



**MALTA EMPLOYERS'
ASSOCIATION**



Work-Life Balance with Focus on Family Life

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1. Perspectives of Time and Work Conflict

Work-Life balance stems from the fact that workers as human beings have other needs beside the economic ones. Individuals have to divide their time among various domains such as work, family, community, religion and recreation. To many people, especially those who are in gainful employment, work tends to be the central activity around which all other activities revolve. In other words the work schedule determines in one way or another how individuals fulfil their commitments in the non-work domains which consist mainly of family and social life. Life becomes a balancing act.

In a balance an equilibrium is reached when the weights, placed on one pan, are equivalent to the weight of the substance on the other pan, so that the beam pivoted at the centre is in horizontal position. What this metaphor therefore implies is that there should be an equilibrium between the work and non-work domains. In other words the presupposition of this perspective is that there should be an appropriate distribution of time allocated between work and non work.

Work-Life balance has become a more topical issue since many institutions are demanding from their employees a kind of time commitment which in the past was only expected from a small number of core workers. Company controlled flexibility to maintain competitiveness may be forcing a number of workers into an irregular time schedule. The labour force has always included workers who have had to adjust to irregular social hours: police staff, hospital and airport staff, maintenance workers in electricity, telephone and water services together with employees in the hospitality industry. Today citizens who have to work irregular hours are not restricted to such categories of workers.

As more workers are being forced to work round the clock, modern society is being defined as 'the 24 hour society' (Kauppinen, 2001; Merrlie, & Paoli, 2001). 'Round the Clock' work entails night work, evening work and work on a shift basis. While regulations may define how long we can work they cannot define the schedule of work. The implications which working time arrangements may have on the social and personal life of individuals as well on the viability of the firm have attracted the attention of social analysts (Kauppinen, 2001; Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). Is the balancing act to achieve a satisfactory equation between work and non work domains a source of tension to individuals as workers? Or is this an act which is proving to give a high degree of satisfaction to many workers? Is working time arrangement designed to help workers achieve this work-life balance?

In trying to answer these questions we have to bear in mind that workers in measuring the time allocated to the non-work domain may have a different perspective from that suggested by the balance metaphor. There is no mechanical device to regulate and adjust the distribution between work and non-work domains in equitable terms. To the phenomenologists the work-life balance perspective, being based on an ideal quantitative equation, tends to ignore the psychological processes by which people make sense of their time and manage multiple domains (Thompson and Bunderson, 2001:17). This phenomenological approach tends to focus more on the significance people assign to the time they devote to specific domains rather than dichotomise life roles into work and non-work (ibid:20). As it looks at the range of possible relationships between work-non work domains this perspective tries to identify the meanings and values that shape and influence one's perspective of time. These relationships may, for example, depend on the intrinsic

motivation of one's work and non work domain. Other factors may be one's feeling of frustration and stress or one's emphasis of success and failure in any one of the two domains.

By focusing on the subjective views of individuals about time it gives a broader view of how the relationships between work and non work are experienced by individuals. It moves away from the metaphor and tries to establish wider parameters on the negative and positive relationships between work and non work. It therefore complements rather negates the work-life balance perspective.

This study tries to tread a line between these two perspectives by providing a quantitative analysis based on a questionnaire which was designed on the views expressed by a group of workers during a focus group discussion.

2. Methodology

This empirical study was divided into four stages:

- (i) A focus group discussion dealing with general issues about working time and family and social life.
- (ii) A questionnaire sent by the Malta Employers' Association (MEA) to its members asking them to provide information about the working time arrangement of their employees and
- (iii) A questionnaire based on the data emanating from the focus group discussion administered to a sample of workers
- (iv) A questionnaire sent electronically to employers to comment about the rationale of the working time arrangement.

3. The Focus Group

The focus group consisted of ten workers, six females and four males coming from different sectors, who work on a shift basis. It is assumed that since social and cultural life seems to be designed on the premise that the majority of people have more time to spare in the evening and during weekends the workers who work on a shift basis have to juggle more to adjust their working life to their non working domain.

From the statements made by participants, it can be deduced that the schedule of work involving irregular hours of work can reduce the joy and satisfaction one can derive from family life. The older workers who are parents of children in their teenage years were more articulate about this issue. One of these workers stated that when he looks at his teenage children a feeling of remorse creeps in because he was not involved in their upbringing as much as he would have liked to. His absence from home during most of the time when children were growing did not help him to establish the ideal type of warm, intimate relationship between child and parent. He still feels that as a parent he is seen more in an instrumental rather than in an expressive role.

In spite of these adverse comments none of the participants was of the opinion that irregular working hours could be a cause for family breakdown. The spouses of the dual worker family appreciate the sacrifice they are doing to provide for the economic needs of the family. This attitude towards work to satisfy the material needs of the family was vehemently confirmed by a male who said that when he was young and unmarried he used

to do his best to shun Sunday work. In contrast today the extra money earned for Sunday shift appears to him very attractive. The reason, of course, is that today he has financial obligations, induced by family needs, which the money earned through Sunday work may help him to honour to a greater degree of satisfaction. This can be defined as an instrumental orientation towards working time.

For these workers family life seems to be too much dependent on the time left over by the demands of their work time schedule and the time they have to spend taking a rest during the day to have enough energy for their shift work. They do not however see themselves as being engaged in a zero sum game in the sense that they are unable to manage time to make it commensurate to their psychological and social needs.

They seemed to have become adept at devising the best means to use the amount of time left. Indeed the utilisation of the time off to the best advantage of their own and that of their family seems to be high in their level of consciousness. Time is not seen in the metaphor of a balance in the sense that they tend to perceive more the qualitative rather than the quantitative aspect of time in their adjustment of their non-work domain to their working life.

3.1 Fatigue and Cultural Deprivation

Nevertheless any device towards a better utilisation of time can be hampered by the feeling of fatigue. Those who work on a shift basis, especially that which includes night shift, tend to feel physically tired throughout the whole day. They feel that their biological clock is being disturbed – (“God created night to sleep”). Somehow they lose their bearings about the days of the week since they cannot be quite active in their social life during most of the day. As tiredness tends to accumulate it may induce two extremes - either aggressiveness or passivity. One air hostess said that when she does not manage to get a good rest before reporting for her night duty on board an aeroplane the passengers would look to her more like ghosts rather than human beings. (‘You look at them as if they are hazy objects’).

The way shift work affects recreational life was also stressed by participants. To the factory worker, although finishing work at 10.00 p.m. makes one feel dead beat she still goes out to enjoy the night life. This sense of fatigue does not however wear off easily and she has to cope with it as she immerses herself in night life. Even the hustle and bustle she has to go through in order to join the fun of night life tends to reduce some of her joy. She has to do everything in a rush. In other words, she cannot prepare herself for the leisure activities in a relaxed manner. She is thus deprived of this luxury and during her leisure time at night she has to make an effort to overcome the tiredness induced by her working so late in the day.

This feeling of relative deprivation is more felt during the summer months when there are more occasions and events for fun late at night. One of the females related how often she had to join a barbecue at a time when the joyful spirit of the event had passed its peak. But it is not just fatigue that may hinder these workers from joining and enjoying social and recreational life. Shift work may make it difficult for workers to participate in family gatherings. Sometimes it can be the attitude of management due to, they admit, to pressure of work which may hinder their participation in social life.

Trying to make time meaningful is therefore not always possible for these types of workers. All the participants in this group discussion, but especially the spouses of dual

working families, feel squeezed between the demands and rewards of work and the needs of family life. Combining work with home is seen as a conflict, especially to females. Although today there is a belief that there is more sharing in house work there was one female who stated that her husband still insists that housework is not part of his sphere of life. Only occasionally (‘when he feels like it’) does he put in his share in housework.

These difficulties tend to make respondents more conscious of the quality of time. They seemed that however much their social and family life may be different from that of others they are continuously striving to make it qualitatively meaningful. They even looked at the bright side of their irregular work schedule.

3.2 Positive Attitudes

Indeed, attitudes about irregular hours of work are not altogether negative. There seem to be some positive aspects. One of these is that they can always find time to attend to some personal or family matters. They are also in a much better position to run other personal errands. Government departments and other offices offer their services during the day. Unlike other workers they do not need to resort to their vacation leave if or when they have to go to any of these offices. They also tend to have far more time for shopping than those with a standard working week. The latter have to squeeze the few hours available late in the evening to do their shopping or postpone it for Saturday. Workers on a shift basis can shop freely in the morning or early in the afternoon. The appreciation of these positive aspects were such that the Air Malta employees did not express any willingness to change their job. It was the females working in the manufacturing sector who were unequivocal about their willingness to change their jobs if they were to be offered a job with less unsocial hours.

The data emanating from this focus group discussion indicated that workers tend to measure their work-life balance on the basis of how much working time allows them to enjoy family life in terms of their interaction with children or members of their family, joining in family based activities (such as wedding receptions) and honouring other family commitments. It was noted that their concept of work-life balance depends also on their perception of time. The time left for leisure, how it can be utilised, their instrumental orientation towards working time and their perceptions of management of time have an impact on their experience of work and non-work conflict. These were the parameters used in the questionnaire to appraise how people experience the relationship between work and non-work life.

4. Questionnaire sent to Employers

The questionnaire, sent by the Malta Employers’ Association (MEA) to its members was answered by 59 firms representing 19,118 employees The working time arrangement of the employees was the following:

Table 1 Working Time Arrangement

Standard working week	11,622	60.8%
More than 48 hours per week	356	1.9%
Shift basis	6369	33.3%
No fixed starting or finishing time	771	4.0%
Total	19,118	100

5. The Questionnaire administered to workers.

From the 59 firms that responded to the MEA questionnaire eight firms were selected from the manufacturing sector on the basis of the number of workers with different working time arrangement in their employment. The same criterion was applied to select the five firms in the service sector and the four state run or owned enterprises. The same questionnaire, sent by MEA, was also sent to Government Departments through the Employee Relations at the Management and Personnel Office. However the officials at this office were not in a position to release the data gathered. In order not to exclude completely the employees in the public sector, twenty questionnaires were sent to employees at the Customs Department. It is to be noted that there is a core group of workers in this department who work on a shift basis. The firms in the service sector were two hotel establishments, a construction company, an enterprise providing transport service and a children's home run by the Church.

In all 480 questionnaires were distributed between October and November 2003 – 240 to workers in the manufacturing sector, 110 to state owned/ run enterprises and 130 to workers in the service sector. As can be seen in the following table, the workers without a fixed starting and finishing time are over represented in the sample. This was done to provide a number that would allow comparative analysis. This slight increase in absolute terms does not however distort the representativeness of the workers with a standard working week and those on a shift basis.

Table 2 Working Time Arrangement of workers in the sample

Standard working week	214	56.7%
On a shift basis	120	31.7%
No fixed starting or finishing time	36	9.5%
Did not specify	8	2.1%
Total	378	100

Since according to the observation made from the focus group, the instrumental attitude to work tends to prevail most among workers in the manufacturing sector the sample was skewed in favour of workers from this sector. However the workers in the sample from the two other sectors, namely Services and Government run or owned enterprises, balance those from the manufacturing sector.

Table 3 Response Rate

	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total Respondents	Number in Sample	Response Rate
Services	87	23.0	130	67.0%
Manufacturing	197	52.1	240	82.0%
Govt/ Run or Owned	91	24.1	110	82.7%
Not specified	3	0.8		
Total	378	100	480	78.7%

The questions can be divided in two categories for the purpose of analysis. In the first category the emphasis is on family life and therefore related to work-family balance. The second set deals with workers' perception of time. The assumption is that the way people think about themselves and their working time will impact their experience of work and

non-work conflict. The variables use are age, gender, civil status, occupational status, sector in which one works and working time schedule.

6. Family Life

Family life can be a source of satisfaction to its members. Many of the psychological and social needs of individuals can be met through the intense interaction occurring within such a small group based on consanguinal relations. Indeed the family can be defined as a special social group which displays all the features of a primary group such as spontaneity and informality, high trust relations together with an ethic of solidarity which engenders mutual moral support among its members. To the parents it can give the added joy not only of witnessing the socialisation process of its offspring but also of being the key players throughout the various stages of this development (Parsons & Bates, 1956 ; Morgan 1975 ;).

The questions which are often raised in this industrialised society are how far the pressures of work impinge on the life of the family. The four questions in the questionnaire addressing this issue dealt with:

- (a) Enjoyment of family life and pressure of work. Do the exigencies of work allow workers to enjoy their family life?
- (b) Commitments of work and family. Can these two be reconciled or do they lead to problems of feeling squeezed between the two.
- (c) Participation in family-based social activities. Does working time hinder workers from participating in family-based social activities?
- (d) Child parent interaction. Do workers who are parents spend enough time with their children?

6.1 Enjoyment of Family Life

Respondents had to indicate whether working time allows them to enjoy family life. Overall the majority of workers (58.5%) state they can enjoy family life. The percentage of those who said 'they cannot enjoy family life' is very low (2.1%). However almost four out of every ten workers feel that working time is not letting them enjoy family life as much as they would like to.

Table 4 Working Hours in relation to enjoyment of family life

	Number	Percent
Can enjoy family life	221	58.5
Not as much as I would like to	140	37.0
Cannot enjoy family life	8	2.1
Total	369	97.6
Non Response	9	2.4
Total	378	100

The most significant variables that affect one's enjoyment of family life seem to be age, occupational status and irregular hours of work.

Overall among the young (16-29 year olds) and the elderly (50+) workers there is a significant high percentage who state they can enjoy family life. The workers over 50 years

of age in percentage terms score very high (74%) whereas 60 % of the young state that they can enjoy family life. The age group with the lowest percentage is the 40-49 cohort (54.7%) whereas the 25-39 (56.8%) age is very close.

The occupational status seems to be the most significant of all variables. There is a wide gap in perceptions of 30% between the workers in the highest rank of the scale in occupational status (the professionals/technical) and the unskilled. The degree of enjoyment of family life goes down the lower one goes the hierarchical scale of occupational status.

Table 5 Enjoyment of Family Life: Occupational Status

	Can enjoy family life	Not as much as I would like to	Cannot enjoy family life
Professional/Technical	81.8%	18.2%	0
Administrative/Managerial	64.5%	35.5%	0
Executive/Clerical	62.3%	35.5%	2.2%
Skilled/Semi Skilled	59.4%	39.1%	1.4%
Unskilled	51.5%	45.3%	3.2%

It may sound a truism to state that workers who work longer hours of work enjoy their family life less. The data of this sample of workers confirms this statement in unequivocal terms. Only 35.6% of those who work more than 48 hours a week stated that they can enjoy family life. This is a relatively very low percentage when compared with other workers who work less hours per week.

Table 6 Enjoyment of Family Life : Working Hours per week

	Can enjoy family life	Not as much as I would like to	Cannot enjoy family life
40 hour per week	68.4%	29.3%	2.3%
40 - 48 hours	55.2%	44.8%	0%
More than 48 hours	35.6%	57.8%	6.6%

n.b. There were only six workers in the sample working less than 40 hours. All of them stated that they can enjoy family life.

The pattern repeats itself when workers are categorised according to their work schedule. Whereas those with a standard working week register a similar score to those who work 40 hours a week, the majority of workers with no fixed starting and finishing time tend to complain about their lack of enjoyment of family life to the same extent as those who work more than 48 hours a week. Those who either work on a shift basis or during the weekend do not seem to be affected to the same extent.

Table 7 Enjoyment of Family Life : Work Schedule

	Can enjoy family life	Not as much as I would like to	Cannot enjoy family life
Standard Working week	67.5%	29.7%	2.8%
Shift Basis	54.2%	45%	0.8%
No fixed starting or finishing time	37.1%	60.0%	2.9%
Work on Saturday	50.6%	49.4%	0

Work on Sunday	46.5%	53.3%	0
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Gender and civil status did not emerge as significant variables. The majority of workers in the service sector do not enjoy family life to the full as only 48% of workers from this sector stated that they can enjoy family life.

6.2 Work and Family Commitments

Reconciling work commitments with family obligations may prove to be problematic to some workers. The pressures emanating from exigencies of work obligations may create problems to individuals to cope with the demands of family life. Indeed such persons may feel that they are being squeezed between the two and the satisfaction of either work or the family have either to be sacrificed or at best expectations lowered. The answers by respondents to a question related to this issue indicate that the majority of Maltese workers do not seem to have any problems to reconcile their family and work obligations. One out of every three feels that he/she is being squeezed between the two.

Table 8 Work and Family Commitments

	Number	Percent
Do not create problems	243	64.3
Feel squeezed between the two	121	32.0
Total	364	96.3
Non response	14	3.7
Total	378	100

Females tend to feel this squeeze more than males. Those who are married also score higher on this count than the unmarried.

Table 9 Feeling Squeezed between Work and Family – Gender and Marital Status

Female	41.8%	Male	27.2%
Married	37.0%	Unmarried	22.2%
Married with children	37.9%	Childless married persons	28.0%

As regards age the 40 to 49 years old persons seem to be the group that suffers most from this work-family squeeze. The workers who seem to suffer least are those in the over 50 age group.

Table 10 Work-Family Squeeze by Age

16-24	25-39	40-49	50+
31.6%	37.0%	40.2%	20.7%

Even the sector in which one is employed may make a difference. The feeling of this strain of work-family squeeze tends to be more prevalent among workers employed in the service sector than among those employed in the manufacturing sector and in state run or owned enterprises.

Table 11 Work-Family Squeeze by Sector

Services	Manufacturing	State run or owned enterprises
41%	30.5%	32.2%

However the most determining factor seems to be working time arrangement. More than half (53.3%) of the workers who work more than 48 hours a week find it difficult to reconcile the commitments of work with those of the family. In percentage terms they outscore workers with less working hours (40 hours and 40-48 hours per week) by 20%. The strain between the demands of work and family can indeed be defined as a time squeeze.

Table 12 Time Squeeze: Working Hours per Week

40 hours	40 to 48 hours	More than 48 hours
29.4%	30.2%	53.3%

Among those who have no fixed starting and finishing time 55.9% feel this time squeeze. This percentage is higher by more than 20% than that registered by shift workers. Almost one out of every three of those who work on a shift basis (29.5%) and those who work regular hours (31.1%) stated that they suffer from this time squeeze.

Working on Saturday does not seem to make much difference. The percentage of those who work on Saturday who feel this time squeeze does not outscore the percentage of those who do not work on Saturday – the ratio for both categories is about one to three. Among those who work on Sunday there are 39.7% who feel this time squeeze compared to 29.4% of those who do not work on Sunday. Occupational status did not emerge as a significant variable.

6.3 Participation in Family-Based Social Activities

Working time in terms of work-life balance can be measured or assessed in the way it can hinder one’s participation in family-based social activities. The question which respondents had to answer was: Does work make you miss family-based social activities such as a wedding reception or similar events? The available reply options were ‘often’, ‘rarely’ and ‘never’. Overall about one in three (34.5%) of respondents answered ‘never’ whereas slightly more than half (51.8%) stated that this ‘rarely’ happens. Those who answered ‘often’ represented 13.7% of the sample.

Working time tends to hinder males more than females from participation in family-based social activities. Whereas the percentage of males and females who responded ‘often’ is more or less the same, only 25.1% of males stated ‘never’ compared to 46.8% of females.

Table 13 Does working time hinder participation in family-based-social family activities

	Often	Rarely	Never
Males	13.7%	61.2%	25.1%
Females	14.2%	39.0%	46.8%

Young workers (16 to 24 years of age) seem to suffer less from an interference of their working time on family activities. Only 6.1% stated that it ‘often’ happens whereas 52.3% answered ‘never’ and 41.6 ‘rarely’. The three other age groups score more or less similar percentages. There is almost one out of every three (30.1%) who is married to whom this hindrance ‘never’ happens whereas to the unmarried the ratio is four out of every ten (42.5%).

As regards sectors of employment it is those employed in the services that fare worst. One out of three workers (31%) in this sector stated that this interference ‘often’ happens and only 19.5% stated ‘never’ in contrast to the 4.1% of respondents from the manufacturing

sector who answered ‘often’ and 47.4% ‘never’. Among the occupational grades the executive/clerical and the unskilled seem to be the groups of workers whose working time interferes most with their family activities – respectively 18.3% and 14.7% stated that this ‘often’ happens.

Table 14 Does working time hinder your Activities in family-based social family activities

	Often	Rarely	Never
Professional /Technical	4.5%	59.1%	36.4%
Administrative/Managerial	9.7%	58%	32.3%
Executive/Clerical	18.3%	45.8%	35.9%
Skilled/ Semi Skilled	9.0%	62.6%	28.4%
Unskilled	14.7%	44.2%	41.1%

The most distinctive difference is however between those workers with a standard working week and irregular work schedule. Only 2.3% of the workers with a standard working week state that working time ‘often’ hinders their family-based social activities in contrast to 29.6% of those who work on a shift basis and 30.6% who have no fixed starting and finishing time. ‘Never’ is marked by 48.0 % of those who work regular hours. For those who work on shift the percentage is 13 while for those with no fixed hours of work it is 16.6 %.

Table 15 Work Schedule and interference with family-based social activities

	Often	Rarely	Never
40 hours per week	13.4%	46.8%	39.8%
40-48 hours per week	12.5%	63.5%	24%
48+ hours per week	15.6%	51.1%	33.3%
Regular work schedule	2.3%	48.8%	48.9%
Shift	29.6%	57.4%	13%
Hour not fixed	30.6%	52.8%	16.6%
Work on Saturday*	26%	57.1%	16.9%
Work on Sunday*	34.9%	54%	11.1%

* Work on at least an average of two Saturdays or Sundays every month

6.4 Child – Parent Interaction : time parents spend with their children.

Family life to parents may be evaluated more by the time they can spend with their children than by participation in social family activities. Is the time left over after work seen to be enough by parents to spend with their children? The question respondents who have children under their care (189) had to answer was: Working time (a) leaves me enough time to spend with my children (b) leaves me no time to spend with my children (c) does not leave as much time as I would like to. Slightly more than half (51.9%) of the respondents feel that the time after work which they can spend with their children is adequate (‘enough’) whereas 44.4% say that it is not as much as they would like to. Only 3.7% stated they find no time after work to spend with their children.

Males tend to be satisfied more than females on this issue even though the divergence is not very significant. Age emerged as a more significant variable. The 25 to 39 years old age group – likely to be parents still bringing up children- were the most negative. There were only 5 parents in the sample between the age of 16 and 24. One of these answered

‘enough, one ‘no time’ and three stated not as much as they would like to. The over 50 were overwhelmingly positive – 73.8% find enough time.

Table 16 Time workers can spend with their children in terms of Gender and Age

	Enough time	No time	Not enough
Males	53.6%	2.1%	44.3%
Females	47.8%	4.3%	47.8%
25 – 39 years old	41.4%	4.2%	54.2%
40 – 49 years old	51%	4.0%	45.0%
50 + years old	73.8%	0%	26.2%

Most of the workers with a professional/technical and administrative/managerial grade expressed dissatisfaction about the time they can spend with their children. More than 60% of each of this category of workers stated that they either find no time to interact with their children or not enough time. The same level of dissatisfaction is found among workers working more than 48 hours per week. Among workers with no fixed starting or finishing time the level of dissatisfaction surpasses the 70% mark. However those working on a shift basis show a much lower level of dissatisfaction. Overall 43.7% of these workers stated they find no time and not enough time. It seems that shift work provides a relatively high level of satisfaction (56.3%) about time spent with children – even higher than that of workers with a standard working week (53%). The satisfaction and dissatisfaction level of the workers working on Saturday and Sunday is very near that of the overall percentage.

6.5 Commentary

Some factors such as shift work and work on Saturday and Sunday do not seem to have the high degree of negative feeling that was portrayed during the focus group discussion. In percentage terms the workers on a shift basis do not deviate from the overall average as regards enjoyment of family life, reconciliation of work and family obligations and the time they spent in their interaction with children. It is only in the participation of home-based social activities that the shift workers tend to have more problems than other categories of workers. It must be emphasised that one of the members in the focus group commented that management of time may be more important than work schedule. This issue is being dealt with in the section that follows about the perception of time.

7. Workers’ Perceptions of Working Time

Workers’ perceptions of working time are being analysed in terms of:

- (a) The amount of time it leaves for leisure.
- (b) Workers’ belief in the concept of management of time.
- (c) Workers’ attitude or orientation towards working time.
- (d) The advantages, if any, which workers perceive are inherent in their work time schedule.
- (e) Workers’ willingness to change their job for one with a better working time arrangement.

7.1 Time for Leisure

Overall there were 37.1% of respondents who stated that working time does not allow them enough time for leisure activities (defined as entertainment or recreation). The

workers who tend to suffer from this lack of time for leisure activities more than their counterparts are:

- females,
- those in the 40 to 49 age group,
- workers in the service sector,
- workers in an administrative/executive job,
- workers working more than 48 hours a week and
- those with no fixed starting or finishing time.

The table below shows that the workers who work more than 48 hours a week and those with no starting and finishing time of work deviate considerably from the overall percentage (37.1%). One out of every two workers with this working time arrangement claims that he/she does not have enough time for leisure. This ratio is substantially higher than that of other workers. Workers over 50 years of age do not tend to suffer much from this lack of time for leisure.

Table 17 Percentage of workers claiming that they do not have enough time for leisure.

Less than Overall Percentage (37.1%)		More than Overall Percentage (37.1%.)	
Gender			
Males :	27.6%	Females	39.3%
Age			
16-24 :	35.4%		
25-39 :	32.5%	40 -49	39.3%
50+	18.2%		
Sector			
Manufacturing	29.4%	Services :	40.7%
Govt/owned or run:	31.5%		
Occupational Status			
Professional Status:	22.7%	Administrative/Managerial :	45.2%
Executive/Clerical :	28.6%		
Skilled/Semi Skilled :	34.8%		
Unskilled :	34.7%		
Working time Schedule			
40 hours per week:	26.4%	48+ hours per week	47.8%
Standard working week	28.6%	No fixed starting or finishing time	52.9%
Shift basis :	32.5%		

7.2 Management of Time and Work Life Balance

Work-Life balance may depend on how one manages time and adjust according to circumstances. In other words it may not depend on the quantity but rather on the quality of time and the way one is able to utilise it. Time can therefore be seen as a resource which, whatever the work commitments may be, can always be utilised to one's advantage if the proper time management strategy is adopted. To test workers' belief in this concept of time management respondents were invited to answer the following question: *'Whatever the working time arrangement may be, any person if he/she wants to, can strike a balance between work and non work domains such as family, leisure, religion and community life'*. The majority of workers (61.4%) 'strongly agree' or 'agree' about this statement.

Table 18 Management of time is the determinant factor in achieving work-life balance.

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
18.2%	43.2%	32.3%	6.3%

The married and unmarried score very similar percentages (61.6% and 62% each) whereas those whose marriage has been annulled score relatively lower (52.9%). The only widower in the sample agrees with this statement whereas the three who live with a partner are equally divided – one ‘strongly agree’, the other ‘agrees’ and the other ‘disagrees’. The three strongest variables about this view that time management is the determinant factor in achieving work life balance are: age, the sector in which one is employed and the working hours worked per week. Indeed this notion of time management seems very widely diffused among these categories of workers:

- Workers over 50 years of age
- Workers who work 40 to 48 hours per week
- Workers who work in state run or owned enterprises

The percentage of the above workers who ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ is over 70% which is about 10% more than the overall percentage (61.4%).

7.3 Instrumental Orientation towards Working Time

Affluence is no longer a goal which is within reach of a select few. Many workers tend to believe that work can be a medium through which individuals can become affluent. Such a belief has made the instrumental value of work dominate over all other values (Golthorpe et al 1968). Such an instrumental orientation to working time may make one perceive working time as an expendable commodity that can be traded for the enhancement of one’s material comfort. It may also enable one to indulge in the extravagant and opulent practices of one’s reference group. This instrumental attitude may affect the concept of working time with its concomitant effect on the priorities people give in their choice of jobs.

To test the presence of this instrumentality in the consciousness of workers, respondents were given a hypothetical question in which they were asked to choose between these two options:

- (a) A job with long hours of work but with a very good pay that would enable one to indulge in some lavishness
- (b) A job with regular working hours but with a pay that would not enable one to indulge in lavishness.

Overall, only one in four (25.3%) chose the first option, which may be taken to mean that the majority of workers (74.7%) do not subscribe to the instrumental value of working time. All variables except one proved to be significant, which means that there are categories of workers who in percentage terms manifest this instrumental orientation toward working time more than others. The exception was the sector in which one works as there were no significant differences between employees in the Services, Manufacturing and state run/owned enterprises who chose the option which is related to the instrumental value of working time (option ‘a’).

Gender

Males (31%) tend to be more instrumentally oriented than females (17%). This was the widest disparity in percentage terms between the two sexes in all the questions in the

questionnaire. This can be explained by the persistence of stereotype gender roles. Men, still being perceived as the main bread winners and much more attached to public rather than private life, tend to believe more in this instrumental concept of working time than women who are still more confined to the private life and domestic sphere. As was argued during the focus group discussion members of the family tend to associate the father more with the instrumental rather than the expressive role.

Age

The workers in the 40 to 49 years old bracket are the least instrumental of the four age groups.

Table 19 Instrumental attitude to working time according to Age (choice option ‘a’)

16 to 24	25 to39	40 to 49	50+
25.1%	24%	20.6%	30.3%

Civil Status

Those married (22.2%) are less instrumental than the unmarried (30.6%) and those with annulled marriage (35.3%). One of the three in the sample who live with a partner chose the first option whereas the only widower in the sample chose the second option. Those who are married with children and the married who are childless score similar percentages (25%).

Occupational Grade

The occupational grade of the workers may also affect one’s orientation to working time. There are significant differences between most of the categories of workers. The least instrumental are the skilled workers whereas the most are those with administrative and managerial jobs.

Table 20 Instrumental Value of Working Time by Occupational Category (Choice Option ‘a’)

Professional/ Technical	Administrative/ Managerial	Executive/Clerical	Skilled/ Semi Skilled	Unskilled
18.2%	33.3%	28.4%	17.9%	24.7%

Working Time Arrangement

The higher the number of working hours per week the employees work the more they tend to be instrumental. Workers working more than 48 hours a week who chose the instrumental option register a relatively very high percentage (46.5%) which is 20% more than the overall percentage. In contrast those who work between 40 and 48 hours per week score 30.2%. These percentages seem to indicate that in answering this question workers tried to find a rationale or a justification for the number of working hours they work every week. In other words the more hours the workers work or the more they have to contend with unsocial hours the more instrumental oriented they tend to be towards working time. The workers on a shift basis are the most instrumental (32.2%) followed by those who have no fixed or starting or finishing time (29.4%). The least are those who work on a standard working week (21.3%). Even those who work on Saturday (32.9%) in their instrumental orientation outnumber those who do not (18.5%). The difference between those who work on Sunday (31.7%) and those who do not (22.4%) is narrower.

7.4 The Positive Aspects of Working Time

On being asked to state the most positive aspects of their working time schedule respondents were given four options. The preferences in terms of respondents' choices (they could choose more than one) were the following:

- It enables me to do my errands without any hassle 56.7%
- The free time it provides me with 39.7%
- It enables me to do my shopping without any constraints and urgency 30.1%
- The flexibility it provides 29.6%

About one in ten stated (9.1) that they could not choose any of these options. Some of these pointed out other aspects:

- 'I can do other work'
- 'The free weekend'
- 'Can collect daughter from school'
- 'Can enjoy my family at different times'
- 'I'm off when others are working'
- 'Time for studying'

'**Doing errands without any hassle**' perceived by respondents to be the most positive aspect of their working time schedule, was more popular among the following categories of workers who scored more than 65% (about 10% higher than 56.7%):

- Workers in the service industry (65.5%)
- Workers on a Shift basis (68.4%)
- Workers who work on Sunday (68.3%)

It was less popular (scoring less than 50%) among the professional /technical (42.9%), skilled/semiskilled (45.6%) and those with no fixed time schedule. (44.4%).

The preference scoring the second highest percentage, '**the free time it gives**', was most popular among employees of state run or owned enterprises (51.7%) and executive/ clerical workers (50.7%). It was least popular among the professional /technical workers (28.6%) and the unskilled (28.1%).

The third option '**doing shopping without constraints and urgency**' was preferred mostly by females (41.6%) and least by the skilled/semi skilled workers (17.6%). In the option with the least total percentage, '**the flexibility it gives**', there is a very wide variety of percentages registered by different categories of workers. It tends to be more popular scoring more than 40% (10% higher than the overall - 29.6%) among: workers with no fixed time schedule of work (52.8%); the professional/technical (47.6 %), workers in the service industry (43.7%), workers on a shift basis (41.9%) and those who work on Sunday (41.7%). It was least popular (with less than 20%) among the 16 to 24 years old (18.2%) and workers with a standard working week (18.9%).

7.5 Willingness to change job for one with better working time.

The working time schedule may not be one of the main factors that can make a person change one's job. One out of every eight workers (12%) would be willing to change job for better working hours. There were 52.5% who stated they would stick to their job

even if they were to be given such a choice while 35.5% said that they 'would think it over'.

The workers who tend to be most willing to change their job for better working time are those who work on Sunday (47%). This relatively high percentage of 'Sunday' workers seems to contradict the relatively high level of satisfaction expressed by this category of workers in their appreciation of the positive aspects of their working time. It may however mean that though they appreciate the positive aspect of their working time they still aspire towards working hours which are more socially accepted and which can let them socialise better with their family members and peers.

The young workers (16 to 24 years old) also seem to be more willing than other groups of workers to change their job for better working hours. One in four (36%) stated that they would be willing to change job if they were to be given such a choice. These two categories of workers, the 'Sunday' workers and the young, show the least level of hesitancy when it comes to make such a choice. Only 1.6% of those who work on Sunday and 6.7% of the young workers said that they 'would think it over'. These are very low percentage when compared to other categories of workers where the percentage for this hesitancy ranges from 29% to 48%.

The workers least likely to answer 'yes' to this question are the administrative/managerial grade workers with a 3.2%. This group of workers also tends to be the most hesitant about such a choice - 48.8% said they 'would think it over'- which is the highest percentage for this type of answer. Males (13.9%) seem to be more willing than females (9.9%) to stick to their jobs. However there are more males (39.9%) than females (30.9%) who 'would think it over'. As regards age it is the group of workers who are over 50 years of age (18.9%) who would be most willing to change their jobs if they were given such an option while the least are those in the 25 to 39 age bracket. Among the occupational categories the unskilled (16.1%) tend to be the most inclined to change their job for better working hours.

7.6 Commentary

Perception of time may therefore play an important part in the individual's relationship between work and non-work life. There is a tendency among three categories of workers to appreciate the leeway that their working time arrangement gives them and which can be utilised to satisfy their personal needs. These are the 'shift' workers, those who work on Sunday and workers in the service sector. In their choice of positive aspects of work these workers scored a relative high percentage in three of the aspects. Together with workers with no fixed hours and the professional / technical these workers appreciate, to a higher degree, the flexibility inherent in their work time schedule. These workers were very well represented in the focus group and they more or less expressed the same feelings. While they complained about their time schedule they also acknowledged its positive aspects. Their less rigid and/or less routinised work time schedule can be seen as an advantage to cope with the exigencies of their non-work life.

However, by and large, the significant variables that emerged in this second set of questions are the same as those of the first – age and working time arrangement. Although a statement that working time schedule may be a determinant factor in one's

work-life balance may sound palpable or self-evident it nevertheless raises questions about the rationale of working time. What pre-empts managers from changing the working time arrangement to suit the exigencies of their employees? What makes the practice of flexi time problematic? Do workers opting to take reduced hours cause problems to management? Have there been any attempts to change working time arrangements? These are the questions which employers were asked to answer in the questionnaire sent by the Malta Employers' Association (MEA) to its members.

8. Employers' Views

The questionnaire was sent electronically in November 2003 by the Malta Employers' Association (MEA) to its members. The number of respondents was 35. The firms of these respondents can be classified as follows: 14 from the manufacturing sector; 17 from the service sector and 4 state run/owned enterprises.

The view of the majority of managers representing these firms is that changing the working time arrangement to suit the needs of employees would create problems to the firm. Only three out of the 35 firms responding to the questionnaire stated that such an adjustment would have no adverse effect on the firm. The others stated that 'it will definitely' (12) or 'might be harmful' (20) to the competitiveness and viability of the firm.

Only two firms stated that they can afford to make compromises with the requirements of employees. The options chosen by the others are all related to the needs of the firm:

- Making optimum use of machinery 8
- Saving on overtime 8
- Maintaining level of production that enables firms to reach targets 7
- The policy of the parent company 2
- Considered to be normal 3

Other reasons given were that 'the company has to operate within business hours' or 'it has to operate according to the requirements of clients'.

Even flexitime is viewed by about half the firms (16) as being unsuitable. What makes it unsuitable according to the managers is the nature of the work at the firm, the disruption it can cause to the organisation of work and the difficulty and complexity it may bring to the coordination task of management. According to three managers flexitime can be introduced in some sections but not at shop floor level while another two managers stated that their firm is too small.

Giving the workers reduced hours of work seems to be equally problematic to managers. Only 10 managers stated that workers opting to take reduced hours would not create problems to the firm. The main problems identified with such an option by the other 25 firms fall within two classifications: (a) the disruptive element that it would cause to production and organisation of work and (b) the additional workers who would have to be recruited to replace those missing. This would mean an added cost to the employer. One manager emphasised the point that two part timers instead of one full time worker would make the firm incur more expenses.

The imperatives of the market and client based business can also be seen as valid reasons:

- 'We would not cope with customer's demands'

- ‘We have strict time limit for export.’
- One manager said that due to the small size of the firm it would be impossible to give such an option to workers whereas another one was afraid of its ripple effect - ‘if you allow one, you allow others’.

The business-like approach, which firms have to adopt in order to remain competitive and cost effective provide managers with little leeway to renounce the logic of pragmatism. This pragmatism does not however mean that there are no firms which try to change working time to accommodate employees. Thirteen respondents stated that during the last two years attempts have been made to change working time arrangements. Three of these changes were induced by the practicality as can be testified by the following:

- Cleaners to provide a better service
- To reduce overtime
- Removing people from shift

However the other attempts to change working time seemed to be more influenced by the demands of employees as the following statements show:

- Made life easier for employees and did not harm the company
- On request by employees, starting time changed from 7.00 am to 6.00 am.
- Requested by some employees but idea did not find support by the majority.

What one may conclude from the views expressed by management is that working time arrangements are not based on some fanciful notions or arbitrary decisions of individuals. The exigencies of the firm and the market very often have to prevail over the needs of employees.

9. Conclusion

Work-family balance and work-life balance seem to be synonymous in the sense, that by and large data indicate that the same categories of workers are finding the equation of both balances difficult to achieve. The family occupies a very large space in the non-work domain of individuals. Thus if one is unable to achieve the right work-family balance one is also likely to suffer from lack of work-life balance.

The 40-49 age group tend to confirm the validity of such a proposition. They are the group which show consistent tendencies in both set of questions dealing with family life and perception of time. The workers belonging to this age cohort feel the time squeeze most while four out of ten claim that they do not have enough time for leisure. This lack of leisure time seems to affect their perception of time because they are the least instrumental oriented towards working time. To most workers in this age group work-life balance seems to be elusive. It must be borne in mind that while people in this age bracket may be beginning to taste the fruits of their own efforts in terms of increasing security, comfort and influence they may also find new responsibilities thrust upon them (Lowe 1977:226). This tends to be the stage in life when many workers are likely to get a promotion at their place of work and therefore they have to gear themselves up to new responsibilities and maybe a heavier workload.

To the majority of workers between 25 to 39 years of age the relationship between work and non-work domains seems to be equally problematic even though they were

not so consistently negative as the 40- 49 age group. Perhaps workers in this age group have more family induced financial burdens such as house loans or expenses related to the education of their children. Feeling more hard-pressed to earn more money and working excessive hours may make their work-life balance elusive.

In contrast older workers (over 50) seem to have fewer problems to reconcile their work life with their non-work domains. The majority of workers in this age group answered positively, several times overwhelmingly, to the questions related to family life. Even in the questions about the perception of time they overwhelmingly believe that work-life balance is a question of management of time rather than the arrangement of working time. One possible explanation for this highly positive attitude among older workers in the sample is that once they reach the age of fifty the unhappy workers manage or contrive to withdraw from the labour market by availing themselves of the exit pathways which the social policy system provides. But a more plausible hypothesis would be that people over fifty may get to know what they stand for, their family may have grown up or left home and they may start delegating some of their responsibilities to younger persons (Lowe 1997:226).

Gender and working time schedule also emerged as significant variables. The motherhood mandate that culture imposes more harshly on the female parent in a family context is also a factor that affects work-family balance. Females more than males feel squeezed between family and work commitments and are more dissatisfied about the interaction with their children. Even the married score higher than the unmarried about this time squeeze and inadequate time for leisure. The same can be said about workers working more than 48 hours per week and those without a fixed starting and finishing time. These two categories of workers seem to have much in common: they both score very low in enjoyment of family, relatively high in feeling the time squeeze and most of them are dissatisfied with the available time to interact with their children.

In their majority they also claim that they do not have enough time for leisure. Their responses to the second set of questions dealing with perception of time more or less show the same feeling of conflict as expressed in the responses to the questions related to family life. In other words workers engaged in time consuming work or in jobs where demands are high are more likely to experience a sense of conflict between their work and non-work life.

However this conflict may not always be manifest in the workers' consciousness. Indeed data from this survey show that ambivalence tends to prevail among a number of workers especially those in the service sector and those working on a shift basis. The overall responses of workers in the service sector show a high degree of dissatisfaction about the various parameters used to measure this work-life balance of workers. However this group of workers were more forthcoming than workers in the other two sectors to affirm the positive aspects of their working time. This was also evident during the focus group discussion where the workers in the service sector showed greater temerity to point out the positive aspects of their working time in contrast to those in the manufacturing sector.

The same ambivalence emerged among workers on a shift basis. Overall they do not seem to score differently from other categories of workers as regards work-family balance. But there was a relatively high percentage (29%) who claim that they 'often' had to miss a

family-based social activity due to the constraints of their working time schedule. While the majority of these workers highlighted the positive aspects of their working time in the following question the majority expressed their willingness to change their job to one with better working time arrangements. As was noticed during the focus group discussion, the workers on a shift basis and those in the service sector tend to be ambivalent about their working time arrangement.

These ambivalences or rather inconsistencies in the responses of workers in this sample may be a manifestation of the complexity of the psychological process of how people make sense of their time in their attempts to reconcile the demands of their work and non-work domains. They tend to confirm the phenomenologist perspective that in the debate about the relationship of work and non-work life, the subjective view of individuals about the meaningfulness of time has to feature prominently. People may measure their work and non-work life in terms of meaningfulness of time rather than by quantifying the time attributed to each of these two domains. An enormous amount of juggling may take place in how time is apportioned, valued and perceived.

The conflict between work and non-work domains or rather the lack of the ideal work-life balance cannot therefore be attributed to one factor. The notion of work-life balance is based on the acknowledgement of the multiplicity of needs which a worker as a human being has to satisfy. The persons taking part in the focus group discussion either implicitly or explicitly expressed the need for discretion to structure their own life. In other words they would like to live a multi-dimensional life in which they are given opportunities to play a number of roles that give them various role identities. If people due to their working time arrangement feel unable to honour or are forced to abandon the commitments related to these various role identities they may be said to be suffering from an inner conflict. The data emanating from this empirical study indicate that there are many people who are suffering from this inner conflict. The trends of the market do not seem to offer any solution.

The imperatives of the market as the responses of employers indicate leave little room to manoeuvre for managers to adjust working time arrangement to the needs of employees. There seems to be constraints inherent in the work practices dictated by the logic of the market that militate against the introduction of flexi time, granting reduced hours to workers and finding ways to design working time arrangement to accommodate workers' needs. Many firms in the manufacturing and service sector cannot afford to go beyond the provisions of minimum standards about family friendly measures laid down in the labour law. The globalised economy does not seem to offer any guarantees to the workers that they will attain the ideal work-life balance where the combination of elements related to paid work and non-work or personal time would enable them to find ways of combining working life with personal life

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