranquilisers. Women wanted, and insisted they must have work outside the house, and they have been insisting ever since. What's more their demands, coinciding with the consumer boom, convinced aspiring couples that they couldn't live without two incomes. This is now the new ideal.

But neither social nor legal arrangements have kept up. Provision for childcare and legal entitlement to equal pay are both issues where women still feel legitimately aggrieved. There has been a revolution, driven by women, to change family life. Fathers have, as a consequence, come closer to their children, sharing the care of babies, playing with toddlers, taking on cooking and shopping and in the process mellowing that assertive, driven maleness that formerly made the sexes so remote from each other. Things have improved domestically. But when it comes to the support systems that today's families need, there seems to be only a haphazard mix of child carers, nurseries, private nannies, and increasingly the fit and able grandmothers who are living longer and becoming a major prop of the working family.

I give this long historical background simply to show there is no ideal arrangement, that working families have accommodated themselves to the needs of the time, the changing social patterns and economic expectations. There is no ideal arrangement, only changing ways of dealing with the world of work and home. Today we are facing a major new development that will affect all of us.

We are living longer and our population is ageing. This older population will place a huge financial burden on a society organised as ours is at present, so things will have to change. We cannot have a large segment of the population simply not working and living off the rest. The old will have to work longer. This means the default retirement age will have to go and we ourselves, allowing for our health and attitude, will determine when we retire. Work arrangements will have to be amended to accommodate the old, who tire more easily and don't have the up-to-the minute skills that will be needed. For both reasons, the old will need to take more lowly jobs than they might have been used to. (No longer headmaster, perhaps, but now a part-time teaching assistant.) In return older workers will work flexible hours, part-time and perhaps fewer days per week. All this will need to happen to maximise the wellbeing of society. Employers will need to be dragged kicking and screaming towards the new realities.

There are, in fact, benefits all round. Working people can look forward to a longer working life, and perhaps be able to accommodate in their working lifespan some time off to be with growing children at the right time. Certainly by the time children have grown and flown, older people can resume their working lives. Again grandparents, already a crucial part of childcare, will have the chance to be integrated back into the family as carers and loving advisers. In turn, the family will be able to offer care and support when for them work is no longer possible.

All this is highly idealistic. But we have to start somewhere to confront how working families need to change to deal with demographics and the continuing developments of medicine. The old themselves are already aware of the looming crisis. Younger people, in their prime, working full tilt at careers and jobs while juggling with family commitments, need to recognise that a new change is on the way, one they can benefit from. They must look to the old!

Work-life balance – in search of the business benefits

Stephen Bevan, Managing Director, The Work Foundation

Work, paid and unpaid, has always been an integral part of peoples' lives. Yet over the past thirty years, the way in which work and life outside work fit together has altered dramatically.

Changing social conventions and inexorably shifting demographics have changed our workplaces and the work that we do. The workforce is now older, more female, more diverse, and more highly skilled than at any time in the past. Moreover the nature of the work we do has shifted, leaving the UK with a smaller (though still important) manufacturing sector, a burgeoning service sector, and particular growth in "knowledge" industries such as information technology or legal services, highly skilled jobs in all industries and lower skilled jobs in some parts of the service sector. When, where and how we work has changed too, in part driven by technological developments but also by greater competition between organisations bidding for the custom of more informed and affluent consumers. Work has, in many ways, already been transformed. And yet…a closer look demonstrates that the world of work is not as different from the 1970s as it may at first appear.

Despite intensifying competition, rapid technological advances and changing perceptions about gender roles, many things have stayed the same. There may be more women in the workplace, but most of the senior roles still belong to men. In theory technology enables us to work more effectively and productively, but we still work long hours – and there's a continuing productivity gap between the UK and other G8 countries. We may have managers who are more diverse in gender, age and skills, but all too often they still seem to default to the old work equation of *long hours = commitment = success*. For every progressive workplace, there is one that continues to do things 'as they have always been done', losing or under-utilising skills. These organisations have failed to realise the opportunities to work more flexibly and make more sophisticated choices about *how* work is organised, *when* work takes place and *where* jobs are done.

Changing Expectations

Whether there are mutual benefits to be gained from adopting more progressive ways of organising work depends on our ability to match the changing expectations of a complex array of stakeholders. Some of the shifts in expectations in the past thirty years have included:

Consumer Demand: We are becoming more demanding consumers, willing to switch brand loyalty if an organisation can offer a product or service that is more tailored to our needs, cheaper or delivered at a more convenient time. Our desire for consumption and 'keeping up with the Joneses' seems to be partly fuelling the collective reluctance to get off the treadmill and work fewer hours, and that until this wider attitude change happens, it is going to be difficult to transform working patterns.

Individualisation: The decline of collective institutions and the increased emphasis on individuals being able to make 'choices' that express their individuality has made it more difficult to have a collective debate about issues such as balancing paid work and other interests. An example of this in practice is the increased desire for bespoke contracts. Consumption is also becoming an increasingly popular way for individuals to express their individuality, by purchasing products or services that affiliate them with a particular identity.

Importance of paid work: Paid work has become an

important source of identity for many individuals, partly because many enjoy their work and derive satisfaction from it, and partly because it takes up so much of people's time. Those who care for children at home can report feeling "overlooked" because of the emphasis on the question "what do you do?" in social circles.

Importance of 'Work-life Balance': Despite the importance of paid work, more and more people are expressing a desire to have a balance between paid work and other activities. A Work Foundation survey found that nearly three-quarters of full-time workers want to spend more time with their family and that this includes those without children, with nearly two-thirds of those without children agreeing with this statement.

People would like to work more flexibly: People want flexibility for different reasons – from parenting, caring for older relatives, studying, reducing hours around retirement, to work in the community and for wider interests. The demand for flexibility is likely to grow with 60% of people supporting the extension of the right to request flexible working to all employees. Half of all adults, including a higher proportion of men than women, said they would like to work more flexibly . People want flexibility – or sovereignty – over both time and space. They do not want fixed hours but instead express a preference for choosing which hours they work as long as they could ensure the job was done. Lack of flexibility reduces the available workforce. The EOC found that 6.5 million people are 'leaking away' from the workplace: 4.8 million are not fully using their skills and experience at work and say they would have made different job choices if flexible working had been available. A further 1.7 million people out of work say that flexible working would encourage them back into employment.

Expectations vary through the lifecycle: Research also shows that expectations about paid work and the rest of life tend to vary at different times in people's lives. Younger workers tend to want *either* part-time and reduced hours to combine work and study *or* exciting, creative, interesting jobs and they care a lot about career progression and personal development. Older workers, those aged over 55, see themselves as working into their 60s, many of them full-time. This may be as much out of necessity to avoid impoverishment as out of choice. Older workers are less likely to become unemployed than younger workers but, if they do, they take longer to return to work and are more likely to leave the labour force for good. Disabled workers, experiencing high unemployment and significant barriers to entering employment including discrimination, may *either* want to find a route to entry, with expectations about flexibility being secondary *or*, as they find themselves underemployed, may be seeking better work, measured by flexibility, progression, skill development. Parents, particularly fathers, may want to spend more time with their children, carers want to be able to combine work and caring responsibilities and older workers may want more control over how and when they retire. This means that employers need to deal with an increasingly diverse range of expectations from the labour market.

Changing views about families: An EOC survey found that nearly three-quarters of female respondents agreed that the need to care for children had affected their work choices. Views on how families work have also changed as more women enter the labour market. Not only are both parents spending more time with their children but men in particular are taking on greater responsibilities. Seven out of ten dads would like to be more involved in childcare. This has created a debate about men and access to flexibility, with research suggesting that men feel unable to talk about their desire to spend more time with their families and feel less able to ask for flexibility. Six in ten fathers are concerned about spending enough time with their family.

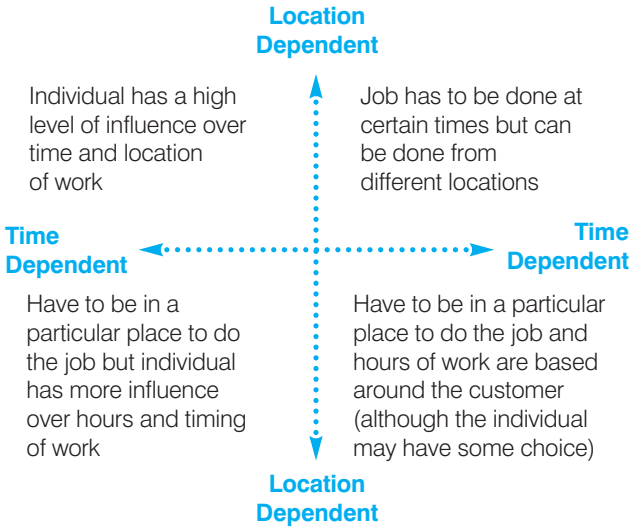
These expectations affect the relationship between employer and employee and the way in which people manage the conditions of work under which they will thrive and be productive. As they change, they become important considerations for organisations seeking to implement a model of work that responds both to their customers and to the workers they want to recruit and retain.

Of course, not all jobs are equally able to accommodate flexibility – and it is important to acknowledge this as there is perhaps too much 'flexibility evangelism' which argues that all kinds of work are equally open to change. The Work Foundation has identified two important dimensions of work which will condition the extent to which jobs are able to be adapted or reshaped to allow greater flexibility to be embraced. In Figure 1, below, the interaction between time and location dependency are illustrated.

Our experience is that, by talking to organisations and managers who struggle to embrace the use of flexible working practices, this kind of framework can help them identify which kinds of changes and adaptations they can

Figure 1

Time and Location Dependency in Flexible Working



Source: The Work Foundation, 2009

make while still keeping the business imperatives centre-stage. Despite this, there is still much to do to convince employers to make anything other than cosmetic changes.

Where are employers now?

In research for the Equal Opportunities Commission, The Work Foundation conducted interviews and workshops with groups of employers. These employers tend to identify themselves as being at different points in the journey towards 'transforming work' towards greater flexibility. We identified three staging posts:

Yet To Adapt

"Every employer I've talked to knows it [flexibility] is an issue but it's a question of having the willpower to change it."

Employers who identified themselves as not changing tended to argue that the business drivers were not sufficiently strong to catalyse action, or that there were pressing business issues demanding more flexibility, but a lack of understanding amongst those at the most senior levels of management.

Changing their Model of Work

"Use of flexible working has increased but there is a less than ideal understanding of how to use this effectively."

Most businesses we spoke to argued that they had started to transform their model of work through the introduction of flexible working policies. However, many commented that it was because they had not also made changes to other aspects of the model of work – performance management, work organisation, job design etc – that they felt they were not making the most of flexible working, either for individuals or the business. Some were also concerned that this could lead to retrenchment unless there was a better understanding of the benefits of flexible working and how to realise them.

"Management by objectives – it's not when you're here but what and when you accomplish."

Only a small number of businesses identified themselves as being at the point of transforming work, although many said this is their aspiration. For those businesses that are transforming work, the reasons tend to vary – reducing cost, responding to customers, recruiting/retaining knowledge workers – but the common theme is that they all had a business reason for changing ways of working, and that they all changed their model of work overall, and did not just introduce a few flexible working policies.

All of the organisations we spoke to were clear that their model of work was changed (or not) because something happened to get the organisation thinking about their model of work. The precise reason varied – a desire to recruit/retain more staff; a desire to respond to customers; a need to manage costs – but reorganising work was clearly part of the response.

Mainstreaming Flexibility

We have known for many years that enabling employees with a greater degree of flexibility can bring benefits such as lower absence, improved retention, better quality and continuity of customer service, greater employee commitment and an enhanced employer 'brand' . Yet, too often, organisations who offer flexible options make it hard for employees to take them up – either because they place (implicit) pressure on staff to work long hours or equate the use of these flexibilities as a downgrading of the employee's commitment or ambition. Career 'death' can result.

What we need is for flexibility to be part of the mainstream of organisational life. Of course, these practices must go with the grain of business, but to claim that flexibility of working practices and business success are mutually incompatible is surely as outdated a position as creationism.

Flexibility and agility are critical qualities which businesses need to respond to the often fickle needs of customers and many employers pride themselves on their ability to adapt seamlessly to changes in deadlines, locations and time-frames, especially if failure to do so risks losing out to a competitor. Mainstreaming flexibility – and practices which enhance the work-life balance of employees – requires the same outlook. In a post-recession economy, as competition in both consumer and labour markets increase, businesses which are able to blend both approaches to flexibility will be the ones which thrive.

Success and family life

Alain de Botton is a writer of books that have been described as a 'philosophy of everyday life'

One of the few ambitions shared by politicians across the party-political spectrum is that of creating a fully meritocratic society, that is, a society in which all those who make it to the top do so only because of their own talents and abilities (rather than thanks to unfair privilege: upper-class parents, a friendship with the boss, etc.). Throughout the western world, all governments have, since about the middle of the eighteenth century, had the common goal of trying to create a hierarchy based on actual ability, replacing posh, chinless halfwits with the meritorious, wherever they may be found and whatever age, colour or gender they might be.

This meritocratic ideal has brought opportunity to millions. Gifted and intelligent individuals who for centuries were held down within an immobile, caste-like hierarchy, are now free to express their talents on a more or less level playing field. We have largely turned the page on a western world that was once filled with rulers who were too sick or stupid to govern, lords who couldn't manage their estates, commanders who didn't understand the principles of battle, peasants who were brighter than their masters and maids who knew more than their mistresses. No longer is background an impassable obstacle to advancement. An element of justice has finally entered into the distribution of rewards.

But there is, inevitably, a darker side to the idea of meritocracy: for if we truly believe that we've created (or could even one day create) a world where the successful truly merited all their success, it necessarily follows that we have to hold the failures exclusively responsible for their failures. In a meritocratic age, an element of justice enters into the distribution of wealth, *but also of poverty*. Low status comes to seem not merely regrettable, but also deserved.

Of course, succeeding financially (without inheritance or contacts) in an economic meritocracy endows individuals with an element of personal validation that the nobleman of old, who had been given his money and his castle by his father, had never been able to feel. But, at the same time, financial failure has become associated with a sense of shame that the peasant of old, denied all chances in life, had also thankfully been spared. The question of why, if one is in any way good, clever or able, one is still poor becomes infinitely more acute and painful for the unsuccessful to have to answer (to themselves and others) in a new meritocratic age.

My belief is that a lot of the anxiety people experience around work – and the reason why they sacrifice family for work – is because they are engaged in the painful pursuit of status as opposed to simply money. We worry a lot whenever we are in danger of failing to conform to the ideals of success laid down by our society. We worry that we may be stripped of dignity and respect, we worry that we are currently occupying too modest a rung or are about to fall to a lower one. We worry that we will, out of ear-shot, be referred to as a loser. It's a lonely feeling. Like confessing to envy, it can be socially imprudent to reveal the extent of our concerns and, therefore, evidence of the inner drama is uncommon, limited usually to a preoccupied gaze, a brittle smile or an over-extended pause after news of a good friend's success. We might not worry so much if status were not so hard to achieve and even harder to maintain over a lifetime. Except in societies where it is fixed at birth and our veins flow with noble blood, our position hangs on what we can make of ourselves; and we may fail in the enterprise due to stupidity or an absence of self-knowledge, macro-economics or malevolence. And from failure will flow humiliation: a corroding awareness that we have been unable to convince the world of our value and

are henceforth condemned to consider the successful with bitterness and ourselves with shame.

Any solution for anxieties about status has to begin with the reminder that there can by definition never be a truly meritocratic system, because the 'merit' of an individual is far too complex and subtle a thing to be determined by salary or rank. Those who have faith in meritocracy are essentially subscribing to an insane, and certainly arrogant assumption that ordinary humans (employers, teachers, journalists who draw up lists of who is 'in' and 'out') can handily take over the solemn responsibilities that past ages more wisely left in the hands of a God who, helped along by the angels, was due to weigh the souls of each person on the Day of Judgement.

To free ourselves from some of the more punishing side-effects of a meritocratic worldview, it would be wise to cease investing with moral connotations something as haphazardly distributed as jobs and money will always inevitably be – and to retain a little of the old-fashioned, modest belief in a distinction between what someone earns and what their souls are like.

We have to remember another old lesson, namely that family life is the primary defence against the snobbish judgements of the world. We need family as a way of escaping from snobbery. The word 'snobbery' came into use for the first time in England during the 1820s. It was said to have derived from the habit of many Oxford and Cambridge colleges of writing *sine nobilitate* (without nobility) or 's.nob' next to the names of ordinary students on examination lists in order to distinguish them from their aristocratic peers.

In the word's earliest days, a snob was taken to mean someone without high status, but it quickly assumed its modern and almost diametrically opposed meaning: someone offended by a lack of high status in others, a person who believes in a flawless equation between high social rank and human worth.

Though traditionally the rank that snobs were most interested in was the aristocracy, the identification of snobbery with an enthusiasm for old world manners, blazers, hunting and gentlemen's clubs hardly captures the diversity of the phenomenon. It lets too many off the hook. Snobs can through history be found ingratiating themselves with any number of prominent groups – soldiers (Sparta, 400 BC), bishops (Rome, 1500), poets (Weimar, 1815), farmers (China, 1967), film stars (Hollywood, 2004) – for the primary interest of snobs is power, in whatever form it may come (pin-stripe suits or torn jeans), and as the distribution of power changes, so, naturally and immediately, will the objects of their admiration.

The company of the snobbish has the power to sadden and unnerve because we sense how little of who we are deep down – that is, how little of who we are outside of our status – will be able to govern their behaviour towards us. We may be endowed with the wisdom of Solomon and have the resourcefulness and intelligence of Odysseus, but if we are unable to wield socially recognized badges of our qualities, our existence will remain a matter of raw indifference to them.

This conditional attention pains us because our earliest memory of love is of being cared for in a naked, impoverished condition. Babies cannot, by definition, repay their carers with worldly rewards. Insofar as they are loved and looked after, it is therefore for who they are, identity understood in its barest, most stripped-down state. They are loved for, or in spite of, their uncontrolled, howling and stubborn characters.

Only as we mature does affection begin to depend on achievement: being polite, succeeding at school and later, acquiring rank and prestige. Such efforts may attract the interest of others, but the underlying emotional craving is not so much to dazzle because of our deeds as to recapture the tenor of the bountiful, indiscriminate petting we once received in return for arranging wooden bricks on the kitchen floor, for having a soft plump body and wide trusting eyes.

It's a little of this that we can re-find in family life as adults – and for this reason (if not for many others too), we should take care always to keep a balance between work and family.

Organising for a better future

Kay Carberry is Assistant General Secretary of the TUC

In 2009 the pressures on working families have intensified. New anxieties now accompany the constant struggle to reconcile the conflicting demands on people's waking hours – work time and family time. Unemployment is higher than at any time since 1996, and working mothers are not immune. With record numbers of women now in the labour market, the rise in women's unemployment is closer to the rise in unemployment among men than in previous recessions. Economists will argue about the precise moment the economy stops being in recession, but unemployment is likely to carry on growing throughout 2010, and it could be three years before it falls to pre-recession levels.

Against a background of joblessness, layoffs, reduced hours and pay freezes, the drive towards "better work" for everyone, particularly parents and carers, could easily stall. Surely any job is better than no job?

Only the most short-sighted employers are taking this approach. While unions are agreeing temporary measures to preserve jobs, the best employers recognise that effective recovery will depend on their maintaining high productivity, boosting skills and building their reputation, which in turn will depend on their ability to recruit, retain and motivate staff. Abandoning work-life balance, better work and employees' well-being in the downturn is self-defeating.

The well-evidenced benefits to employers and employees of flexible working and other forms of parental support are no less apparent in a recession. Nor have the documented disadvantages of excessive working hours become irrelevant – the negative impact of long hours on families and on individuals' health still affects employees' productivity, motivation and loyalty. Government work-life balance employer surveys show employers reporting positive effects of flexible working on labour turnover and retention, on rates of absenteeism and on motivation. Maintaining these levels of commitment during difficult times will be as important to employers as maintaining skills, if they want to be best placed to take advantage when recession recedes.

The TUC is arguing for a post-recession labour market that is both fairer and more economically productive. Naturally the focus now is on maintaining jobs and skills, and on policies to help unemployed people back to work. This has to be the priority. But dealing with the downturn must not divert us from the uncompleted job of supporting families. Working practices need to change. This means not only completing the next phase of parental support, including extended paternity leave and more flexible parental leave to accommodate the changing realities of family life. We also need to break down the divide between workers without caring responsibilities and those who do have children or other dependents to consider – workers who are often either resented or grudgingly given special concessions.

For a start, we should extend the right to request flexible working to all, as well as taking a fresh look at ways to deal with Britain's excessive working hours. The recession has reduced the number of people working long hours – with 17.9 per cent of employees reporting that they usually worked more than 45 hours a week in January 2009 compared with 19.9 per cent a year earlier. The downturn has also brought more flexible working, as employers and employees look for alternatives to redundancies. A side-effect of bad times therefore may be to show the benefits of shorter hours and flexibility, so that once the recovery is under way employers will see that sticking to new ways of organising work is in their best interests.

As we look to the upturn, the government should be doing more to promote good quality work. A mountain of evidence shows the direct link between "good work" and high performance – the components of good work from the employees' point of view including fair reward, challenge, the chance to develop skills, having a say in the workplace and having control over work time and organisation. These matters are priorities for unions. They are as important to cleaners and shop assistants as they are to office workers and managers, and are the key to reducing the pressure on working families. At the same time, all the autonomy and control in the world won't help families struggling to make ends meet. Fifty-nine percent of poor children have one or more parents in work. The government will not meet

its child poverty targets without urgent action on low pay, the gender pay gap and the exploitation of workers at the bottom of the labour market.

Powerful economic forces, technological change and globalisation have already transformed work and the pace of change will only increase. Work will remain central to most people's lives, either because they are in jobs or dependent on someone in paid work. It is not easy to find anything good to say about a recession that has brought so much misery, but it has brought into focus some fundamental questions about the way we organise work and our economy. The high productivity economy and prosperous society we want to see after the recession will depend in large measure on good work done by people who are living good lives.

Modern times, flexible families

Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

For both men and women "having it all" can be a tough balancing act. The way that many mothers and fathers manage the demands of work and home is phenomenally impressive. But breezing up the career ladder while raising healthy, happy children isn't simply all in a day's work. More often it is hugely challenging, with sacrifices regularly needing to be made.

And in many families when push comes to shove it's still women who are automatically expected to bring up the children, while men are counted on to bring home the bacon. Women lose out at work, and men lose out at home. Children – who benefit from spending time with both parents – lose out full stop. Especially now that Britons put in more hours at work than almost anywhere else in Europe.

But despite most fathers taking time off when their children are born, many feel they would be emasculated if they asked their bosses for more flexible work arrangements once they are back. The culture of presenteeism puts pressure on them to feel their place is in the office, not the home. And although a lot of men say they would like to play a more hands-on role with their children, many also say they feel they're behaving wrongly when they put their home life ahead of their job. Westminster is just as bad. I've seen it myself, as a father whose decision to take the two weeks available for paternity leave was frequently met with raised eyebrows.

So although progress has been made in terms of more men wanting to have a greater presence at home when their children are young, it shouldn't be overstated. It's true that on average men spend more time with their children than they did a generation ago. But what was 15 minutes a day in the 1970s is still only two hours now.

We need a fundamental shift in the way we understand the roles of men and women. They need to be able to split their time in whatever way suits their family best. There is no single carbon copy for what that can and should mean. But wherever we can we need to give families the choices and opportunities to balance work and home in the way they need to.

That's why my party want to radically overhaul maternity and paternity leave. For too long the gendered labour divide has been entrenched by giving men a measly two weeks while women were given up to a year. Parental leave needs to be divvied up much more evenly, but the Government's new plans don't go far enough, and although paternity leave will be extended it will be at the expense of the time mothers can take off.

It would be much better to give mothers and fathers an interchangeable eighteen months. No parent should be able to take more than a year, avoiding the trap of mothers taking the full allowance and spending even more time away from work. Plus the leave should be offered on a use-it-or-lose-it-basis to encourage both parents to take it up. For single parents, leave should be paid for the full year and a half, even if they return to work after twelve months, in order to help with childcare costs.

Families across the country will tell you that finding reliable, affordable childcare that fits around work can be a nightmare. It's one of the reasons so many women have to

downgrade their job once they have children. Many women choose to work part-time, where the pay is often lower and career prospects are less promising. So after the eighteen months covered by parental leave have passed we would also provide all families with twenty hours a week of free, quality childcare until the child is five.

Our plans give modern families the flexibility they need. We've come up with them by listening to parents. It sounds so simple, but until now that just isn't how things have been done. We need to support working families in a way that explodes stereotypes rather than reinforcing them. That means giving men more freedom to stay at home with their children and women more opportunities to go to work if that's what suits them. I believe it's right that families decide what's best for them. It's better for mothers, it's better for fathers, and ultimately it's better for their children too.

Work-life balance: today's dilemma

working families Pioneer

Professor Cary L. Cooper CBE, Distinguished Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health

Even as far back as 1851, John Ruskin suggested that "in order the people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: they must be fit for it, they must not do too much of it, and they must have a sense of success in it." From the industrial revolution until the middle of the 20th century, most people worked extraordinarily long hours, and in many cases in unpleasant and dangerous working environments. They certainly did not get the balance that Ruskin felt essential for good quality of life. Post-Second World War, with the strength of the trade union movement and the increasing awareness of occupational health and safety, the movement toward a more regularised working week took hold in many developed countries. Working practices and hours of work became more stabilised, although there were still some noticeable differences between sectors, levels within organisations and between different socio-economic groups. The 1950s and '60s were still dominated by the male breadwinner, with many women in unpaid housework or in jobs but not careers! The 1970s were about industrial relations strife, but the '80s were the forerunner decade that laid the foundations to the great 'work-life balance' debate.

The Enterprise Culture of the 1980s, and the Globalisation or Americanisation of the UK and the developed world in the '90s (which continues today) has led to massive change in the workplace, as we enter Industrial Revolution Mark II. Jobs are no longer for life; working hours are long; human capital is 'mean and lean'; new technology has created the 24-7 society; rigorous performance indicators abound. The psychological contract between employee and employer is under strain (e.g. outsourcing, short term contracts), with the individual employee considered by many employers as a necessary but 'disposable' asset. This is all taking place in the context of a major social upheaval in family life, with two out of every three families being working families (or single working parents). In a long hours, 24-7 culture, with dual earner families the norm, the possibility of obtaining 'balance' is almost unattainable. In 2005, Working Families did a large scale UK study of working hours and found that 27% of men (and 15% of women) said they were contracted to work over 40 hour weeks, but 67% of men (and 54% of women) actually worked far *beyond* their contracted hours. And for those who consistently worked over 45 hours, they were significantly more stressed, and spent only minimal time with their children (less than one hour a night) and with their partners.

Do we really believe that a long hours culture, in a society where most families are working families, and the competitive pressures of the modern workplace are penal, is healthier for the family, the individual or the company? Do we really believe in the often-heard phrase that 'the most valuable resource we have is our human resource', or is this empty rhetoric or HR management speak? Do we really think that 60 or 70 hour working weeks are good for our businesses? Would you want a surgeon to be operating on you in the inevitable heart bypass operation in their 65th hour of the week, or a pilot to be flying you to a business meeting in the States in his/her 70th hour (if it was legal to do so)? Of course not. Why, then, do we have finance directors or marketing executives, or anybody for that matter in any senior role, consistently working long and unsocial hours under intensive conditions in central

office environments, with little time for their families and the other people in their lives that mean something to them, or for the community they live in (e.g. schools, local politics, charities). I thought we had entered the era of good corporate responsibility, where employers committed to a range of stakeholders (i.e. the community, their employees, the environment, etc.).

There are answers to this Industrial Revolution Mark II era: more flexible working arrangements and trust in the workplace, where our employees could work partly from home and partly from central work environments. Let's begin this new millennium by using new technology to our advantage, allowing people (where it is possible) to engage in flexi-place as well as flexi-time. We are basically now a service or knowledge based economy, which should enable us to use technology in such a way that we can meet our work, family and community demands, and still allow us to be productive. In the follow-up to the Working Families study, it was found that truly flexible working arrangements led not only to greater job satisfaction and less stress at work, but also to greater self-perceived productivity. There are many studies now emerging showing the same thing: that good flexible working arrangements can lead to a more productive workforce at a time when our productivity per worker in the UK is less than many of our competitors. Indeed in the government's Foresight programme on Mental Capital and Wellbeing (www.foresight.gov.uk), it was found that flexible working had a significantly positive 'benefit to cost' ratio, which now makes it not only a corporate social responsibility issue but also a bottom-line issue for businesses. But this requires greater 'trust' by employers, that if individuals are given more autonomy and flexibility, that they will honour their work commitments and deliver to the bottom line. It all depends on our view of man. If you treat people as disposable assets then you are unlikely to get them committed or motivated. If you nurture them, give them some autonomy and value them, you may be pleasantly surprised.

The challenge for senior management in the private and public sector in the future is to understand a basic truth about human behaviour, that developing and maintaining a 'feelgood' factor at work and in our economy generally is not just about 'bottom line' factors. It is, or should be in a civilized society, about quality of life issues as well, such as hours of work, family time, manageable workloads, control over one's career and a sense of job security. As Studs Terkel suggested in his acclaimed book Working, "Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash for astonishment rather than torpor, in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying".

It's not just about business

working families Pioneer

Duncan Fisher OBE, co-founder and former CEO of the Fatherhood Institute

Every time there is a debate about paternity leave, the business associations are wheeled onto the stage to say that if there is any increase in paternity leave, the sky will fall down. They did the same with maternity leave, and thankfully the sky is still up.

If you ask children what they want from their parents, they say one thing more than any other – more time. But they have no voice in this debate. Business has the stage, alone.

You have to give it to the business associations – they have been phenomenally successful. They have seen to it that we have the most imbalanced system of leave entitlements in the world: two weeks of leave for fathers and 39 weeks for mothers. Having lost the battle against maternity leave, they have ensured that the expectations on men to take time off work for family responsibilities can be set at zero – men are where they want them, completely to be depended upon not to compromise work for any extraneous issue such as caring for the next generation. Life is so much easier when you can tell by a person's gender whether they are likely to be a top tier committed worker or a second tier compromising worker. It simplifies considerably questions of recruitment and promotion.

And we all collude. In absolutely every media discussion about work-life balance at the moment, men's unremitting work is regarded as part of an immutable background for the difficult work-life choices and compromises that women

must make as they shoulder the sole responsibility of caring for children. We seem completely unable to look at the defining issue: the working patterns of *men*. And as we shy away from this, instead we try to regulate business and create new entitlements for women, to make their lives easier. Fair enough, but every time we do this, without looking at men at the same time, women become more expensive in the workplace relative to men, and we make things worse.

There are those who believe that expanding work choices for women is 'natural' and expanding work choices for men is 'social engineering'. I refer here to some sections of the media. These people base their argument on the idea that women want to look after children and men don't and so we should just let people make their own choices. This argument is false: men are not happy with work as every single study shows, and in every country where new work flexibilities are introduced and are affordable, their uptake by men is instant and substantial. Men would take much more time off work in the UK if only their families could afford it. We are engineering men out of the home and women out of the workplace.

The obsession with work in the UK is revolting. John Gray, the 21st century philosopher, puts it thus: *"Nothing is more alien to the present age than idleness. If we think of resting from our labours, it is only in order to return to them. In thinking so highly of work we are aberrant. Few other cultures have ever done so. For nearly all of history and all prehistory, work was an indignity. For the ancients, unending labour was the mark of a slave."*
(Gray's Anatomy, 2009).

As one father in Newcastle put it in an impromptu street interview recently: *"If you're not going to be there, if you're not going to give them hugs and kisses and look after them when they're ill, there's no point."*

Barack Obama wrote beautifully about the pressures of work for Fathers Day 2009 – see how he makes work the burden and care for his children the opportunity, the opposite of how work and caring responsibilities are usually presented. *"It is rarely easy. There are plenty of days of struggle and heartache when, despite our best efforts, we fail to live up to our responsibilities. I know I have been an imperfect father. I know I have made mistakes. I have lost count of all the times, over the years, when the demands of work have taken me from the duties of fatherhood. There were many days out on the campaign trail when I felt like my family was a million miles away, and I knew I was missing moments of my daughters' lives that I'd never get back. It is a loss I will never fully accept."*

What we have now is a victory of short-term economic interest over long-term economic interest, of business interests over the interests of children. The costs of this arrangement are the pushing of skilled and knowledgeable women in droves out of suitably skilled jobs, the squeezing of fathers out of precious time with their children, the stress and instability created within families when parents are forced apart down different paths against their desires. Recent research in the US and Sweden finds that families who share working and caring roles more equitably are happier on average, and families where fathers do more caring of their children are less likely to split up.

But things are changing, the tide is turning.

More and more companies are already responding to demand from employees. Businesses that depend on women, or that most need the kind of men that are now saying *"I want a life as well as work"*, or that are working internationally in countries that have balanced leave entitlements, are already far advanced in supporting their fathers and discouraging the emergence of a two-tier workforce.

The Equality & Human Rights Commission has sounded the trumpet call for gender equality. In its Working Better report this year it delivered a killer blow: *"New parental rights introduced over the past decade are well intentioned but entrench the unequal division of labour and caring between the sexes and work against gender equality."*

The Good Childhood Inquiry recently concluded that fathers are as important to children as mothers and pointed the finger at the pressures on parents not to be with their children.

And the man with the most important job in the world talks of his work leading him to fail in his responsibilities as a father and to lose irretrievable moments in the lives of his children.

Business associations beware – your time is up. But you will benefit in the end, along with all the rest of us. We are all bound together.

Business needs the space to breathe

David Frost, Director, British Chambers of Commerce

Since the second quarter of 2008, the British Chambers of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey (the largest business survey of its kind) has shown some of the lowest balances we have seen in employment expectations, investment and turnover and profitability predictions. The previous recessions have stripped out many inefficiencies so this time round, businesses are really trying to hold onto their staff, so far as is possible. It is against this background of economic stagnation that we have called for a three year moratorium on employment legislation, both at the domestic level and the EU.

Although we have consistently opposed the 'right to request flexible working' regulations as too administratively burdensome and costly on business, we firmly believe that there is a strong business case for flexible working. Our recent Workforce Survey showed that just over a third of firms had received flexible working requests. Yet the two-thirds of firms who have not received formal requests are likely to also offer flexible working, whether it be shift work, job-shares or more informal arrangements. For example, many smaller businesses are often happy to give their employees a later start here, an earlier finish there if they need it. This doesn't require a formal request, just a good working relationship between the manager and the employee.

During this recession, a lot of emphasis has been placed on the importance of businesses being able to retain employees and their skills for the upturn. We know that people who become long term unemployed find it very difficult to get back into the workplace and so it is in all parties' interests to help businesses retain staff. We have proposed that a short time working scheme, similar to the one used in the 1980s, should be adopted. However, flexible working is also a useful tool here. If employees wish to vary their working patterns at a time when demand is falling then this can be a useful cost-saving mechanism for businesses. Flexible working and/or reduced working hours should certainly be the first consideration before redundancies.

Going forward, our main concern is that those who drop out of the labour market should be able to find a way back in. Therefore, a totally different approach to the one seen in previous recessions is needed. Enterprise should be encouraged as a genuine career option by JobCentre Plus and other Government agencies. For those who have caring commitments or have other reasons to wish to work flexibly and/or from home, starting a new business is often the best option. Older workers need to be helped to retrain and given the confidence to start a new career. Our research shows employers are keen to utilise the experience of older workers and JobCentre Plus needs to give these workers special attention to help them back into employment.

What we need now is a period of simplification, consolidation and reflection on the employment laws already in place. The last ten years have seen an influx of employment legislation and employers are reaching saturation point. The implementation of the Agency Workers Directive and the Pensions Act 2008 will place huge costs on business over the next few years and beyond. This, combined with expected increases in National Insurance Contributions, will put businesses under immense pressure as the economy begins to recover. A moratorium on social legislation would help all the recent changes 'bed down' and give a much needed signal that the Government is serious in helping businesses retain their staff and stimulate economic growth.

New thinking for a better future

Kate Green, Chief Executive, Child Poverty Action Group

No one could deny that progress has been made in reducing child poverty over the past 10 years. Following then Prime Minister Tony Blair's pledge in 1999 to eradicate child poverty within a generation, 400,000 fewer children live in poverty today. That hasn't happened by accident: deliberate choices have brought about that reduction in child poverty, not as great or as quickly as campaigners hoped, but a significant achievement nonetheless.

Those policy choices have had the mantra "work is the best route out of poverty" at their heart. A plethora of policies designed to increase parental employment have been quite successful, especially for lone parents, yet while the present recession naturally raises considerable anxiety about rising unemployment, it remains the case that the UK's high child poverty rate sits alongside one of the highest employment rates in Europe, and most children in poverty have at least one parent in paid work. For those families, work has not proven to be a route out of poverty, and too often family time is sacrificed for inadequate financial reward.

Of course, most parents want to work to support their families, and many will tailor their employment arrangements and ambitions to suit their family circumstances. But those arrangements may not reflect a true choice for parents, and the impact on their children's wellbeing cannot be assumed. Parents (especially mothers) working part-time typically face lower hourly earnings. Especially in London, part-time work which parents might prefer is less likely to be financially viable – or even available. Flexible jobs which can be combined with family responsibilities too often turn out to be sub-prime stop-go jobs, the hours unsocial, the prospects poor. So-called family friendly working for many parents is in reality largely employer friendly, and parents pay dearly for the flexibility they need with lower pay, poorer quality jobs and further strain on family life.
Yet the alternative – bringing up a family while out of work – offers an even poorer deal. Parents who are unable to take paid work because of caring responsibilities are left to get by on income levels that have them struggling to afford the basics, as the safety net of tax credits and benefits is set too low to lift children above the poverty line.

How can this add up to a viable policy programme for eradicating child poverty, let alone a programme for supporting family life? Clearly a rethink is needed, yet the latest direction of policy, the broad welfare reform agenda that commands the support of all the main political parties, threatens to embed the very features that have failed the policy intent to date. More parents will be expected to be available for work and subject to work-related activity requirements – or face cuts in already meagre benefits if they don't comply. Pressure to take a job, regardless of its suitability or sustainability, will increase. An already over stretched Jobcentre Plus, coping – well, it must be said – with the influx of the newly unemployed, will have little time to offer high quality support for those further from the labour market. "Parking" looks all the more likely, while the recent budget with its measly 38 pence a week increase for children has done little to increase family incomes or lift children above the poverty line.

Yet this could be a time of opportunity: the coincidence of recession, an urge for welfare reform, and the introduction in Parliament of a Child Poverty Bill which proposes to enshrine the child poverty target in legislation, coupled with public anger at the unfairness that got us into the economic mess we're in and appetite for change, create the chance for long-range and imaginative thinking that develops truly family friendly policies – if the politicians are bold enough. For when the economic assumptions of the past half-century have been so thoroughly discredited, now is surely the time to rethink our vision of what kind of society we want to become. Securing the incomes of families in and out of work, through provision of an adequate safety net, and by helping parents to find decent well paid jobs that are sustainable for the long term, coupled with a right to support (including affordable childcare and access to training), would both eradicate child poverty and empower parents to make the choices that are in the best interests of their children. True welfare reform would have those ideas at its heart.

We know what children think about all this: they want their parents to be less stressed, have more time to spend with them, have the money to do things together as a family and to grow up to get good jobs themselves.

A reform programme which set those as its success criteria would amount to the best child-centred, family-friendly, recession-busting, fairness-promoting, economically sustainable, anti-poverty programme we could possibly create. A time of exceptional economic uncertainty is surely the time to think radically and with vision: now is the time to be bold.

Putting the family at the heart of Labour's agenda

working families Pioneer

Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP QC, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Leader of the House of Commons and Minister for Women and Equality

When I asked my first question to the Prime Minister, in 1982, it was about after-school clubs for working mothers in my constituency. In those days you could talk in Parliament about the money supply, motorways and the mines. But my question about my constituents' need for after-school clubs was greeted with derision not just from the Tory government benches, but from the Labour benches too.

Now, no-one questions the importance of after school-clubs and nurseries, as while the pressures on families has not diminished, the work of organisations like Working Families over the past three decades has helped ensure that family is at the centre of public policy. The increase in the number of women in the House of Commons also ensured that the family is at the heart of the work of the government. More women MPs not only changed the face of British politics, but changed the political agenda too.

Families are the framework of our lives, they matter to us as individuals – particularly when we are children but also as we get older. Families matter to our communities, the economy, and society as a whole. This Labour government has already built a strong foundation of support for families, but further progress is needed if all families are to be given real choices about their lives.

Labour's election victory in 1997 marked a watershed for families with more time off for parents, the National Minimum Wage, the new deal to help unemployed people back into work, massive investment in childcare, education and health services and a better deal for older people. Tax credits have transformed the financial landscape for families and currently around 450,000 low and middle income families are benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, with help towards childcare reaching the widest possible range of families.

Today family policy acknowledges that mothers have entered the workforce and fathers are set to play a bigger role at home. Mothers who work make a significant contribution to the family budget, while fathers' greater role in the daily care of their children strengthens the relationship to the advantage of both child and father. That is why as well as doubling maternity pay and extending paid maternity leave to 39 weeks, we introduced two week's paid paternity leave. We want to build on this to give fathers more opportunities to spend time with their children, and are consulting on how best to do this including the option of sharing paid leave.

Public policy for families will not be right unless families shape it. People often see precious little connection between their family and politics and often when politicians broach the subject, parents can feel judged. So we need to be careful and we need to listen. That is why the government needs to back up families and give them the right support so that they can make their own choices about how they want to combine looking after children, with keeping the job they need for income. We have already built a strong foundation of support for families through the right for parents with children under six to request flexible work. But children don't stop needing their parents' time when they reach their sixth birthday and as any parent knows, older children going through their teenage years need just as much support and guidance. That's why, in April this year, we changed the law to extend the right to request flexible working to the parents of children aged 16 and under.

Family policy is not just about parents and children; it is also about the older generation. Without the involvement of active grandparents, many families would not be able to cope. Families are multi-generational, which means not just grandparents helping with grandchildren, but younger families helping the older generation. As we look to the future for working families, the number of people over 85, the age group most likely to need care, is expected to double over the next 20 years. At the same time, women, who make up 70% of those in care-giving roles are going out to work more. So, just as the stay-at-home mother has become the working mother, the stay-at-home daughter – who might have been looking after the older parents – is now going out to work.

Supporting older family members later in life has been a key priority for Labour – whether through the work of the

Government in lifting a million pensioners out of poverty through the winter fuel allowance and investment in pensions or through providing access to services such as free TV licences for over 75s and free off peak bus travel for over 60s.

We know that supporting older family members will be a priority for more and more people in the future. Older relatives will need someone to pop in on them, or to do some shopping, and in most cases, will want a family member to help them; and relatives themselves will want to provide that assistance. That's why, just as we are backing up families with children, we are backing up families caring for elderly or disabled relatives.

In 2007, this Labour government extended the right to request flexible working to those who care for others, so they don't have to give up their jobs. Although the more than 90% of requests for flexible working by carers are granted, most people are not aware that carers have this right; so we are stepping up action to increase awareness about flexible working rights for carers. Family carers will also get additional protection in The Equality Bill, which is currently going through parliament. It will strengthen the law to protect carers from discrimination so that, for example, an employer could not refuse to promote a member of staff because she cares for an older relative. Last year we announced more respite care, more support and more financial help for Britain's growing army of family carers.

This Labour government has put families at the heart of its policy agenda over the last 12 years and this has resulted in significant progress of which we are proud. But the job is far from being done, because the issue of how people balance work and family life is not a trivial one. It is a major public policy issue today and one which will need even more serious consideration in the future as more women have children and especially as the population is ageing. Being a parent and caring for older relatives is the big issue for our age and a Labour government will continue to see childcare, family friendly and flexibility as fundamental to its policy agenda.

What work skills will we need in the future?

Claire Ighodaro CBE
Council Member of the Learning Skills Council and the Open University

Demographic shifts, globalisation of markets and climate change have been well charted as a background to the changing work skills requirements of the future. When considering the future of work, it can be tempting to imagine a very different landscape without paying attention to the journey by which we will get there. For example, many predict an increase in remote working, with employees scattered far and wide, using technology to virtually come together and work, rather than all collecting in a single office on a daily basis. But how this switch to remote working, and how the skills that individuals will need to make it practicable are achieved, are often glossed over, with an assumption that people will somehow just acquire the portfolio of skills which they will need.

Employers and government need to be forward looking – it's a leadership responsibility to ensure that people are able to develop the right skills. This isn't something that will remain static; people will need to develop their skills not only in formal education settings, but throughout their working lives. As the workplace changes, people will need to carry on learning and work itself will need to adapt to allow for new skills to be developed.

Specific skills such as handling information technology, essential for a modern economy, and future growth in the economy in areas such as low carbon and bioscience are identified in the government's strategic vision for Britain's post recession recovery – 'New Industry, New Jobs'. As the workplace changes, leadership skills will also be of increasing importance – in fact, people will need to become self-leaders as structured management arrangements reduce in significance and relationships become more interdependent. Team-working skills will be at a premium, and a collaborative approach will increasingly be a must-have. Much has been made of the rise of so called 'feminine' skills in the workplace, such as emotional intelli-

gence, empathy and relationship building. However, I believe this is better framed as a skill set which everyone is able to learn, and should not be thought of as a gender specific pool of attributes.

The workforce of the future will be more diverse but we can also treasure what has happened over the last 30 years. Today's workplace is a far more open one than it was in the 1970s. Comparing how much easier it is for women now to carve out a successful career while also having a family is instructive, although we are by no means there yet. Innovation and competitive pressures will continue to accelerate change in the workplace, challenging the existing cultures in organisations. Organisations wedded to command and control ways of operating will need to become more nimble.

It is certainly possible to predict that areas such as technological and communication skills will become more important. Organisations will need to think carefully about how they are equipping existing employees with new skills, and what attributes they will seek from new recruits for a changing workplace. But perhaps more importantly, it is the framing of skills development as an ongoing process throughout working life (paid and unpaid) which is the real message as the future unfolds before us.

Work, family and the dance towards a 'play ethic'

Pat Kane is author of *The Play Ethic: A Manifesto for a Different Way of Living*

I guess I won't be the only contributor to this volume who's writing this piece under the very same wobbly conditions of 'work-life balance' that is our chosen topic.

In my case, I'm getting to grips with this piece as the school holidays begin: I'm four days over what (I hope) was a soft deadline. My daughter's been getting out of school at 12.15pm the last couple of days (was that a surprise announcement? Yes!). So I've had a few frantic mornings trying to master the inbox of self-managed tasks that face the average cultural freelancer. At the very least, this lifestyle demands clarity and efficiency when you actually do sit down in front of your interface.

After years of good and bad experiences, I've realised that I'm happiest when I can devote my energies fully to either 'work' or 'life' – however unsatisfactory those terms are – with as little overlap between the two realms as possible. Meaning that when my daughter emerges from the school gates, or after-school club, all of my affections and attentions are hers. And the best way to ensure that psychic commitment is to ensure that the anxieties of one's project-driven life are actually – or if necessary, forcibly – abated.

The necessity of a calm and tranquil mind (and heart, if possible) in the face of one's children also comes from a somewhat bumpy personal road. Post separation eight years ago, my ex-wife and I made a binding pact to ensure that our children never had any sense of lacking access to either parent. We split our fortnight of care equally, weaving between each others' nearby households, allowing each other evenings and alternate weekends to sustain friendships and relationships (in different cities – Glasgow and London). But we've come together to ensure that none of our children ever returned to an empty house.

Both of us have our separate productive commitments. My children's mother is a well-established media editor, whose working week builds to a climax of long, intense days in a city-centre office as the weekly deadline approaches. I'm a largely self-determined writer, musician and consultant, who can be very flexible when I'm in my daughters' home town of Glasgow, but has a regular London routine (for work and new family), and occasional weeks-long stretches of touring or recording. I'm probably behind in my overall care hours, but I'm always keen to catch-up – and I'll be doing so over these school holidays.

The enabling conditions for all this are half personal and half technological. Tech-wise, texting and mobile calls (for last minute changes), social networks (for sharing family photos, keeping in touch with a student daughter), and synchronised digital calendars (which give us a picture of the weeks and months that allows for it all to be equitable

and manageable). Personally…well, a friendship and mutual respect – and a narrative of family love – that keeps the whole network of care pulsing and responsive.

So far, so good. But what does such a picture of family life, in a flexible, entrepreneurial, post-marital world, imply for policy makers, government and employers? What are the "welfare supports" that could be imagined for this kind of family adhocracy? An experience full of motion and dynamism, passions, projects and – yes – a degree of instability and openness?

I can only look back on our own patchwork of arrangements over the years, and conclude that there are some marked tensions between state provision, civil society/ social enterprise, and one's own family resources. In our state primary school in Glasgow, which both our children attended over a period of 14 years, we often availed ourselves of an 'after-school club' on the premises of the school.

It was started by a well-known and respected mother in the school, based on a day rate that worked out around £7 per day, and eventually growing (though the securing of development grants) to a well-appointed facility. Were our children always pleased to be there for the 60-90 minutes it granted their parents to complete their tasks? No, not always: it was sometimes too boring, sometimes a continuation of schoolyard dynamics that they'd rather have gotten a rest from (though more often than not, I'd have to say, they'd have to be dragged away). The point for us was to be able and willing to respond to their anxieties – by cutting the days to a minimum, or arranging that the days coincided with other favoured pals that were going.

Yet I think that third space between school pick-up, and adult end-of-working-day (compelled by the after-school club, quite rightly, to be no later than 5.30pm on most days), gave our kids a precedent. They expected and wanted to be involving themselves in sports and arts classes – some they'd actively choose, some they would respond to as suggestions from us.

And again, the organisations providing these services were out there in the marketplace, in civil society, rather than state-provided – in our case, in areas of dance, drama and art. These had the advantage of being staffed by people who could claim a degree of excellence and classicism for the courses they provided – but the disadvantage of that being at quite a high cost price.

This experience has led me to believe that there should be some kind of state voucher scheme for after-school and children's club services. This would respond to the existing ecology of the situation of childcare. There's energy and idiosyncrasy that can come from the match-up between parents and children seeking services, and enterprising people in the arts and sports wanting to provide those services. But without some kind of subsidy, that match-up becomes a province of the affluent urban middle-classes.

Well-subsidised or free state provision must of course be part of the mix: we availed ourselves happily of such services over the years (indeed, we had a marvellous, and completely free game of father-daughter crown bowls in the summer sun, outside Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum – also completely free – only the other day!). But there should be an element of the public budget devoted to supporting a sector which, in my experience, addresses the work-life balance – as it teeters between school-gate, end-of-workday, and school holidays – with great variety and quality.

Ultimately, we've taken a clear and encouraging lesson from our personal and social histories of childcare over these nineteen years. To wit, that the rights of the parent to be a rich, active parent – rather than some semi-present, semi-distracted enabler of the passage from childhood to adulthood – seems to be gaining ever more respect. Yet I believe there are still many new frontiers to be reached for in this area.

For example, the old demand of a shorter working week can now be addressed from a different, more development-and-nuture-oriented angle. It should be justified by the need to provide sufficient parenting time for the full development of one's children, and participation in building the social capital of our communities – rather than the usual arguments about 'sharing out the work' or providing 'recreation' for exhausted workers.

And perhaps when that rebalancing of care and work has been established, we can begin to address what we mean by "work" itself – which is what I tried to do with my book, consultancy and blog *The Play Ethic*. To what extent can the patience, love, creativity and empathy that go into the act of good parenting become an influence on the actual nature of the jobs and services we commit most of our waking hours to?

Of course, we all want to get away from the painful schizophrenia implied by 'work' and 'life' – the first constrained and compelled, the second voluntary and embraced. But over about a decade of advocacy of the power and potential of play, I now never underestimate how difficult it is for people to change their conception of what they do as productive, value-creating, collaborative people in organisations. Or more often than not, in order to achieve that identity, *outwith* organisations. An aspiration towards a 'play ethic' is something I still think is possible, given our growing post-materialist attitudes, our enabling technologies, and particularly given the current crisis of the work-to-consume paradigm.

But I think we need tangible experiences of unalienating, satisfying life to build up enough of what I call "lifestyle militancy". A militancy that emboldens us to challenge not just the length of working hours, but the nature of those hours, and even the very point of many of our divisions of labour, products and services.

Those experiences can come from many places. But they certainly come from where I started this piece: the open, honest demand of your child that you be present, engaged and a full participant in their unfolding towards adulthood. The school holidays is a good a place for that to start as any. A time that can brew up revolution, I'd say, as much as relaxation.

The 21st century's biggest conundrum

Penelope Leach is a leading expert and author on child care and development

The vital question "how are children being cared for and how can their needs best be met?" is not "merely" about the wellbeing of children, or the lifestyles of parents. It is far removed from the everyday child care discussions, conducted in the media and over family dinner tables, about what nurseries are charging, what tax credits can be claimed and how many days each week grandparents look after their grandchildren. And it cannot be answered by a tweak to parental leave here or a childcare tax rebate there. It is a basic question about the wellbeing, even perhaps the viability of contemporary society.

The unsolved conundrum of child care – the elephant in the living room that we are so accustomed to that we walk around it unseeing – is that the needs of children have not changed but their societies have. Children's wellbeing depends as it always has on intimate and loving adults ensuring their daily care for at least a decade. But the economic survival of commercially active nations now depends on all adults' paid labour and resulting earnings, taxes and spending, women's as much as men's; parents as much as the child-free. Far-reaching social changes, including the growth of individualism, materialism, and profit as the sole arbiter of value; developments in the nature and organisation of productive work; changes in the structure of families and in peoples' expectations and lifestyles including rejection of traditional female and male roles – have left no obvious place for children. So who should, who can and who wants to meet the minute by minute, hour by hour needs of babies and young children, and what social and economic priority are they to be given?

When prospective and pregnant parents are asked who is going to care for their babies, most mothers answer "me" and a lot of fathers answer "us", but the truth is that with most able adults in paid work, much of the day-to-day hands-on care of children has to be paid work, and where care is familial it is costing somebody their workplace and their wage.

Questions about how much time will children spend in whose care, for how much money and from what source are basic to modern life. The much-vaunted solution to child care problems, whether on a familial or societal scale, is a "work-home balance", but while all can aspire to a comfortable balance between working and caring, between time spent *with* children and time spent earning money to spend on them, many find it elusive. That balance is unlikely for parents who are female or those who are poor, and almost impossible for those who are both.

Gender Issues

Now that women do as much as men in the workplace it

seems obvious that men should re-balance the equation and solve the conundrum by doing as much as women in the home. Very few men do (though more than a generation ago). It is not only that corporations and colleagues still tend to assume that most of child care is a mother's responsibility, but also that not all women want equal parenting.

Carrying, birthing and breastfeeding babies is our basic gender-exclusive, and many women continue to guard their role not only as mothers but also as principal parents and the family's child experts. Many highly participant fathers behave, and perceive themselves, more as assistant mothers than as autonomous fathers.

These gender issues are important not only to individual families but also to society as a whole. As long as women (but not men) are entitled to time off after children are born some employers will give preference to males in job recruitment or promotion. Likewise, as long as it is mothers (rather than fathers) who ask for family-friendly working arrangements, those reduced or flexible hours will continue to be underpaid. In fact as long as caring for small children is a higher priority, and leave and part time work is a greater demand for women than for men, the scandals of sex discrimination in employment, promotion, and pay will continue.

Offering "parental" rather than "maternity" leave – as in most of continental Europe – helps a little because although fewer men than women actually take it, employers cannot base policy on the assumption that they will not. However these gender inequalities will not be rectified unless there are such radical changes in social attitudes and education that equal parenting comes to be seen as the norm by both sexes.

Attachment and relationship issues

The security and strength of babies' attachment relationships with mothers, fathers and other adults at home have more impact on their development than any other relationships or care settings. The prime importance of that relationship with the mother is the most consistent finding in contemporary child development research.

In the English speaking world the children of more privileged parents do better than others, almost always and in almost every way. It is not that secure attachment, and maternal sensitivity or responsivity, can be bought, of course, but they can be facilitated by money: the social, educational and employment status that tends to go with it and the easing of the practicalities of parenting which bought solutions – such as self-financed leave, a resident nanny or part time work or self-employment at the cost of a drop in salary – can provide.

It is unfortunate that such solutions and compromises are almost exclusively available to the well-to-do few, especially as those include most politicians, policy makers and opinion leaders. Many of those influential individuals do not see the nature and extent of problems for others; cannot imagine having to leave their own infants with strangers in the first few months after birth, with minimally trained family day care providers in the first year or in child care centres which may or may not be of high quality later on. So the very individuals who could influence government to prioritise support for parents at home, and improvements in the pay and training and conditions of child care workers, know little of what current child care facilities are like for children, or of what it is like to have no other choice as a parent.

Quality of care issues

The long-term importance of high quality care in the early years – both at home and elsewhere – to children's development as individuals and as law-abiding, earning citizens is universally acknowledged. But while highly respected social economists on both sides of the Atlantic describe such care as the best long-term investment any government can make, their political colleagues reject as unaffordable the increase in expenditure that improvements across the whole sector would entail. So although we know what is best for children and know that its provision is best for society, we do not provide it. Indeed governments, not only in the US but increasingly in the UK also, use the threat of loss of benefits to blackmail poor parents into paid work, irrespective of their children's needs or available care arrangements.

Any element of coercion of parents works against measures to raise the quality of child care because such measures can only be effective if they are planned and undertaken in the context of what parents want and what works for them and their children. Policies based on expert opinions are useless – sometimes worse than useless –

unless they have the support of parents. Children's ability to fulfil their own developmental potential crucially depends on their relationships with their parents so policies that make those relationships more difficult are likely to be bad for children, and policies that support or enhance them are likely to be good. For example, however strongly a group of experts may feel about the value to young children of having a parent at home, failing to provide acceptable, affordable child care and/or sufficiently flexible jobs, is a damaging means of keeping them there. Being forced to stay at home when they need the money, companionship or career continuity of outside employment, is liable to reduce mothers' pleasure in being with their child and therefore reduce the quality of the care they provide. Likewise, however certain policy makers are that parents' waged work is the way to lift children out of poverty, cutting back on benefits or making them conditional on employment so that a mother who would prefer to be at home with her child is forced to leave her with somebody else, is equally liable to take the shine off her feelings about being a mother.

How people feel about being parents actually makes a difference to children's lives today and how they develop tomorrow. The overall contentment – even joy – of the adults doing the caring affects the development of the small people they are caring for. So parents, the people we hold primarily responsible for the community's children, should surely get to choose how to meet that responsibility.

Whither work-family relationships after the recession?

Suzan Lewis is Professor of Organisational Psychology at Middlesex University Business School

working families Pioneer

Rhona Rapoport is a thought innovator and generates a better understanding for the work-life dilemmas of our time

What do the global recession, MPs' expenses and greed more broadly have to do with working families? We suggest that they are symbols of our time that have the potential to trigger a radical rethink of prevailing assumptions and values – about how work is done, how it affects families, communities and other institutions in everyday life, and how fundamental changes could be made.

Historically, changes in the way we think about working families tended to reflect contemporary social and economic trends, whether it was changes in families, the growing number of women in the workforce, skills shortages, the globalisation process, or the recession of the early 1990s. Back in the 1960s questions were asked about the impact of mothers' employment on children, rather than how to support working parents. There was also some published research raising questions about the impact of women's employment on their husbands. This reflected deeply held assumptions about ideal families and seems outdated now, but it made sense at the time. The questions we ask are all historically embedded[1].

So, what might the future hold for workplaces, families and communities in these challenging economic times? There are a number of possible scenarios. At one extreme things will get worse; those still in employment will work even harder, while others will struggle to find jobs. Employers may withdraw or limit access to "work-life" policies as some did in the 1990s recession. At the other extreme the financial crisis could be a tipping point, enabling an unfreezing of conventional ways of thinking and heralding a reassessment of values and assumptions about the way we work and quality of life. There have long been concerns about the fairness and social sustainability of many contemporary forms of work in terms of the effects on individuals, families and communities. However, in these discussions, economic sustainability tended to be taken for granted. That has changed. Many people will be asking whether all their hard work, that left little time and energy for personal life, was worth it. We could witness an emerging transformation in approaches to work and

[1] See Gambes, R, Lewis, S and Rapoport, R. (2006) *The Myth of Work-Life Balance. The Challenge of Our Time for Men, Women and Societies.* Wiley

personal life. What would it take for this optimistic scenario to stand a chance?

First, we need to revisit the terminology that shapes our thinking. The notion of work-life balance emerged in response to late twentieth and early 21st century changes in the nature of work, such as intensified workloads and also technology that blurs the boundaries between work and non-work, creating feelings of "imbalance". However, we contend that the work-life balance approach focuses on surface manifestations of deeper problems. It focuses on providing choices within the current systems but not on changing these systems or the bigger picture within which work-life balance problems arise.

Secondly we need to ask new questions to replace old debates. Below we identify some current questions and the shifts that are needed to frame the future agenda. Some are already being asked – but they are not yet mainstream:

1. Shifting from "what policies can be developed to support working families?" to "how can workplace culture and practice support working families?"

Laws and policies are essential to provide a floor of rights for workers. Great strides have been made over the last 30 years in government and workplace policies to support working families. But we need to focus on the ways in which policies are implemented; how work is carried out and valued. Giving people the right to, for example, work flexible hours alongside intensified workloads or without tackling cultures in which only those who work long and inflexible hours are fully valued is clearly not sufficient.

Recent European research[2] shows that workers who make use of formal flexible working policies do not necessarily report greater satisfaction with "work-life balance" and in some cases they are more dissatisfied. There are a number of possible explanations for these findings: formal flexible working arrangements don't really provide autonomy and control; they blur the boundaries between work and personal life, enabling people to work more; work intensification due to heavy workloads or the fast pace of work undermines policies; flexible workers are not valued. There is some evidence to support all these explanations. For example, work intensification can make it difficult to take time off for childcare emergencies, even when parents are entitled to do so, because they know that already overburdened colleagues will have to cover for their absences[3].

Policies such as the Working Time Directive can help, in some cases, to ensure time but not necessarily energy for families. Perhaps the next step might be a working intensity directive.

So policies are necessary but not sufficient. The question now is how we can build on policies to challenge assumptions about how work is organised and which workers are valued.

2. Shifting from "how can we enable women (and in some cases men) with family responsibilities to adapt to current workplace practices?" to "how can we challenge unrealistic expectations at work and value diverse ways of working for men and women?"

The myth that managing work and family life is just a women's issue is waning in some organisations. Yet it is still widely assumed that men do not need to change the way they work. Most workplaces are still structured around a cultural picture of the ideal worker who has no family or personal obligations beyond work. Hence unrealistic expectations about how people can work go unchallenged. This can lead to overvaluing and rewarding inefficient and time wasting ways of working and obscures the effectiveness of alternative working practices. It undermines not only gender equity but also workplace effectiveness.

So, we need to move beyond debates about how to enable mainly women to adapt to current workplace cultures, and look for ways of challenging deeply ingrained assumptions about ideal workers and the place of work in people's lives.

3. Shifting from "how can people be helped to better manage their work and family time?" to "why is time at work valued more than time spent on other activities, in our society?"

The notion of the ideal worker who can "give" more and more time to work implies that working time tends to be valued more than time for families and communities, by employers and perhaps more widely. There is also visible and invisible time in the workplace. For example, time at work in the early morning is often valued less than time spent at work late into the evening. Those who use flexitime or informal flexibility to come in to work very early and leave early, often to collect children from school, report that they are often undervalued or regarded as part-timers, while those who come in later but work late and call late meetings, are considered to be highly committed.

[2] See www.projectqualuty.org [3] See Lewis, S., Brannen, J. And Nilsen, A (2009) *Work, Families and Organisations in Transition*, Policy Press

So we need to ask questions about why working time and especially some forms of working time are more valued than other time and about what sort of society we want to live in if we primarily value people who work all the time. The rhetoric is that we value families and communities, yet the people who seem to be most valued are those who prioritise work. The questions for the future are not just about how to manage time but about the ways in which time is valued and what that means for wider society.

4. Shifting from "how can we enhance work-life balance?" to "how can we enhance fulfilment, happiness and social justice?"

Workplace practices that are incompatible with family and other obligations either assume an outdated model of relations between men and women or imply that profits (or other work related outcomes) are more important than people. If the recession is really to be a tipping point we may need to face up to the social justice implications, and indeed the irrationality of this. Profits for what, if not quality of life and sustainable societies?

This is where greed comes in. Greed in its various forms is highly relevant to the work-family debate. At the time of writing the greed of MPs' expenses is much in the news but this reflects wider trends; organisations that are greedy about how much of employees' time they use; greedy consumers who work more and more to spend and spend; greedy societies that want to acquire ever more wealth while others struggle with poverty.

We know that a certain threshold of affluence is needed to meet people's needs but also that beyond an optimal threshold extra wealth does not equate with extra happiness and fulfilment. Does the modern economy meet our needs for fulfilment, happiness and social justice? These debates are not new but this time of economic turbulence may be the time for other voices to be heard. Might this be the new debate replacing work-life balance? This will call for a radical rethink of assumptions and values about the place of work and families and other aspects of life in people's overall lives, about economic systems, about greed at many levels, and about economic fulfilment and needs beyond an optimal level.

Systemic change usually takes a long time, but it could be helped along by shifts in the debates and the ethos in which we think about the issues. Current economic difficulties could galvanize new ways of thinking and implementing a new era of relating work to other parts of life, even if we cannot plan the changes in detail. With a new agenda to shape our thinking, many of the questions we have been asking about work and family before the current economic downturn may well seem outdated in another 30 years.

Top ten myths of flexible working

Bruce Lynn,
Microsoft UK Server Director

Most everyone 'gets' the inherent and practical business advantages of having the greatest flexibility in how they operate. Everyone 'gets' that flexible practices can save money, save the environment and save social costs. What tends to stand in the way of organisations adopting more ambitious and creative ways of flexible working are a number of obstacles that all too often are based on misconceptions and myths, rather than real business impediments.

If anything, we are entering the true coming of age of flexible work. It is no longer a new concept, with notions such as job sharing, flexi-time, outsourcing and home work now well woven into the business fabric.

In larger organisations, many Finance departments are aligned with the IT function who are leading the way in demonstrating how radical flexibility can bring massive cost savings. Over many years now, 'Services Oriented Architecture' (SOA) has been widely regarded as the ideal approach for cost effective systems development, and at its core is a platform and approach designed to optimise flexibility. In more recent years, 'Virtualisation' technology has come to the fore, delivering unprecedented ROIs. While centred on technology, the concept behind SOA and virtualisation are just as applicable and profitable when applied to the 'human' world as to the system side.

[1] See Gambes, R, Lewis, S and Rapoport, R. (2006) *The Myth of Work-Life Balance. The Challenge of Our Time for Men, Women and Societies.* Wiley

So with the benefits so readily apparent and proven, what holds companies back from adopting them more aggressively? In my experience, the obstacles are a number of perceptions, some perhaps grounded in a real issue, but ultimately more myth than reality.

Myth 1 – It's just home working. Often when I present on 'Dynamic Work' or flexible working, people respond with the comment, 'Oh, you mean home working. A number of our staff just don't have a situation where they can work at home.' Well, yes, it can be 'home' working. But then it can be much more. People work at cafés, Starbucks, customer sites, libraries, professional organisations, social clubs. The list is truly limitless. Microsoft recently showcased its 'moofing' concept ('Mobile Out Of Office') with some workers working out of a tree house. *Home working might not work for everyone, but explore the boundless places that can deliver greater productivity and more convenience*.

Myth 2 – It's just flexible hours. If it is not the geographic constraints, then it can be the chronological ones. For very practical reasons, many enterprises need access to key people and information at given times. The brute force way to ensure this is to have all of the resources in place at a given time. But technology enables whole new approaches to the concept of 'presence'. People can be readily available despite being nowhere to be seen. Instant Messenger tools like Microsoft Office Communicator provide 'presence' information which extends far beyond the notions of 'here' or 'not here' which one gets in a conventional setting, looking at their desk. One can be 'available', 'busy', 'away', 'in a meeting' or any number of customisable statuses. *Using messaging technologies means that managers and team members can have a better access to colleagues even though they are not 'in'*.

Myth 3 – Presence needed for serendipity. Managers acknowledge that a lot of the time the work of their employees could indeed be done somewhere else and much of it is individual task work. But they argue that having everyone together enables impromptu interactions. An idea pops into someone's head that they want to bounce off another, or a problem comes up that a senior partner wants to show to a more junior staffer as part of their apprenticeship. These are important interactions that managers fear they will lose in a flexible, remote workplace. *Experiment with new models of coaching and mentoring to preserve the critical process of knowledge transfer, skill development and culture sharing, while enjoying greater flexibility through less pervasive 'face-time'*.

Myth 4 – People abuse it to skive off. Actually, in the flexible work environment the more pervasive problem that actually transpires is not people doing too little work, but actually doing too much – the 'crackberry' syndrome of not knowing when to turn off. While some eager managers might welcome this 24/7 productivity, it does require managing and tempering. It can be a simple problem to moderate with some coaching. One of the key changes to adopting flexible work practices is having a management by objective culture. *Look at more areas to manage performance based on outcomes and the 'how' of the work becomes much more versatile*.

Myth 5 – Lower skilled, junior workers can't handle it. A common misconception is that flexible working is the exclusive domain of higher skilled, more senior staff. When pushed, these perceptions seemed to be guided more by a prejudice about how responsible junior and lower skilled staff are, and less on the capabilities of the individual or the true requirements of the role. A classic example is the personal assistant (PA). Often, these people are the lonely bastions holding down the fort in an empty office. While there is value in having a physical body to chase down physical things, when scrutinised even the PA's role often centres around fielding calls, emails and diaries all of which can be done anywhere. *Look at the person and role to understand the real constraints and avoid generalisation about groups that may be less suited for the advantages flexible working offers*.

Myth 6 – Managers can't manage it. This notion is probably the one most grounded in reality. But it is a bit overstated. It is not that managers can't manage flexible and remote workers, it is that it is different, it takes new skills and it can be more effort at first. But it is not the case that remote management is not feasible, it is just different. This concern is the best reason to consider gradual introductions of flexible work practices to help acclimatise both managers and workers to the new ways of working. *Check out the workshops and consultancy that Working Families offers to organisations to build these skills and capabilities*.

Myth 7 – Digital communications are crude. Many people got a web cam years ago and tried out that long-anticipated futuristic scenario of the video phone call. While it was cool to see the person you were speaking with often

thousands of miles away, most of the time the first experiences were little more than a curiosity. Jumpy frames, broken up 'Max Headroom' voices, awkwardness looking slightly askew to camera all made the process less than satisfactory. Even just basic voice calls over the internet have been plagued with technical complexity, latency lags and interruptions in the early days. While the technology and infrastructure is still not perfect, the whole scenario has leapt forward massively in the past couple of years. Skype and MSN Messenger calls are now second nature for many users. With the right equipment (a good microphone and speakers), most calls are indistinguishable from land lines. *If you have been put off by flaky experiences in the past, now is the time to try out the latest incarnations and see just what they can do.*

Myth 8 – No one sees each other. It's not that the importance of face to face communication is exaggerated, but rather that despite how important managers say it is, much less of it happens and happens well than they all imagine. While flexible working can scatter staff hither and yon, it does not have to mean that face to face communication is reduced. In fact, it can mean that the quality of in-person interaction is enhanced. Managers talk about having everyone in the same locale to collaborate, but in practice the vast majority of the time is spent doing individual tasks in individual modes of work. Many companies find they need to fund special off-sites to effect deep dialogue and sharing. *Consider investing less in routine space and time together and investing a chunk of that saving into face-to-face interactions of high quality and impact.*

Myth 9 – It means getting rid of the office entirely. One can dramatically reduce the needs for office space with flexible working. Many companies have actually become completely 'virtual' with no fixed office premises. But such an extreme does not have to be the objective. The 'office' – a central hub for coming together and collaborating – remains a useful tool and investment for most organisations. Flexible working can still drive down the volume and costs of such a key asset and at the same time enhance its core function and unique contributions. *Explore how flexibility can enhance the office environment, not necessarily eliminate it.*

Myth 10 – I'm already doing it. Perhaps one of the most seductive rationales for not pushing further on these fronts is the sense that people are already doing something. They already have instituted some policy or technology that enables some remote or flexible capability and so they think they have ticked that box. *Take a look at the extent to which companies are now exploiting new and creative concepts and the innovations in infrastructure and technology that are emerging to support them.*

The Conservative vision for a more family-friendly workplace

working families Pioneer

Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Shadow Secretary of State for Work & Pensions and Shadow Minister for Women

The economic downturn in the UK has hit families of all shapes and sizes. It is essential that, as the recovery comes, we build not only a stronger and more sustainable economy, but also one that is also more family-friendly.

We need to start by acknowledging where we have made mistakes. As David Cameron has said, politicians on both sides of the political spectrum have got the family wrong. Too often the Left has refused to accept the reality that it is best, where possible, for children to be brought up in a family where both parents are available to look after them. But equally, the Right has at times placed too much emphasis on family structures and failed to recognise the role that the government can have in encouraging family-friendly business practices.

I am pleased all political parties recognise the need to make Britain a more family-friendly place to do business. And I am proud that the Conservatives have been leading the debate on issues such as flexible working, equal pay and shared parental leave. The workplaces of the coming decades will not and should not look like the ones of the past. In particular, women will continue to take more senior positions in all areas of business and public life. It was recently reported that women are now regularly outperforming men in higher education. As one report put it,

'they are more likely to go to university, do far better once they get there and win higher-quality jobs as a result'. This is an entirely positive development, but we cannot be complacent and think that this change will simply trickle through to the wider business world without continued action to support women and families.

That is why a Conservative government would go further in reforming employment regulations. The first area is flexible working. For some time we have been calling for the right to request flexible working to be extended to parents with children up to the age of 18. The government has moved in this direction but has not quite gone far enough. This is a vital step. Flexibility helps both parents and the businesses that employ them. In fact, many businesses make use of flexible practices without ever thinking of it under the banner of 'flexible working'. Working from home, job sharing or even flexibility in shift patterns are all forms of flexible working. Many businesses are embracing this, finding that it increases staff commitment, productivity and retention.

Encouraging flexible working practices will help parents, and particularly mothers, to find arrangements that suit them. And helping mothers into work will also help tackle poverty. Studies have shown that child poverty could be dramatically reduced if even a relatively small proportion of poor single-earner families became dual-earner families.

This type of flexibility for parents should begin as early as possible. That's why we want to see some dramatic changes to the system of maternity and paternity leave. We need a system of leave that maximises choice for parents and allows them, as far as possible, to make the major decisions about how to balance their family, work and other commitments. The government has made steps in the right direction with their proposal for additional paternity leave. However, even this title underlines the basic flaw in the government's thinking – that leave belongs only to the mother and that somehow paternity leave is 'additional' and not the norm.

Conservatives believe that it is for parents to choose the arrangements that suit them best. We will introduce a system of flexible parental leave in which parents will have the period of paid maternity leave, currently 39 weeks, between them. The first 14 weeks would apply automatically to the mother, allowing her to recover from childbirth and to develop a strong bond with her child. However, it would then be for parents to decide how to use the remaining time. Many will choose for the mother to continue taking it. But for others the father can take over, or – crucially – both the mother and father could decide to take leave simultaneously.

The evidence shows that the more involved the father is in the first six months, the more likely it is that he will continue to be involved at a later stage. Equally, a high level of paternal involvement in the child's first six months has a positive impact on their cognitive and social development. But the point is for parents to have the choice.

We know that there is another thing that prevents Britain achieving its full potential as a family-friendly nation, and that is the persistence of unequal pay between men and women. Equal pay is about making sure that women – particularly those at the bottom of the pay scale – have proper and fair protection. Back in 2007, I put forward a number of proposals that will make a real difference, such as compulsory pay audits for companies found guilty of discriminating on pay. This is a measured response to the problem, one that does not place unreasonable burdens on businesses but will root out illegal activity.

Creating a more family-friendly economy does not just mean supporting those that are in work but also those looking for work. Tackling the unemployment crisis will be a priority for any incoming government. But there is more we can be doing to ensure we have a skilled workforce ready to take up new opportunities when they become available. In this respect it is important that there are chances for training and education available to parents who have been out of the workplace caring for children. Community learning can play a key role in providing locally-based training for people who have been away from the labour market. The courses can be particularly beneficial to parents because they are flexible – for example, short IT courses and other skills that are important in boosting somebody's employability. Conservatives have put forward proposals for a £100 million Community Learning Fund to enhance these opportunities, recognising the value of community learning in promoting social mobility and helping parents and others into work.

So it is clear that there is more to be done to ensure that the practices of our businesses work with and not against the needs of our families. This is not about bureaucracy and box-ticking, but fairness and flexibility. This is the

challenge, and it is one we must meet to ensure that as we come out of recession we do so with more family-friendly businesses operating in a stronger, family-friendly economy.

For *every* worker, there is more to life than work

John Monks, General Secretary European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and Catelene Passchier, confederal secretary ETUC

The concept of work-life balance is often directly linked to the idea of reconciling work with family responsibilities. Most people thus believe that it concerns only women and care. However, tackling the work-life dilemmas that an increasing amount of women and men face throughout their lives is key, if Europe seeks to fulfil its Lisbon agenda of full employment with more and better jobs, and at the same time respond to the challenges of demographic change.

As trade unionists, it is appropriate to recall the first struggles of organised workers, back in the 19th century, about reducing the long working day to humane limits – humane in the sense that workers should survive working and not perish from exhaustion. Health and safety was the first reason to limit working hours – and it remains a hot issue today. Its focus is on protecting workers and their capacity to be productive against the short-term profit sought by employers. But even before that, women and children were targeted with protective measures to ensure long term economic progress in society: the growing up of a healthy and skilled next generation demanded the limitation of working hours of mothers, and the sending to school of children.

The next issue was the worker's personal development: having free time for cultural and educational purposes, or to become active in a union, the community or politics. It took a bit more time for the labour movement to get to terms with what the 'humanisation' of labour was about: work, not just seen as a means to earn money and survive, but as an activity that itself should be interesting and rewarding.

However, work-life balance has only become an issue on the EU's agenda since women have massively and visibly entered the labour market, and have come there to stay. Therefore, until recently it was perceived as primarily a women's and equal opportunities issue, leading to piecemeal policies and measures supporting women and families. In our view, this is essentially wrong.

At present, it is mostly women who pay the price of the fact that the gap between old societal structures and modern times has not yet been solved. Women continue to juggle work and care, often without having any 'free time' at all. Moreover, they hold part-time jobs with few career perspectives and are affected by pay and pension gaps. But in ETUC, we have changed our approach in recent years. It is still important to fight for equal pay and equal treatment of men and women, as well as for the upgrading of part-time and precarious jobs, and better social security and pensions for women. In addition, however, we have to tackle the mainstream issue of how work, care and private life are organised for both men and women. For the labour markets of the future, we need all the capacities of women and men available. For the future of our economies and societies, we also need new life to be born and educated. And when we grow old, we need some people around to take care of us.

These issues cannot be properly dealt with on a merely individual basis, and only during the limited period in which workers have small children to care for. In every stage of life, although maybe in varying intensity, any worker will increasingly have to take care of himself and somebody else, and invest in his own personal development and adaptability. There is, therefore, a strong need for a life-course approach in social policy and work organisation.

An approach based on 'supporting the individual with specific needs' with a bit of flexible working here and unpaid leave there, as has been characteristic of the UK's policy in the past, may offer some short-term solace to mostly women. But it does not help create the environment for a long-term sustainable perspective of an active population that is highly skilled, productive and also demographically a sound mix of young and old. For this, we need long term visions and investments. We have to reconsider established views in particular on what is the

domain of public interest, employers' responsibility and private 'choice'.

In this time of economic crisis, some voices say that work-life balance policies are a luxury, and that people (read: 'men') should be allowed to work more to make ends meet. We take a different view.

In our EU of 27 Member States, very interesting examples exist of how raising women's employment rate, combined with a higher investment in care infrastructures and paid leave facilities for women and men has gone together with higher birth rates; how conversion from unpaid domestic tasks into paid personal services can broaden a country's GDP; and how reduction of full-time working hours has helped raise productivity (Scandinavia, France, Netherlands).

On the other hand, high female employment rates in eastern Europe go along with very low birth rates, due to women's very low wages and lack of proper and affordable housing. In 21st century Europe, individual 'choice' can mean that families decide to postpone having children or have fewer children than they desire for socio-economic reasons. In other words, both women and men need stable jobs and incomes to have kids and careers!

Clearly, a lot has to be done at national and local level involving all the relevant stakeholders, including public authorities as well as employers and trade unions. Modern trade unions in the UK and elsewhere increasingly offer an interesting collective response – such as in the form of collective agreements – to individual needs, for instance in the area of flexible working, leave facilities, childcare arrangements and care infrastructure.

Which role is there for the EU to play?

First of all, the EU should – in its follow-up to the Lisbon agenda for growth and jobs – come up with a more up-to-date analysis of its labour markets, based on more equal and interchangeable roles of men and women. Concrete targets on gender equality and childcare should be monitored and enforced, and a new target added on the provision of eldercare.

Secondly, workers should be protected against long working hours, as also enshrined in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. Health and safety risks have changed with technological change; however, recent evidence confirms old truths. Long and irregular hours are bad for the health of workers and may also lead to dangerous situations for third parties (patients, and other road-users, for example). There is also still a strong need to ensure that international minimum standards on working hours and rest periods prevent unfair competition between companies and Member States. Therefore, ETUC, together with the European Parliament, has fought for a strong and unambiguous Working Time Directive which would offer both flexibility and protection without the so-called individual opt-out. A working week without limitations is utterly outmoded, as it confirms a traditional division of labour between men and women, and is neither flexible nor innovative. Instead, many of our unions have negotiated genuinely innovative and flexible working time patterns, which also give workers a say in the organisation of their working time. This is the kind of flexibility that we should promote as it gives ample scope for win-win outcomes.

Thirdly, leave arrangements for working parents need to be reviewed and updated to ensure a minimum harmonisation of rights throughout the EU, which can help EU countries to develop in the same direction. ETUC, together with the European employers, has just finalised a revision of the Parental Leave agreement of 1995, strengthening its provisions. The Pregnant workers Directive is also important in this regard; a revision to strengthen its provisions is currently in discussion in the European Parliament. For ETUC, a clear distinction has to be made between these two instruments: maternity protection and leave are clearly linked to the necessary protection of women being pregnant, giving birth, recovering and breastfeeding, while parental leave is about recognising the care roles of mothers and fathers. Rather than introducing 'transferability' of maternity leave to fathers, as currently discussed in the UK, we therefore strongly argue in favour of strengthening individual rights to parental and paternity leave. Of course, such leave facilities will only be really taken up by women and men when there is a proper income guarantee. In our recent agreement on parental leave this connection is clearly recognized, although the implementation in practice is left to the Member States.

Finally, there is a strong need for policy coherence, and especially now in the economic crisis. Measures and policies developed in all areas of socio-economic policy making at EU level should be checked on their relevance and impact on the organisation of work and care, and the

division of labour between men and women. Short-term working for men in ailing industries can become a stepping stone to more flexible working arrangements that support work-life balance. Investment in care infrastructures can create jobs and support workers in combining work and care. Investment in (re)training of both women and men can help Europe to reach the necessary higher skills base to remain competitive. If well managed, the crisis can become an opportunity. If not, the crisis will become a serious setback with long-term negative consequences for workers, families and economies.

Ultimately, 'work-life balance' is about a sustainable future for our societies.

Maximising the full potential of the employees of the future

Trevor Phillips is the Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission

'A line of doors flew open and a lot of men stepped out headlong. They had high hats, healthy pale faces, dark overcoats and shiny boots; they held in their gloved hands thin umbrellas and hastily folded evening papers...' (Joseph Conrad, The Return, 1898)

Conrad's description of London commuters at the end of the 1800s is a compelling reminder of how Britain's workforce has been transformed over the last century. Gone are the trains filled with pale-faced men. Today's rush hour is a more variegated scene, peopled almost equally with women as well as men, black and white, young and old. But while the working population has become much more diverse, in many important ways, the rules that govern our working lives have remained the same. Our working practices have not evolved to keep pace with the rapid changes that have taken place in wider society.

The social shifts we have seen over the last century are only the beginning. The demographic and social changes that Britain faces over the next hundred years will be just as dramatic – if not more so. In 2009 women make up 46% of the UK workforce, and the proportion of ethnic minority workers is rising; between 2001 and 2007 ethnic minorities accounted for an estimated 90% of the growth in the working-age population of England. Over a quarter of people in the workforce are aged 50 or over.

Perhaps most significantly, the combined effects of increased life expectancy and a reduced birth rate mean there will be fewer workers for every person of pensionable age. In the 1950s there were around seven people of working age for every pensioner – this will fall to less than three by 2031. The fact that people are spending a lower proportion of their lives in work has a range of potentially damaging consequences: a greater pressure on pensions, more older people forced to live in poverty, and escalating costs of social and healthcare. The challenge for employers and policy-makers is to make sure the country has enough talented workers to build a vibrant, innovative economy.

In this context there are strong arguments for increasing the default retirement age, or indeed abolishing it altogether. Only 7% of people are still in work at the age of 65. This is in spite of evidence that given the right conditions – fulfilling work and flexibility – many people want to stay economically active into their late 60s.

There are other fundamental changes that we need to make to working life in Britain. We must think radically about how to remove the barriers that keep whole swathes of the population out of work, or in jobs far below their skill level. Girls outperform boys at every level of education yet women remain under-represented at the top levels of companies, in Parliament, and in the judiciary. We need to understand why our economy is deprived of their talents. The Women and Work Commission has estimated that Britain is losing £15-23bn per year due to the under-use of women's skills.

The same applies to other groups who remain below the glass ceiling. Disabled people, older people and people from ethnic minorities are often under-represented in senior roles. Failing to exploit their talent not only undermines our aspirations towards a socially mobile society, it is also economically unsustainable.

So what are the barriers that prevent these groups from contributing to their full potential? Prejudice continues to play its part, and we at the Commission will continue to challenge it vigorously. We know, however, that this is not the whole picture. We need to look harder at systemic causes of these distorted outcomes, such as the persistence of a rigid, inflexible approach to work that is increasingly out of tune with the realities of life in the 21st century. Britain cannot afford to go on asking people to fit their families around the demands of ever-more intense 24/7 global competition, and marginalising or rejecting workers who fail to fit into traditional and inflexible working arrangements. There is plenty of evidence of both the need and the appetite among employees and employers for a more flexible approach to work. Equally, we know that flexible workplaces create more loyal, hardworking and productive teams. But legislation and official employment practices do not support newer, flexible models.

The Commission's 'Working Better' project, launched in summer 2008, aims to identify and promote innovative new ways of working which help meet the challenges of the 21st century. It will explore how we can match the aspirations of employees with the needs of employers. Continuing from the 'Transformation of Work' project undertaken by the former Equal Opportunities Commission, we have expanded the parameters of 'Working Better' to include the needs of parents, carers, disabled people, young people and older workers.

Whether you are someone with caring responsibilities, a mother or a father who wants to be a more active parent, a disabled person who wants a fulfilling career, a younger worker who wants phased entry into work, or an older worker who wants to stay in the labour market longer – this is the big issue of our time.

As part of the first phase of 'Working Better', which focused on families, we found that today's parents want to share work and family more equally, and that there is extensive unmet demand from fathers for more leave with their children. But despite these social realities, the current maternity, paternity and parental leave rights – with long low paid maternity leave, short low paid paternity leave and inflexible unpaid parental leave – do not enable parents to meet those aspirations.

We have proposed that the current model should be replaced with a new world-class policy of gender-neutral parental leave by 2020. This would enable families to exercise real choice in the first year of their child's life, and to have the option of paid parental leave up to the age of five. We also recommended that the right to request flexible working should be extended to all employees throughout working life. These measures would make a real difference to women's ability to maintain a career after having children – and to men's ability to participate fully in family life.

For the second phase of 'Working Better', which will be completed later in 2009, we are looking at disabled workers, carers and older workers. Our preliminary findings have shown that two thirds of older workers claim they would use flexible working arrangements if they were available – many because they have caring responsibilities outside the workplace. The research also challenges some of the common assumptions about the aspirations of older people. Among the over-50s, only 5% say they want to shed responsibilities as they get older. Employers refusing promotion or downshifting opportunities is the most common reason for not being at a preferred level of seniority. Given the economic importance of keeping older people in work, we can no longer afford for this to be the case.

The traditional model of a 35-year full-time career, largely without breaks – the kind of career one imagines that Conrad's commuters would have aspired towards – is increasingly out of step with the realities of modern life. All of us – mothers and fathers, carers and older people – need to balance our working lives with our other responsibilities. Even young people are increasingly aware of these considerations: in a 2008 survey of Oxbridge graduates, a majority in every sector said they would prioritise work-life balance when thinking about their future career. The challenge for government and employers is to take advantage of these changes by showing a real commitment to flexible working. Only then will we be able to capitalise on the full diversity of talent available to us in 21st-century Britain.

There must be time for families

Shivani Rae, Year 10, Graveney School, Tooting

I sometimes wonder about the future, and what I want to do. I think there are so many jobs that are not compatible with family life, and I think it is sad that so many children miss out on their parents at the most important stages of their lives – even teenagers need to have their parents around sometimes.

I remember I was at a friend's house a long time ago when his mum told him that his dad would be home for dinner that day. I remember thinking it was strange that my friend was so excited about this; my parents ate with me pretty much every day. It made me realise that up until then, it hadn't even occurred to me that what I took for granted was a novelty for many other children.

After I was born, I was looked after by a neighbour who was a childminder. She moved when I was two, but until then I used to go to her house almost every day. Apparently I loved it there. My childminder was lovely, and had children of her own who played with me and made it feel like another family. My parents still talk about how great she was, but they also told me that sometimes when they went to pick me up, I would ignore them completely!

Now, my parents both work in full-time jobs and they are happy with them, though they'd like more time to spend with my sister and me. Luckily my mum's job was very flexible when she was pregnant with me, and although my dad wasn't given leave, he managed to take a few days off when I was born. My mum worked for a fair and considerate company, and when she returned when I was six months old, she was given her usual job back and didn't miss out on any opportunities. My sister was born when I was four, and again it wasn't a problem for my parents. My mum worked part-time for a short time, so she could pick us up from school. Even now, both my parents have work they can do from home occasionally.

In my family, both my parents need to work for financial reasons, but they are in jobs which allow them to have a good family-work balance. They both say that they would work even if they didn't need to, which I can understand. I think I would hate not working after a while.

I don't have much to write about, but that's good. It means that I've had a happy childhood. I guess I'm really lucky that both my parents were there for me when I was growing up even though they worked. When I was a baby, they looked after me. When I was a young child, they were mostly there. And made money to buy me things and go on holidays. Now, as a teenager, I am set up for life and I hope I'll get a good job and a family too.

The incomplete revolution

Dr. Katherine Rake OBE, former Director, The Fawcett Society

In the 30 years since Working Families was set up, women's experience of paid work has undergone a revolution. The 1970s witnessed the first wave of equality legislation which set in place the basic parameters for women's rights – the right to take out a mortgage in their own name or entitlement to be served at the same bar for example – and set in place the principles that guide practice today including equal pay, the protection of pregnant workers and a recognition of domestic violence as a crime. Over the thirty years, women have repeatedly broken into new territory – from the first woman on the floor of the London Stock Exchange in 1973, to the UK's only woman PM in 1979, to the first woman allowed to go to sea for the Royal Navy in 1990 to the first (and to date only) black woman in cabinet in 2003. And since that time, the workforce has seen a net addition of approximately 4 million women workers (from 9.5 million in the early 1970s to just under 13.5 million at the turn of the century).

And yet, ask the question has women's entry into the

labour market resulted in an equal labour market, and the answer is a resounding no. While there has clearly been considerable progress on some measures, the labour market remains divided on gender lines. The UK experiences one of the largest gender pay gaps in Europe, women remain concentrated in low paid, part-time and often vulnerable employment and becoming a parent still has a much bigger impact on mums' employment than it does on dads.

Why this continuing inequality? The simple answer is that while women's lives have changed beyond recognition, there has not been a similar change either in the fundamental structure of the labour market or in the role of men, and both of these factors have put limits on women's ability to achieve true equality at work.

Turning first to the structure of the labour market. The changing composition of the workforce over the past 30 years has not led to an equivalent shift in the nature of work itself. The notion of a 'normal working life' of 9-5, five days a week, uninterrupted until retirement still has a powerful hold. Even the terms full time and part-time reinforce the notion that there is a normal pattern of working hours, with the workforce divided by those who conform and those who do not. To capture and realise the talents of those leading complex lives, in which balancing work and family are just one demand, requires a deep process of change which unpicks the many rules of workplace engagement that were put in place when the workforce was predominantly male and concerns of family life were firmly private matters.

The modern workforce requires full flexibility. This flexibility would mean that not only is the working day redefined, so is the place of work and, with an ageing society where the number of years of possible working have been extended, the timing of employment engagement over the lifecycle is re-examined. And yet, current policy does not meet this complex reality. For example, the right for parents and carers to request flexible working has introduced strict parameters around flexibility, and inadvertently reinforced the notion that parents and carers are in some sense special and different from the mainstream workforce. Although these rights have been hugely welcomed by working parents, limiting conditions in this way has created the risk of a 'mummy track' and perceptions of flexible, and particularly part-time working, as of lesser value with the consequence of low take up at senior levels, by men and by those seeking an alternative work-life balance for other reasons. It also requires greater sophistication in how we recognise the contributions of employees. Many methods of assessing productivity are still based on the simple metric of time – time spent on the production line, in the office or even at one's desk working from home – rather than true measures of productivity. The challenge here is for organisations to become more sophisticated in understanding what employees produce, its value and how to reward that appropriately. Without these changes, women will continue to be concentrated in the limited number of jobs that fit around their childcare needs and will continue to experience the staggering pay penalties associated with being a woman and with motherhood.

The second 'incomplete revolution' affects the lives of men. The move of women into the workforce has not led to an equivalent army of male labour moving into the home to pick up the domestic work, child and elder care that is necessary to run a modern family. Instead, women retain prime responsibility for care and domestic labour, resulting in many women completing a 'double shift' of paid work and unpaid labour. The traditional gender division of work has been reinforced, probably unwittingly, by recent policy reforms. The past 10 years have seen substantial extensions to maternity leave and rights and while paternity leave entitlements have been introduced for the first time in the UK, they are limited to just two weeks. This not only concentrates employment risks with women – so that employers can easily identify those at risk of taking maternity leave in a way that they simply could not if fathers had equivalent entitlements – it also fails to support the possibility of equitably shared parenting. It is essential that we now build the case for support for shared parenting at the same time as protecting and promoting women's maternity rights.

If the last 30 years has been a tale of revolution in women's working lives, the next thirty years must be about completing that revolution through a transformation of the labour market and of men's participation in caring and domestic work. This is now the mandate for Working Families.

This article was written while Katherine Rake was still Director of the Fawcett Society. She is now Chief Executive of The Family and Parenting Institute.

A family-friendly economy

working families Pioneer

Richard Reeves is the director of the think-tank Demos

There is no politician willing to say a bad word against 'hard-working families'. That single phrase acts as a raft for a range of moral goodies. These are families (good), who are in paid work rather than on the dole (good) and really trying hard to do a great job rather than skiving off at every opportunity (good).

It is a paradox then that the group who are perhaps the hardest-working families, on incomes below the average, have seen their financial situation suffer relative to other groups. Labour has done a pretty good job of getting money to those at the bottom of the pile, through more generous benefit payments. Meanwhile those at the very top, especially the top 1% have done extremely well since 1997, notwithstanding recent dents to their portfolios. Research by the Resolution Foundation focusing on those in the band between 20% and 50% of the way up the income distribution shows a group under significant financial and familial pressure.

What can be done for this group? First, it is necessary to get away from the worship of paid work, at least for those with young children. Parents are almost always the best people to raise children, at least in the early years. Second, we must however avoid nostalgia-tinged hopes of a 1950s-style gendered division of labour. Saying that parents should raise children is not code for 'mothers must raise children'. We should move to equal rights for mums and dads to time off work, allowing families to make their own choices about balancing work and care, and balancing the work aspirations of both partners. Third, the drive to provide more flexible working options should be renewed. The UK does well in terms of providing a plurality of options for working parents, but the old-style full-time working week still dominates. Rather than seeking to adapt care arrangements to outdated working practices, with 'wrap-around schooling' and long-hours pre-school nurseries, we should be adapting our labour market around the new challenges of raising children. We want a family-friendly economy, not economy-friendly families.

Generation Y and their impact on the workplace

Cilla Snowball CBE, Chairman and CEO, AMV Group

Much has been written about Generation Y, their beliefs and behaviours and the seismic impact they will have on the workplace. But what kind of an impact are they having on organisations, how are we adapting to them and how is it likely to play out as they grow into leaders?

This vibrant generation, now in their late teens and twenties, are sweeping into the workplace with confidence and ambition. Dubbed "Generation Why?", they have been brought up to feel they can question anything, achieve everything and expect to be able to do it on their own terms.

Well, why not? Harnessed effectively, this generation are team-orientated, intent on making a difference and lacking in the cynicism that characterised the generation before them (a truism being that each generation learns from and in some ways reacts against the previous generation). The first generation to truly grow up with technology, Generation Y are accustomed to change, choice and connectivity and are able to multi-task with ease. All this, plus a wealth of knowledge a click away, a respect for learning and a desire to get on fast, means they can be stellar performers.

But their supreme confidence and high expectations of working in an organisation that nurtures and rewards them means that if you get it wrong, they won't hesitate to tell you. Their comfort with change and natural expectation of choice also means that if you really get it wrong, they are ready to walk away from you much faster than previous generations, who grew up in the old job-for-life tradition.

As consultancy Rainmaker Thinking says about Generation Y, they are *"the most high-maintenance workforce in history, but the good news is they're also going to be the most high-performing"*.

So how do we get it right with this high-performing yet high-maintenance group?

Well, in our experience at Abbott Meade Vickers, getting it right with Generation Y to an extent demands much the same approach that has always been right for our organisation. In order to create motivation and loyalty we:
Hire bright, talented, nice people who enjoy working together.

Create a working environment in which their creativity will flourish, recognising that if your people are happy and motivated, then creative and commercial success follows.

Create an organisation they feel proud to belong to, delivering compelling service, outstanding output, coherent values and a social conscience.

Give responsibility and recognition and nurture talent in a high trust, high opportunity culture.

These are the principles we have always done our best to run our business by, and everything we know about Generation Y tells us that these things matter even more to them. Generation Y don't just care about being managed well, they insist on it. They have raised the bar on how well and how quickly they expect us to deliver for them and raised the stakes if we don't deliver.

As our Head of Talent Management Alison Chadwick puts it, *"they expect to move quickly through the ranks and be rewarded. If not, they have no problem moving on. They aren't prepared to play the waiting game and can't understand why they can't bypass particular routes in order to realise their ambition."*

The impact on us as an organisation? It has meant we have had to raise our game even higher on talent management and in finding relevant, new ways to enhance employee satisfaction. The vocal and 'vote with their feet' demands of Generation Y have added urgency to these efforts.

Thus for example, we dedicate in-house resource to training and management coaching across all disciplines, to ensure our managers understand how to empower and nurture the young talent in their charge. We also create management opportunity early for our talent. Our Managing Director at AMV BBDO joined as a graduate trainee just twelve years ago and his rapid ascent included taking responsibility for the agency's biggest client one month after being promoted to the Board.

So Generation Y are having a major impact in terms of their confident insistence on being proactively and rapidly developed, nurtured and rewarded in their careers.
The second major challenge is one that reaches right into how this generation live their lives outside as well as inside the workplace. Getting the best from Generation Y requires us to adapt to the ever more blurred societal and corporate boundaries that this generation have grown up with, and that increasingly define the way they live and work.

Let's look briefly at four well-documented, yet blurred, boundaries to create a sense of the scale of change Generation Y are driving.

For Generation Y, the societal boundaries of what **family and community** mean are far more blurred than they were for previous generations. They have grown up with the reality of almost one in two marriages ending in divorce and in an environment where every kind of diversity is normal to them. They are also the generation for whom Tweeting their every daily thought to a thousand strangers is a version of friendship. All this gives them an acceptance of difference and a collaborative, peer-orientated way of behaving and they expect the same from their employers. Seemingly arbitrary or unfair hierarchies or boundaries are found baffling and unacceptable.

The old corporate boundaries that defined **traditional workplace roles** are melting away with the ascent of this generation too. We see twenty-year-old internet entrepreneurs, thirty-year-old CEOs and of course a trend for open, collaborative structures and flat hierarchies. All these trends would have been unheard of or at least rare twenty years ago, but are increasingly the way that this confident and un-hierarchical generation expect to work. One of my team is an aspiring 20-plus champion climber, with ambitions in elite sport to combine and dovetail with very promising career ambitions in planning.

Gender boundaries in the workplace have also been

blurred. Generation Y women are not the ones who first shattered the glass ceiling, nor are they done with the struggle. But they are the first generation to grow up with the utter normality of both parents being out at work and the first to be able to look around them in the workplace and see many key positions filled by women (still nowhere near enough, but many more than twenty years ago). That moves Generation Y women further up the chain of expectation. Maternity provision, career breaks and flexible working are frequently discussed and requested.

Finally and perhaps most importantly (because it's a boundary that has been more dramatically blurred by this generation in particular), is the astonishing softening of the **boundary between work and home**.

This is of course a technology-driven trend. Technology-enabled from childhood in a way that makes working from the park on their Blackberry as natural as working at their desk, for this generation of "Flexistentialists" (as Microsoft have dubbed them), there just isn't a line between work and home any more. Timothy Ferris, author of the recent best-seller The 4-Hour Workweek says *"Separating work and life is a lost skill among the 18-35 year olds"*.

Yes, they care strongly about balance (time off is a motivating reward for this generation) but it's more extreme than that: for many the way they work is an extension of the way they live, so the trend is for more of a work-life blur than a work-life balance.

As a recent LS:N report succinctly put it, *"MySpace is their new conference room"* and mobile gadgets like iPhones that allow them to watch a film, book a holiday, order their groceries, send their work emails and trace a music track are stimulating this convergence at an incredible pace. The Future Laboratory have coined the term "Bleisure" to capture this new reality.

Technology is the practical catalyst for this blur but not the only driver. In the knowledge-worker age, many find their work so engaging that it doesn't really feel like work (especially if they can do it from the beach). Daniel Pink, the author of A Whole New Mind, says: *"We often thought of work as something you do to get money to buy leisure. But that is a false way to look at it now. If you are doing something that you enjoy doing and you are getting paid for it, it becomes a profitable hobby rather than drudgery"*.

So how do we adapt as employers to enable Generation Y to work in this way?

Well, we give them the technology to enable their flexibility and mobile connectivity and then create a culture with as much trust, enjoyment, challenge, variety, opportunity and freedom as we can. As a creative organisation, we have always worked like this to an extent (an advertising creative is likely to come up with their best idea for a skateboard brand if they've spent the afternoon at a skate park and be more creatively stimulated in an office with decent coffee, a free breakfast and a table football game to mess around on), but the need for a flexible working culture is now paramount to motivate this generation.

"Give them a laptop ... a mobile and internet connection and let them go free" says Nari Kannan, one Generation Y'er. Already LS:N report that 12% of the UK workforce spend the majority of their working day away from an office, with that percentage set to rise.

So, in some ways, getting the best from Generation Y demands just more and better of the same principles and practices that always created motivation and performance at work. However the really seismic shift is being driven by this blurring of so many of the traditional boundaries that previous generations grew up with. Any organisation that wants to keep and get the most from their young staff will need to loosen up to embrace the ever-changing landscape.

And what of this generation, as they grow into leaders? Well, we expect even more of the same. How could we expect this *"restless generation of business leaders waiting impatiently in the wings"* (Daily Telegraph, 2007) to do anything less than confidently create or re-mould organisations to reflect their own defining characteristics, when it's their turn? In fact the lesson of the Bleisure trend is that these shifts are a societal inevitability: not a decision to change the way they work as much as a natural shift into a different reality.

So we should expect them to lead companies that are peer-focused with flatter, more collaborative structures. Companies that are learning and opportunity- orientated. Companies that are hard-working, but technology-enabled to equip their people to do their work whenever and wherever it suits them. In a recent Microsoft survey of this generation, 18% believed that head offices will be redundant in the future. This generation will also lead

companies that are intent on making a difference to society's big issues.

There is a wonderful Chinese proverb that says *"If you want a lifetime of happiness, help the next generation."* If we follow this, all the time we spend in understanding and helping Generation Y will be very well spent indeed, for them and for us.

Who cares wins

working families Pioneer

Madeleine Starr is Strategic Projects Manager of Carers UK

We are all, it seems, leading increasingly complex lives, with growing demands on us both in and outside the workplace. The extension of working lives is now a given, with much talk about work and job design for an ageing workforce, and the importance of health and wellbeing at work. How we manage work related stress and stress related absenteeism is seen as critical to maintaining a productive workforce, and remaining economically effective and competitive.

But what about the impact of life outside the workplace? What effects do the changing demands of modern society and family life have on our ability to work longer, smarter and healthier? We have wrestled with – and largely won at least in principle – the fight for the right to reconcile work and parenthood, with few arguing that women should not work and raise children, or that men should not give time and attention to their families alongside their careers. However, the next fight is already upon us, and growing more pressing year on year, and that is the fight for the right to combine paid work with care for dependents other than healthy children – elderly parents, partners or family with disabilities or long term health or mental health conditions.

We know that families show extraordinary resilience in managing complex caring responsibilities as part of their ordinary, everyday lives, including their demanding working lives. We also know that doing so can cause significant stress, with carers twice as likely as non-carers to suffer from stress and stress related illness. The stress of caring can have a significant impact on working carers, with employers increasingly identifying caring as the underlying cause of what is being reported as work-related stress.

The UK has over three million working carers. One in seven people in any workforce are juggling work and care, often managing what can seem like two jobs, one paid and one unpaid. That number is set to grow dramatically with changing demographics. More people living longer, and more people living longer with disability and complex health conditions, is a good news story, but it has an impact beyond the individual. In the future most people's lives will include at least one episode of caring, more often than not during their working lives, with 45-64 the peak age for caring. Over the next 30 years the number of carers in the UK will jump from six million to nine million, significantly increasing the number of people in the workforce with caring responsibilities. At exactly the same time, we will see a shrinking workforce and a shifting dependency ratio which will require people to work longer to pay their own as well as the country's bills, many of them while caring. Currently, 90% of working carers are aged 30 plus – employees in their prime working years.

Given this complex picture, achieving a work-life balance becomes ever more a priority for the many, not a concession for the few, and reaches into every area of family and community life. If we are all to be citizens contributing the maximum to society – remembering that unpaid care is worth £87 billion a year in social capital – and not only workers contributing the maximum to the economy, how we engage employers in recognizing the benefits of their own support is critical. Employers of all sizes may increasingly need more flexible and multi-skilled employees but the recruitment pool will be smaller – supporting a diverse workforce, including those with caring responsibilities, will be essential to their success. The trick is to demonstrate that this support is about bottom line benefits, not being 'nice to people'.

So how can supporting carers in their own workforce benefit employers? What should that support look like? And what more do working carers need?

The first thing to recognize is that caring is different from mainstream childcare and needs a separate response from

employers. Caring for a sick or disabled relative or friend – for example, as a result of an accident or stroke – can happen overnight, and can be unpredictable. Every year, 10,000 people have a stroke, 36,000 people are seriously injured in a road accident and 27,000 children are born or diagnosed with a serious disability or rare syndrome. Caring milestones are different too – a disabled child may still be at home with parents as a disabled adult. All too often, the "end of caring" means a loved one moving into residential care, or dying.

We might argue that this is all far too difficult to bring into the workplace, that caring is a 'private concern'. However, how we maintain a productive workforce, and a competitive economy, is very much a 'public issue' and managing care is increasingly at its heart. There is much that can be done by employers to support carers at work. Policies identifying carers' discrete needs, flexible working arrangements, flexible leave arrangements, providing or signposting to information and advice on accessing care and support, peer support networks, offering emergency care cover, are all ways that employers can support working carers. The pay back is demonstrable benefits in terms of improved retention, increased productivity and reduced absenteeism, to say nothing of loyalty and commitment. It quite simply makes business sense.

However, it is not only about what employers can offer. Carers also need flexible, affordable and good quality services for the people they care for. Carers cite difficulties in getting these services as their greatest cause of stress, and stress is top of the list of reasons why a staggering one in five carers give up work to care. This is simply not acceptable, neither in terms of impact on employers seeking to retain the best in a difficult labour market, nor impact on individuals and families who then face financial hardship and social isolation.

Giving and receiving care, willingly and within interdependent relationships, is a fundamental part of the human condition. Caring touches everyone, in all their diversity, and how we manage care in society will have increasingly significant social, economic and human consequences. Not only do carers have a right to expect responsive services for their loved ones and families, employers also have a right to expect a national and local infrastructure of care and support services that enable their employees to do their paid jobs effectively even while providing the care that is so crucial to their families and to wider society.

Employers made a significant difference to the quantity and quality of affordable childcare on offer to enable parents to work when they added their voice to the childcare debate two decades ago. Employers now need to make their voice heard in the new debate on care, and help us to ensure that support for working carers outside as well as inside the workplace contributes to a work-life balance that properly reflects our changing world.

Managing happiness

Henry Stewart, Chief Executive, Happy Ltd

A couple of years ago I attended a forum of small business directors organised by the Sunday Times. When I talked about our approach to flexible working, the response from the others was that they couldn't possibly afford to do that. Later the Chair of the event asked what their greatest challenge was. Every single one gave the same answer: 'recruitment'.

At my company, Happy, we have never had a recruitment problem. We don't pay recruitment consultants and we generally don't advertise vacancies. For a company of just 50 people, our waiting list of people wanting to join us has been as high as 2,000. Last time we needed new trainers, I sent one email and had over 90 completed online application forms within a week. With little effort, and no external cost, we recruited three strong candidates.

A key reason for so many people wanting to work for Happy is our flexible working. The Financial Times has voted us the best in the country for work-life balance, and this year the Great Place to Work Institute rated Happy as the best company in the UK for health and well-being. But we don't do this out of paternalism or philanthropy. We do it because it makes business sense, and I believe it pays for itself out of improved staff retention and easier recruitment alone.

In 18 years of business we have never rejected a request for flexible working. A key turning point was when, eight years ago, we decided to assume any request made sense, putting the onus on the company to show it wouldn't work (if we wanted to turn it down) rather than on the member of staff to show it would.

People at Happy work very different hours. Some have worked term-time only. Many work part-time. Some work varying days. Most popular, though, is compressed working where you work the hours of a five day week in four longer days.

We decided long ago that flexible working should not be restricted to parents. I spend most of Mondays in my childrens' school (where I am Chair of Governors). But Cathy Busani, our Managing Director, has no direct childcare responsibilities and is more likely to be relaxing on her day off. (Yes, making sure senior management are working flexibly is crucial to making it work throughout the company.)

We had one member of staff whose favourite club was on a Sunday night and he would either be exhausted or hung over, or not turn up at all, on Monday. At first we worked with him in traditional management style to resolve the problem, and were close to taking disciplinary action. But then somebody had a brainwave and suggested he work his hours Tuesday to Friday. It was a win-win solution. He was delighted and we got back a valued and motivated worker.

We try and step out of judging whether a reason is good enough. Instead it is not about what we think, it is about what is important to them. It doesn't matter whether it is to look after a child, to study for a degree, to recover from clubbing or to spend more time with your cat – if it improves quality of life, then let's try and make it work.

One thing I learnt from Cathy was the concept of "me time". For too many, flexible working means being able to go home and be exhausted looking after the family, rather than exhausted at the office. But do you get any "me time", time for what refreshes and invigorates you. Pushed to look at what I would love to be doing, I started taking days off to cycle. And I have had some of my best ideas while cycling through idyllic countryside.

Some ask how we prioritise different requests. The answer is that we try not to. Instead we try to step out of the way.

For example, our administration is done by a group called "smoothies" (it is short for "smooth operators".) We were getting various requests for different ways of working, and so we handed the decisions over to them. "We need two people on the phones from 9am to 5.30pm. As long as you ensure that, you can decide how you work between you." And they did. The result, because many people wanted to start early, was that the phones are now answered from 8am. Our people got the hours they wanted and we got improved service for our customers.

We have a simple core principle at Happy: people work best when they feel good about themselves. In the talks I give, I have asked thousands of people whether they agree with that statement and the vast majority (over 95%) do. The next question follows on: what then is the key role of management? Clearly, if you agree with the first statement, it follows that the key role of management is to create an environment where people feel good about themselves.

The effectiveness of this approach has been proved. Nandos, the popular restaurant chain, some years ago carried out research into discovering the key factors that explained why sales at some of their restaurants grew faster than at others. After detailed analysis they found one thing stood out above all others in explaining the difference. This was how happy the staff were, as measured in the annual staff survey. In response they changed their bonus system, so that 50% of each manager's bonus became based solely on those staff survey results.

Think about that for a moment. What would your organisation be like if making your staff happy – making them feel valued and motivated – really was seen as the key function of management?

The result can be a different sort of organisation, where people are trusted and given freedom (within clear guidelines) to do the job.

Imagine a workplace where people are able to get the life balance they want. Where they are energised and motivated by working the way that works for them. Where people are valued according to the work they do, rather than the number of hours they spend at their desk. Where they are trusted and given freedom, within clear guidelines, to decide how to achieve their results.

Wouldn't you want to work in a place like that?

Thats what my company does now. We help organisations create great places to work in. And it really isn't that hard, as long as you do value your people. I call it *management as if people mattered*.

Leaders building purpose and communities. . . and all that jazz

Penny de Valk, CEO, Institute of Leadership and Management

We have been talking work-life balance and building business cases for organisations to embrace it against a backdrop of economic, technological and social/ demographic change for well over a decade in the UK now. The intransigence of organisations to adapt to this new imperative however has been remarkable. Rather like the foretelling of the paperless office and that print is dead, most working lives have not been transformed in the last 10 years. We all still largely troop into our workplaces for our full-time jobs, the commitment of those working flexibly goes largely uncounted as does the talent wastage inherent in the traditional career structures that are still pretty much intact.

So what happens at this time of economic crisis where the labour market is not as tight as it was and where potentially employers are no longer as focussed on loosening up their employment practices to open the door as wide as they can. Many will forget about it and go back to business as usual, but the source of competitive advantage is for those organisations who see this as the real opportunity to change the game and look to leadership to do it.

We all know that the next few years are going to be extremely difficult for people in organisations. We will need to ask extraordinary things of ordinary people. As leaders we will be required to deliver results against the odds and the burden of this responsibility will be a heavy one. We will need our people to stay engaged in what they are doing and committed to doing it better than our competitors even though the extrinsic rewards are likely to be slight and will often be seen in terms of keeping their jobs, or not. To survive we need to be relentlessly focussed on getting more from less and we need people doing this all day every day, being the best they can be over a sustained period of time. As leaders it is our job to build our organisation's resilience to do be able to do this. This means building our people's resilience and commitment to doing that day in and day out, when progress will feel slow and laborious. So we need leaders who can build purpose.

One of the keys to individual resilience comes from knowing why we are doing things. People will put up with a lot of 'what' if they know 'why'. Creating a sense of mission over the next few years will be a critical role for leaders yet this can often feel counter-intuitive in tough times. The greater the responsibility we feel for our organisation the more focussed we are on survival, and bigger picture purpose can often get brushed aside or seem like a frivolous use of time and bandwidth. It's not.

Understanding what our purpose is as leaders is also critical to our own resilience. Do we know why we are doing this, why is it important, do we have the courage to ensure it adds up to more than a hill of beans at the end of the day and as importantly, do our people believe it.

A sense of purpose can also mitigate risk in our organisations,as it becomes a super ordinate principle overriding personal greed and individual reward, something we needed to be paying more attention to over the last decade.

Just as purpose supports resilience it also enables change. To compete effectively in our new world we have to change the way we do things and we will need our people to lead on and support that change. And they will only do that if they care enough. Often our response as leaders in difficult times is to focus on the numbers, to become granular in our control of resources and deeply analytical as we try to assess our changing marketplace. And of course this is exactly what we need to do but it can't be at the expense of building a community that cares about why that is so imperative. As leaders we need to understand and be able to articulate 'what counts' for our organisation in every dimension.

While there will be a good deal about modern management that will be pilloried on the back of this economic meltdown much of it will probably focus on the 'technology' of management and its inadequacy to equip us to manage organisations in an increasingly ambiguous and connected world. From deal making to financial instruments, from net present values to business modelling, the classic MBA curriculum will likely be the heartland we go to when trying to answer the question 'how did we get here?' Yet the standard toolkit for managers and leaders of organisations might not be as rich a source of understanding as an investigation into our maturity as leaders. This is likely to yield greater insight into what we might need to do differently, or more of, moving forward.

Over the last 10-20 years a leadership model that is transformational and more coaching oriented than command and control has been taking root. But they are fairly young roots and it will be interesting to see as times get tougher whether they survive, because they need to. This model of leadership hasn't sprung out of a touchy-feely movement, neither is it a by-product of 'good times'. As we have needed to respond to a service economy where people really were our greatest asset we needed to engage with them in a different way. The focus on EQ as well as IQ has begun to be buried in leadership and management development programmes and discussion around issues like integrity, character and follower-ship are now quite the norm. The opportunity now is for us to insist on these attributes in our leaders and to flex our organisations to the extreme.

We have been busy teaching managers skills like listening, coaching, facilitating, creativity, team building – about taking responsibility for building capability in their people. These aren't just leadership attributes for good times, they are leadership attributes for times where one person can't have all the answers anymore, where ambiguity is the overarching feature of the landscape we are trying to navigate. As leaders in this difficult environment we need to appreciate and learn to revel in the jazz of organisations more, which will be the sign of our leadership maturity.

The difference between the organisations of yesterday and today is similar to the difference between classical music and jazz. One is structured and able to be appreciated and dissected intellectually; the other is spontaneous, often appears discordant and chaotic but is in itself profoundly sophisticated and complex. The two kinds of music are created very differently; with jazz there is rarely a conductor. Jazz players are the ultimate self-managing team, they improvise, they support each others' solos, they innovate as they go along with no single rendition being quite the same as the other. The notes they don't play are as important as those they do. The music itself is very fluid, free form, not always planned, the surprises and the innovation is what amazes and delights – the chaos is terrifying. The technical expertise is simply a given, it is the interpretation that is critical. As leaders in these uncharted waters where there is no score, we need to hone our jazz appreciation skills and not be tempted to go back to the managerial models of yesterday that have proved to have served us poorly. If we do that, the attitude and infrastructure shifts required to make work-life balance real will inevitably take root as we loosen up our organisations and reward leaders who can make that happen.

Changing the nature of work

Jim Walsh,
Director of Employment Culture, Diageo

If we look back fifty or one hundred years at how people were treated at work, we would say, "How awful. How could they have treated people so badly?" If we then look forward fifty or one hundred years, I suspect that people in the future will look back at us and say, "How awful. How could they have treated people so badly?" We need to be moving to that future way of treating people. We need to change the nature of work!

In Diageo we place employee engagement very high in our priorities and are thinking afresh about our approach. All of our executives have engagement as one of their objectives, and we measure it annually through our values survey. What gets measured gets done, and people are rewarded (or not) partly based on achieving these engagement objectives.

Firstly what do we mean by engagement? It is about people

putting their maximum energy into the success of the enterprise and, critically, being in a place where they feel that they can flourish.

I love the Einstein quote: "Everything should be as simple as possible, but no simpler." There is a risk that we oversimplify engagement and simply focus on one or two aspects. We are complex beings and it's the whole person who walks through the door.

I mentioned people's energy earlier. You could also think about this as the capacity that people have. Just to be clear, this isn't just about energy for work, it's about energy for life. We think about this in four ways.

Physical energy

This is the most fundamental and is the basis for everything else. Are we healthy, physically fit, eating well, sleeping well, taking regular breaks, using our annual leave? The more we can help and encourage people to be physically well, the better that is for them and the more energy they will have for work. A classic 'win-win'.

Emotional energy

The next building block is emotional energy. When asked how they feel when at their best, high performers in any field will typically use words such as calm, challenged, focused, optimistic, and confident. Just as these positive emotions can support high performance, feelings such as frustration, fear, anxiety, resentment, anger and pessimism will drain energy. Over time they can become truly toxic and may cause health issues.

Mental energy

The third component is mental energy. Put simply, this is focusing our energy on a particular goal. Are we keeping our mind active and alert, are we constantly learning, are we really clear about what we need to achieve, do we focus all our energies on one thing at a time? Alternatively, constantly multi-tasking i.e. not focusing on one important task, lacking concentration, and being easily distracted, all drain mental capacity and our ability to perform.

Spiritual energy

This is potentially an uncomfortable area to discuss and perhaps doesn't seem immediately relevant to business performance. By spiritual capacity we simply mean tapping into our deepest values and sense of purpose. Where we can connect what we do at work with that sense of purpose it can unlock a level of commitment and determination that would otherwise be untapped.

This is all very well, but what can employers do about it? The question is how do we create the conditions for people to maximise their energy for life and for work?

One-dimensional interventions that only address people from the neck up, and ignore their physical, emotional and spiritual needs are now inadequate. When we create the conditions that help people have high energy for life, they win, and the companies that employ them win.

Energy management in practice

It would be entirely wrong of me to imply that we have cracked these issues, but I do believe that we are on the journey. Let me give you a couple of examples of how we've been using this in Diageo.

One of our packaging sites recently launched the 'Living Well' programme. The site closed down its production lines for 24 hours and the employees attended a Living Well event.

Everyone had an individual **Health and Wellbeing Assessment**. Based on a 42 item questionnaire, employees were each provided with a personalised report including an overall health & wellbeing score, along with sub-scores for medical health, job satisfaction, life load, risk and lifestyle, mood, nutrition, sleep, stress, pain and body weight.

They then attended a number of sessions including:

Know Your Numbers – helping people get to grips with the results of their health assessment and the risks it might indicate.

Positive Energy Through Healthy Eating – what eating healthily looks like and how to overcome some day to day challenges that may prevent us from eating as healthily as we should

Positive Energy Through Exercise – how simple day-to-day exercise can bring about significant health benefits.

Positive Energy Through Sleep – helping individuals get

the best out of their sleep and how to minimise the effects of shift working.

In a substantial piece of research, the *Towers Perrin Workforce Study*, 2005, found that senior management having an interest in people's wellbeing was the top driver of engagement. Interestingly it was also the area that employees scored least favourably.

Following the Living Well day, employees fed back that they saw it as the company doing something for them. 77% of employees were planning to make changes to their lifestyles as a result of what they learnt.

Work for its own sake.

As we consider the future of work, I believe that one of the biggest opportunities is for people to be doing work that they enjoy for its own sake, or even work that has real purpose and meaning for them. This taps into the spiritual energy that I described above. The technical term is intrinsic motivation i.e. being motivated to do something for its own sake rather than simply to achieve an end result (such as being paid).

As part of Diageo's leadership performance programme, the most senior 800 leaders in the company spent a great deal of time exploring and understanding their individual "purpose". What is it that is most important for us to do or to be? This was not purpose at work but purpose in life. We could then explore how that fitted with work.

As people realised, perhaps for the first time, how their work connected with their purpose, I witnessed the unlocking of levels of commitment and determination previously unseen. It has also led to people being much more fulfilled at work.

The next challenge is to tap into that spiritual energy for all employees. For everyone to have work that they find meaningful and that they enjoy for its own sake. No small challenge, but as I said at the beginning, it's about changing the nature of work.

The new agenda for flexible working

Caroline Waters is Director, People & Policy, for BT Group

What is the new agenda for flexible working? It's far more than people at work – it's about reaching out to new people, unrestrained by geography, gender or outdated attitudes about how people should work. It's about freeing people to be the best that they can be and it's about smashing the expectations of life that are built on the need for years of continuous earning to prepare for a relatively short span of retirement.

Jobs as we know them are a relatively recent invention, as is the whole concept of partition between work and life. Until the industrial revolution home was a natural place of production. People worked at home, or close by, whether they were farm workers or professionals. Work and personal life quite naturally intermingled and advanced together, creating meaning and a sense of purpose whatever phase of life you were in.

Developments, both industrial and technical, and a shift towards a more liberal society over the last 20 years mean that in the future we will be able to restore this natural balance, while maintaining the enormous benefits of a UK plc made up of knowledge workers who no longer need a manager to control or measure their output.

The rate of change in society is increasingly dependent upon the age at which people are first able to access the latest technology. Even just 20 years ago this would occur at around 16 years of age. Kids today are almost 'born clicking' with the average age of access to computing now just two years old – producing the potential for societal change on a two-year cycle. The future is going to be more dynamic than we can even imagine!

Flexible workers can already work with virtual teams from all over the world; soon they will work 1-to-1 or 1-to-millions. The technology to push 10 trillion bits per second

down one strand of fibre is very close. Soon we will be able to hold 150 million simultaneous phone calls every second! Workers will generate, in one year, more new information than in the previous 5,000 and they'll be able to do it wherever they happen to be. They will also have the technology and flexibility to deal with the increasing demands on their lives outside of work as we see new multi-generational families of four or even five generations emerge as our life expectancy increases.

In the future technology will bring new opportunities to previously excluded groups faster than ever before – opportunities that are hugely magnified by the possibilities offered by a new Web 2.0 enabled world. Web 1.0 at its most basic, the internet, was about pushing information to people. Web 2.0 is all about people interacting with information. We now have real flexibility in not just how we work but in what and how we communicate. We have fast developing social communication tools such as Facebook, You Tube and Flickr. Viral media distribution using peer-to-peer wireless communications are advancing at a pace – soon your iPod will communicate with other devices to bring you the latest news or sale prices, or promote your business anywhere in the world. Tele-presence is developing fast and will truly make geography history, transporting people from their living room to wherever their business partners, suppliers and customers are!

In this world it no longer matters where, when or how you work. Carers, parents, people with disabilities and people in remote locations will all be able to achieve economic independence because access to work will no longer be a barrier. Home based working and flexible attendance patterns are already making a difference to these groups as well as helping businesses address the problems of a shrinking local talent pool even in the midst of a recession.

Make no mistake, today with the global economy moving into previously uncharted waters, the combination of flexibility and talent underpins not only our ability to compete successfully in global markets but our ability to tackle the major issues of our generation: climate change, social inclusion and market innovation – the triple context for businesses of the future, whether they are large or small.

The technology that is emerging allows us to make better use of the best talents whether they live in the UK or beyond. The flexibility we create with it will ensure that the talent we need will come from every corner of the world, making our businesses more competitive and more attractive to everyone who wants to buy from us. Current one dimensional views of talent, often defined by academic qualifications, will be irrelevant. After all, the amount of new technical information is doubling every two years.

It will also allow us to harness the power of underused community buildings such as schools, libraries, community centres and railway stations as places in which the growing community of agile workers can interact. People will have the option not only to work from their employers' premises or from home, but also within their own community, bringing life back to dormitory towns and re-energising our inner cities and rural communities.

The potential for societal change is immense. Imagine the impact of a 50% reduction in commuting traffic on the environment, not just on our health but that of the planet and generations yet to come. If just 20% of EU business travel was replaced by video conferencing we would save 22.3 million tonnes of CO_2 and if just 10% of EU workers became flexi-workers we could save 22.17 million tonnes of CO_2.

Imagine the reduction in crime made possible because parents can play a larger role in the day-to-day life of their children and because the local community presents a more collaborative life model. Imagine 'full-time' workers actively involved in their community, as school governors, charity workers or in local government.

In tomorrow's world the only thing that limits the way we access and control work is our imagination...

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About Working Families

Working Families is the UK's leading work-life balance charity. It supports and gives a voice to working parents and carers, whilst also helping employers create workplaces which encourage work-life balance for everyone.

Working Families helps parents and carers understand their rights and to negotiate for change at work, and also encourages employers to grasp the real business benefits that work-life balance practice can bring. Informed by all it hears from and knows of its individual and employer members, its research and its legal advice work, it is able to argue authoritatively for social policy and workplace change that will benefit anyone with family.

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working families

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