2005

Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies: Perspectives of Irish Employers and Employees

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Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies: Perspectives of Irish Employers and Employees

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Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies: Perspectives of Irish Employers and Employees

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of:

Master of Business Studies

Department of Adult and Continuing Education Cork Institute of Technology

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April 2005
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THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED

TO MY MOTHER AND FATHER

AND

ROGER
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the following people without whom this research would not have been possible:

To Dr. Margaret Linehan, my supervisor and mentor whose expert advice, support, guidance and encouragement made this challenge an enjoyable one.

To Paul Mahony, head of the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at Cork Institute of Technology, for giving me the opportunity to pursue this study.

To each interviewee who took the time to take part in this study.

To my parents, Denis and Joan Williams, whose endless support and encouragement assisted me every step of the way.

To Roger, whose infinite patience and positive attitude has kept my spirits up throughout each stage of this challenge. With you by my side, Roger, I know anything is possible.
Summary

This study assesses the emergence of family friendly / work life balance arrangements within Irish organisations in view of changing conditions on the labour market, particularly with the increased participation of women. It incorporates the experiences, opinions and commentaries of both Human Resource representatives responsible for the implementation of such practices, and employees availing of them in a broad spectrum of public and private sector organisations.

This research addresses the perceived explicit and implicit barriers, such as organisational size, location and culture which challenge employers and employees in terms of alternative working arrangements. It illustrates the significance of introducing and implementing flexible arrangements in a structured fashion with employer and employee contributions and highlights the influential role of the supervisor / manager in the transfer of such arrangements into actual working practices.

The findings illustrate the gendered nature of family friendly / work-life balance initiatives, being predominantly practiced by female employees with caring responsibilities. The research explores the influences of societal norms where women are seen as primary carers, and the perceived fear of negative career consequences attached to such working practices, to explain this gender imbalance. The research also addresses the significance of one's role within the organisation when accessing flexible working options and considers the varied organisational attitudes to facilitating alternative working at all levels.

In the context of a changing labour market, this research investigates the benefits and limitations of family friendly / work life balance practices from an employee and employer perspective.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

There need be no tension between family life and occupational life. Each is so crucially dependent on the other. Family friendly policies are a first step in creating people who are more balanced and more mature, not just in their family lives, but in their occupational and professional lives as well. A rounded citizen in the Third Millennium will be someone who feels comfortable that they can express their personal skills and abilities in a work situation as part of the greater community, while at the same time being able in a mature way to form an intimate relationship and foster it. They will be able to create an environment where the next generation can be cultivated and feel as good as any human being can feel about the way they do all those things (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1998: 2).

This study explores the emergence of family friendly and work life balance arrangements in Irish organisations from the perspective of the challenges facing employers and employees. It is a topic warranting explanation and research attention due to the limited Irish research currently detailing the “complex phenomena” (Tyrkko, 2002: 107) of balancing working life and family life in the modern day.
Originally, this research set out to study family friendly working arrangements and flexibility in recognition of caring for children and other dependents. As the study gained momentum, however, it was recognised that the scope for flexibility is expanding from working/caring, to include other life choices such as education, travel, sport and voluntary work. According to Foley et al. (1999) changing perceptions of work is a labour market factor encouraging the emergence of work life balance. The most obvious change in perceptions being, arguably present amongst the so called Generation X, those born after 1963 (Shabi, 2002), who prefer a lifestyle which includes non-work time, regardless of other responsibilities and who may look for employers who offer work life balance practices (Maxwell, 2005). The discussion concerning flexibility, therefore, is no longer, confined to family friendly working arrangements alone. According to Lewis and Lewis (1996) there have been attempts to conceptualise family friendly working arrangements, and the terminology used is now the subject of debate. Bearing this in mind the purpose of this study, has now shifted, seeking to review family friendly policies and work-life balance, using both terms interchangeably throughout the research. Family friendly policies and work life balance will be defined in chapter 2.

1.2 FAMILY FRIENDLY / WORK LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

At a glance it is obvious from the issues raised in the literature that socio-economic conditions are changing in Ireland. Tightening labour markets as a result of an economic boom, particularly in the mid to end 1990s, witnessed an excess demand for labour and a rising female labour market contribution (Drew et al., 2002). This increase is set to continue considering Ireland’s target for female labour market participation, under the Lisbon process, which is 60% by 2010 (Fitzpatrick, 2005). In
turn, the changing nature of the Irish labour market is reflected in societal changes, with men no longer being the sole financial bread winners. According to the Central Statistics Office, 628,500 of Irish women were engaged in the full-time care of home/family in 1994, compared to 551,900 in 2004 (in Allen, 2005). Societies, therefore, face a challenge, if they are to balance caring needs and paid work (Daly, 1996).

Currently, in Ireland, thousands of Irish parents rely on informal childcare, such as leaving their children with family or friends. The 2002 Quarterly Household Survey reported that 31,000 families depend on relatives for childcare (in Corcoran, 2005b). Dr. Fine-Davis, senior research fellow at the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies in Trinity College, noted:

*The problem is not only that childcare is costly, but we do not have any mechanism to ensure consistent quality for all children* (in Feehan, 2005: 3)

According to the Central Statistics Office's National Household Survey in 2002, the average cost of childcare for families with preschool children was €105.36 a week nationally, the cost in Dublin being more than €131 per week (in Feehan, 2005). In acknowledgement of such needs there has been support for practices in industrialised societies which enable workers, initially women (Myrdal and Klein, 1968), to balance the conflicting roles of work and family life (Drew et al., 2002). In Ireland the issue of childcare is only recently been tackled at policy level as reflected in the results of *Fathers and Mothers: Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance*, a comparative study carried out in four major European Cities (Dublin, Paris, Copenhagen and Bologna). According to the study, of the four countries involved, Ireland is the only country where parents may have to
use their own sick leave or annual leave if their children are ill or their childcare arrangements break down. Denmark, France and Italy all have policies of "child sick days" enabling parents to look after their children when they are ill without reducing their own annual leave or sick leave entitlements. Furthermore, in Denmark childcare is considered a public responsibility, taken on by the municipalities (Fine-Davis, 2005).

In addition, Fathers and Mothers: Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance highlights a longer commuting time for Irish participants. The average commuting time for all four countries, being 32 minutes, while in Ireland it was 39 minutes, on average, 42 minutes for men and 36 minutes for women (Fine-Davis, 2005). In support of such findings a report entitled Women and Men in Ireland 2004 revealed that in 2002, 14.4% of males and 13.5% of females spent between 45 minutes and one and a half hours commuting to work. Furthermore, people are unable to afford the cost of houses close to work and a long working hours culture makes it more difficult to avoid rush hour traffic (in Corcoran, 2005b). A high dependence on the car in Ireland, could also contribute to longer commuting times due to traffic congestion. This is supported by the results of a report published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) showing that in 1991, 41.2% of males and 34.7% of females drove a car to work but by 2002 percentages had increased to 52.9% of men and 58.1% of women. In addition, the percentage of women travelling as a passenger in a car reduced from 14.5% in 1991 to 8.4% in 2002 (in Corcoran, 2005b). Fine-Davis (2005: 13-14) believes that:

As commuting time was a key predictor in successfully combining work and family, changes in transport modes may assist in this area together with staggered commuting times.
According to a report entitled The Costs and Benefits of Diversity by the European Commission (2003: 3):

Companies that implement workforce diversity policies identify important benefits that strengthen long-term competitiveness and, in certain instances, also produce short and medium term improvements in performance.

In terms of work-life balance, surveys have revealed that where employers get this balance right it can result in reduced sick leave, fewer people taking early retirement due to medical conditions and an improved relationship between employer and staff (Curran, 2003). Crow (1999) believes that flexible working arrangements, such as flexitime, part-time working and career breaks may be used as to attract and retain valued staff. Xerox UK, for example, due to its pioneering of work-life balance programme, reported saving of one million pounds over the last five years. Similarly, British Telecom saved hundreds of thousands in retention, recruitment and development costs, and in excess of £200 million in accommodation costs (Fitzpatrick, 2005).

Evans (2001) believes that firms more likely to introduce family friendly policies were those, whose management policy placed a high emphasis on employee's welfare, who give a high priority to the achievement of employee commitment and who perceive a bottom line profit from the provision of family related benefits. Service sector, large and public sector organisations (Persaud, 2001) have been found to be more committed, than other organisations, to work flexibility that is the very basis of work life balance (Mayne et al., 1996). According to Drew et al. (2002), within Ireland, the Civil Service are the leaders in
Family Friendly Working Arrangements with work-sharing practices such as part-time and flexitime being widely available and utilised.

A range of concerns are suggested, among employers, for their hesitancy to introduce flexible work arrangements (Kodz et al., 2002). Often employer action is offset by fears of disruption and administration costs and an overestimation in terms of the number of employees who will wish to avail of such practices. Some employers also claim there is no demand for family friendly working arrangements among their employees (Dex and Scheibel, 2002). This lack of demand could be due to a number of factors including the perceived negative career consequences attached to availing of such working arrangements. Results of the study Fathers and Mothers: Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance found that in Ireland there was a greater sense of pressure on staff to work over and above normal hours to progress their careers. Men and women who participated in job sharing or part-time options were perceived as being less serious about their career, a feeling which was stronger in relation to male employees (Fine-Davis, 2005). In addition, due to the high cost of living in Ireland many employees would be unable to avail of practices which involve working reduced hours and a reduction in income. Prof. Lis Hojgaard, University of Copenhagen, the Danish collaborator in Fathers and Mothers: Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance noted:

*In Italy and Denmark it takes 74.5 hours per week to support a family, and a little more in France at 75.3 hours. But it takes significantly more in Ireland, at 77.5 hours a week (in Feehan, 2005: 3)*
The provision of flexible working also brings with it its own challenges in terms of gender equality. According to Rana and Higginsbottom (2002) the perception exists that work life balance arrangements mainly concern female employees and flexible working may harm one's career prospects. As noted by Fitzpatrick (2005), for example, 37% of females with childcare responsibilities work part-time, while 17% of women with no such responsibilities and 6.5% of men avail of similar practices. Considering such it is obvious a need exists to promote a greater sharing of roles between men and women, encouraging men to play an active part in family and domestic duties, relieving women of the double burden of work and domestic responsibilities (Fine-Davis, 2005). In recognition of this the National Flexi-work Partnership, in collaboration with FAS and a number of childcare providers, is piloting a project to recruit more men into childcare. The aim of the project is to develop egalitarian gender role attitudes, instilling fundamental ideas of equality in terms of caring roles from the early stages of a child's life (Fine Davis, 2004).

The development of human resource management approaches to managing staff and a potential attitudinal shift to employees being considered as business investments and as individuals (Guest, 1997), has encouraged the promotion of flexible working arrangements. According to Baron and Collard (1998: 38) there is:

> a positive relationship between more sophisticated/innovative people management practices and improved organisational performance.

In addition, line managers also play an important role in terms of flexible working practices. Budhwar (2000), Whittaker and
Marchington (2003) noted that line managers have a significant human resource management role to play being closer to employees than specialist human resource staff. Training departments, therefore, should specifically support managers to allow employees to have a fulfilled life inside and outside work. Support systems could include training and development programmes, think-tank sessions, workshops, introducing formal processes to encourage managers to think about work-life balance and arranging additional support if needed (McCartney, 2003).

1.3 RESEARCH FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The complexities of modern Ireland in terms of changing socio-economic conditions and perceptions to work, long commutes and soaring childcare costs have made family friendly / work life balance an issue of importance for both employers and employees alike. This study is, therefore, concerned with assessing family friendly / work life balance policies, considering the many and adverse issues to be faced within Irish organisations.

This study is exploratory as there is limited existing research specifically aimed at addressing the issue of family friendly / work life balance in an Irish context, most of the research available on the issue is from a British and European perspective.

In relation to family friendly / work life balance policies this study takes as its unique and specific focus the perceptions of human resource representatives, responsible for the management of such practices, and employees availing of such working options. A semi-structured interview format was used, in this research, to ensure that the interviews covered the same main
questions allowing respondents to reply in a variety of ways, raising issues that were pertinent to the topics being investigated. In order to draw from a variety of perspectives and experiences, twenty separate interviews were conducted, ten with human resource representatives and ten with employees availing of family friendly / work life balance policies, from ten varied organisations. All interviewees were eager to participate in this study, providing open and honest discussions on relevant issues. This eagerness indicates support on the part of the participants that this is an under researched area which needs to be examined.

Chapter Two, reviews the relevant national and international literature relating to family friendly / work-life balance policies. It begins by exploring the rationale for such working practices, defining family friendly policies and work life balance, considering the challenges employers, employees and the government face. It examines the various flexible working arrangements available both statutory and non-statutory. The chapter also investigates the conflicting responsibilities of work and family and explores the significance of occupational stress in modern society. Finally, it discusses family friendly / work life balance policies from an organisational perspective.

Chapter Three, provides an outline of the research methodology in the context of this study. It describes in detail the research methodology chosen and traces the steps employed in the use of qualitative methodology.

Chapter Four, provides the main findings from the research. It draws upon the twenty in-depth interviews, with ten HR representatives and ten employees availing of such practices, from a cross section of Irish public and private sector organisations. The interview excerpts are organised thematically
from the interview transcripts arising from questions which were based on a review of the relevant literature. The thematic areas considered are as follows:

- The scope for family friendly / work life balance policies
  - Why were family friendly / work life balance policies introduced?
  - How are family friendly / work life balance policies introduced?
  - Factors influencing the introduction of family friendly / work life balance policies.
  - Who avails of family friendly / work life balance policies?

- Barriers to family friendly / work life balance policies:
  - Role or position held by the employee.
  - Career progression.
  - Role of the supervisor / manager.

- Benefits and limitations of family friendly / work life balance policies.

The implications of the findings, based on the data from the interviews, are discussed in the chapter, confirming, challenging and adding to earlier published literature.

Chapter Five, the concluding chapter, reviews the main findings of the research. The thematic areas introduced in Chapter Four are used to structure the discussion throughout the chapter. This study builds on and expands our knowledge of family friendly / work life balance, highlighting the significance of such policies within Irish society. It reveals the existing challenges for developing approaches to maximise benefits to all employees and addresses the highly gendered participation rate.

Recommendations are presented in terms of the negotiation, development and operation of family friendly / work life balance initiatives. Finally, an agenda for future research, which can build on the findings of this study, is also presented.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Work has always been a part of life. For some people it is the primary way in which they interact with others in society. For more and more workers, however, the consequence of new technologies, growing competition and the intensification of customer demand has meant that life has become work. Though some are thriving others are increasingly unhappy (Hutton, 2003).

Over the last thirty years with the influx of women into the labour market it can no longer be presumed that unpaid domestic work is being performed by the person at home, they are often out doing paid work themselves. Subsequently childcare and housework have become issues of importance to organisations, and have heightened debates concerning employees having adequate time outside work to pursue other activities and aspirations (Jones, 2003). New phrases are even being used to describe the time pressures under which modern families live - “the time squeeze”, the “second shift”, the “time crunch”, the “time famine” and “juggling work and family” (Hochschild, 1989; Daly, 1996).

This chapter provides an overview of the relevant literature available in the area of family friendly / work life balance policies. The first section considers the rationale for such policies in today’s rapidly growing economy, assisting employees in combining employment with other responsibilities and
benefiting employers in terms of productivity and staff commitment. The second section addresses the many flexible working arrangements available, both statutory and non-statutory. The third and fourth sections examine the issue of work-family conflict and occupational stress, further justifying the significance of this study. Finally, the impact of an organisation’s perspective toward family friendly / work-life balance policies is assessed.

2.2 RATIONALE FOR FAMILY FRIENDLY / WORK LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

Demand for Family Friendly Policies and Work-Life Balance is steadily increasing. In 1999, an Irish study revealed that, 36% of new mothers in the workforce called for more family friendly arrangements to enable them combine family with work commitments (Brady et al., 1999). O'Brien and Shemilt's (2003) research revealed that 80% of fathers and 85% of mothers believed everyone should have a choice of balancing their work and home commitments in a way that suits them. The changing role of men in society may possibly explain the high percentage of fathers requesting family friendly policies. In the final report of the Commission on the Family (1998: 404) it is stated:

Expectations are changing about what it is to be a good father. Good fathers are increasingly expected to be emotionally involved with their children. They are expected to share housework and take an interest in the children's schooling. It is no longer presumed that the father is the sole breadwinner or that his role is simply to provide the weekly wage packet.
According to Unions and Work, independent research commissioned for Congress Biennial Conference, 2001, 87% of interviewees considered access to some form of family-friendly working as important (ICTU, 2001). While, one national survey in the US reported 45% of male respondents and 64% of female respondents would not accept a promotion if it meant less time with their family (Robert Half International, 1989). Similarly, Irish research has found that many workers, mainly female, choose not to apply for or accept promotion, as promotion can mean the loss of family-friendly options (ICTU, 2003). Research has also suggested that, in some cases, women managers who leave the work force for family reasons do so because their work environment is not adequately flexible to allow them balance family and work demands (Linehan & Walsh, 2001). As reported by Collins-O’Sullivan (2003) there is a need for organisations to implement practices, which incorporate greater flexibility and innovative ways of operating, allowing women with families to advance in their careers without needing to make a choice. Family friendly / work life balance arrangements have, therefore, become an equality issue as they provide the only method for achieving continued labour market attachment, economic independence and equality (ICTU, 2003).

Family friendly policies have been defined as:

_Those policies which help workers in combining employment with their family life, caring responsibilities and personal and social life outside the workplace_ (National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance, 2002).

_Workplace policies that assist employees in combining family and work responsibilities. They consist_
predominantly of flexible work arrangements, voluntary employment breaks and a range of information and referral services provided to employees (IBEC, 2001).

Formal or informal set of terms and conditions which are designed to enable an employee to combine family responsibilities with employment (Simkin and Hillage, 1992: 13).

Human resource policies that organisations implement to respond to the family-oriented needs of their workers and may include policies regarding child and elder care, flexible scheduling, and family leave (Friedman, 1990: 79).

Work life balance has been defined by the Department of Trade and Industry, UK as being:

*About adjusting working patterns, regardless of age, race or gender (so) everyone can find a rhythm to help them combine work with their other responsibilities or aspirations* (www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance/what.html).

According to Caroline Waters, Director of People Networks at British Telecom “Work-life balance is achieved when an individual’s right to a fulfilled life inside and outside work is accepted and respected as the norm to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society” (in Jones, 2003). Holmstrom (2003) reveals “work-life balance is in vogue not simply because it’s a trendy phrase but because it leads to a better quality of life and raises productivity”. As recognised by Cooper (2000b) by striking a balance between home and work one may have a healthy emotional and physical life leading to business success.
By turning oneself into a work obsessive one will never add value to product and services.

The desire to achieve a better work-life balance exists among employees with or without family. Honeycutt and Rosen (1997) found that on investigating the effects of family-friendly career paths among a sample of MBAs all participants were more attracted to companies with flexible career paths, not just those with important family and balance identities. In reality, therefore, work-life benefits appear to have universal appeal as they foster expectations of an employer supportive of employees’ personal needs (Grover and Crocker, 1995). Guzzo et al. (1994) reported family-oriented actions to be positively related to perceived organisational support, defined according to Eisenberger et al. (1990), as a global employee impression that their employer values and cares about their needs and well being.

The introduction and successful operation of family friendly arrangements is a complex process, requiring co-ordinate support and intervention not only from individual enterprises and employees but also the government, policy-makers, social partners, the Equality Authority and trade unions (Fisher, 2000). Under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, in Ireland, a national framework for family-friendly policies has being established to focus on facilitating and supporting the voluntary development of family friendly policies at the enterprise level (Fagan, 2003). As a result of this agreement the National Framework Committee on Family Friendly Policies was set up to promote and raise the awareness of family friendly working practices (Department of the Taoiseach, 2002). In the area of training, for example, the committee has established a programme whereby it will meet as much as 75% of the cost of up to three days consultancy to introduce new work life balance
measures or develop existing ones, in organisations with less than 250 full time equivalent employees (National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance, 2002). The committee is comprised of representatives from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), Irish Business and Employees Confederation (IBEC) and public sector employers, it is supported by a secretariat from the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment and where necessary additional support is provided by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment chairs the National Framework (ICTU, 2003). According to the European Industrial Relations Observatory (2001) and Wickham (2000), however, the diffusion of the framework initiatives may be restricted due its voluntarist nature.

The first Family Friendly Workplace day took place in 2001 and was repeated in 2002 and 2003 (National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance, 2002). Family Friendly Workplace day was, however, renamed to Work Life Balance Day in 2004, the most recent Work Life Balance Day taking place on March 01, 2005. Supported by the Equality Authority, ICTU and IBEC, the purpose of the day was to invite firms to develop person and family friendly policies. Dublin City Council, for example, on Work-Life Balance Day 2004 launched a work-life balance handbook for its 6,500 staff (Coates, 2004a). Obviously, encouraging companies to consider work-life issues, makes for a change from the narrow focus on productivity, to the consideration that employees have a life outside of work (Humphreys, 2004). The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2001) through its Strategy Statement (2001-2004) has already declared that it “supports the mainstreaming of family-friendly practices in employment”. Additionally, an Irish survey found that people’s priorities are changing, in 1962, 83% of Irish
workers believed that work demands should take priority over personal and family needs, now only 37% have the same opinion (in Clutterbuck, 2003).

Research has connected work-life benefits to enhanced satisfaction (Thomas & Ganster, 1995), increased productivity (Galinsky & Stein, 1990) and lower turnover intentions (Grover & Crocker, 1995). Lloyds TSB calculated that improving employee retention by a factor of one improves customer satisfaction by 0.48 (Clutterbuck, 2003). Additionally, surveys have revealed that where employers get this balance right it can result in reduced sick leave, fewer people taking early retirement due to medical conditions and an improved relationship between employer and staff (Curran, 2003). Bevan et al. (1996) suggested that family-friendly policies can be part of a new psychological contract between employer and employee to redevelop trust, particularly after downsizing.

There has been increasing interest in the development of flexible practices in the UK and other countries (Dex and McCulloch, 1995). At British Telecom for example, where flexible working is encouraged staff retention has improved resulting in financial saving on recruitment and training. Absenteeism is also lower, while the return rate after maternity leave increased from 89% five years ago to 96% (Seneviratna, 2001). British Telecom, (BT) have recognised that flexible working patterns are essential for any organisation operating in a 24/7 global marketplace. In response BT has been developing a portfolio of work-life choices along with phone-line support and web sites. By 2001, 9,600 people were working part-time or job-sharing and now over 60,000 employees work in a time-flexible manner. Research performed by BT suggests these employees are more productive and more committed (Gratton, 2002).
As noted by Kossek et al. (1999) a critical challenge facing organisations and an issue of growing importance for business is managing the integration of work and life demands. Speaking at the Family Friendly Workplace Day Conference in February 2003, Jackie Harrison, Director of Social Policy at IBEC, illustrated the changes in the demographic trends "in the thirty years between 1971 and 2001, the number of females at work in Ireland grew by 140%, as opposed to 27% for males. The female participation rate is currently just over 50% compared to 35% a decade ago. The participation rate for married females is now 46.4% compared to 25% in 1991". The National Development Plan (2000-2006) supports an increase in female labour force participation (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1999). As recognised by the FAS Irish Labour Market Review 2002, however, if female participation rates are to rise over the medium term more commitment to family-friendly and flexible working practices, such as part-time work and teleworking, as well as adequate childcare provisions are needed (FAS, 2002). The issue of childcare is a major element in achieving work/life balance (Fisher, 2000). Under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) a Partnership subcommittee, with representatives of Government, ICTU and IBEC has been established. The objective of the sub-committee is to consider recommendations on how to improve the availability of quality childcare for working parents and how to accelerate the supply of pre and after school care (Department of the Taoiseach, 2003).

The results of a survey conducted by The Work Foundation, in association with the Employers for Work-Life Balance Forum in 2003 showed that over two thirds of respondents wanted to spend more time with their families. It is full-time workers who feel
the time restraint most with nearly three-quarters (73%) wanting to spend additional time with their families (Jones, 2003). As few families earn one income large enough to provide for all their financial needs most parents are active in the workforce (Curran, 2003). Surveys have shown that when both parents are working full time, children can loose out. A study of 1,200 teenagers by an Essex University researchers showed that the teenage children of a mother who works full-time during the first two and a half years of their baby’s life were 12% less likely to gain A levels, slightly more likely to be unemployed and to deal badly with stress (Dempsey, 2002).

As a consequence of globalisation of competition, changing communications and information technology, structural changes in the labour market shared with pressure to reduce costs employers are required to reappraise ideas, concepts and methods of organising work (IBEC, 2001). Ireland’s Employment Action Plan, 2002, lists as a priority action the adoption of firms and their staff “to new ways of working” and the introduction of “family friendly practices such as teleworking, work sharing, annualised hours, childcare arrangements to ensure they can be flexible and attract and retain employees, including female and older employees” (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2002). Some employers have introduced flexibility to survive in increasingly competitive environments (Casey et al., 1997).

According to Jackson and Monk (2000) by simply ignoring the importance of flexibility “companies could be denying themselves extraordinary people who may assist in the achievement of fantastic results”. Irish Jobs Share Director, Deirdre O’Driscoll, notes that there are hundreds of highly qualified candidates on their books, the vast majority being
women in their thirties, who do not want a nine-to-five job mainly due to family commitments (in Hughes 2001). Schwartz (1989) noted that it is possible to retain female employees who wish to pursue their careers seriously and participate actively in the rearing of their children by providing the flexibility and family support they need to function effectively. Intel Ireland, for example, one of the ten great companies to work for, according to _Fortune_ in 2003, has recognised the need for flexibility (Moskowitz & Levering, 2003). Additionally, the National Economic and Social Council identified that, for the Irish economy to remain attractive to internationally mobile knowledge workers, progress needs to be made in facilitating work-life balance (NESC, 2003).

The availability of family-friendly programmes within an organisation may however have no effect on the existing company attitudes and values, which can discourage employees from using such benefits, for example, the lack of informal supervisor support (Kofodimos, 1995; Shellenbarger, 1992). Research has found that work-life programmes will not always decrease work-family conflict (Galinsky & Morris, 1991), and that on site child-care is not associated with reduced work-family conflict, while supervisor support is (Goff et al., 1990). Steinberg et al. (2002, on behalf of the Roffey Park Institute) argued that it is the skills, attitudes and behaviours of line managers that ultimately determine the success of flexible working practices. In addition, according to a survey by the Work Foundation, resistance from management is the main barrier to organisations implementing work-life balance policies (in Higginbottom, 2003). As recognised by Hogarth et al. (2001) managers' inclination towards and views on work life balance may be influenced by their own typically long hours, particularly men. The task, therefore facing HR practitioners in championing
and implementing new work patterns remains the same as it was in the early 1980s: prejudice among managers and colleagues working full time and inevitable changes that flexible approaches impose such as changes to the workload, communications and the control exercised by the individual or his or her manager (Walton & Gaskell, 2001).

Jones (2003) found that only one tenth of the UK workforce decide their own working time. Issues such as lack of childcare, low pay, workload, and workplace culture make it impossible for those who, in theory, have autonomy over their work-time to determine, in reality, how they manage their work. It is common practice, for example in some “family-friendly firms” not to approve a parent’s work at home arrangement without proof that the child is in day care during traditional work hours or an employee may only use flexitime if prearranged in advance (Kossek, 1989). According to report by Shellencarger (1995) in a Wall Street Journal survey of large leading edge employers the use of flexible schedules is declining largely due to worker fear to ask to use them. In a 1995 survey of Eli Lilly & Co. who have a reputation of being one of the most family-friendly organisations, only 36% of employees felt it was possible to advance and still dedicate sufficient time to their families (Morris, 1997).

The significance of organisational culture on work life balance has been considered by several researchers (Kramar, 1997; Gonyea & Goggins, 1992; Tombari and Spinks, 1999; Kropf, 1999; Shabi, 2002). The significance of management in this respect was highlighted by Glynn et al. (2002: 8):

...whether an individual feels able to discuss issues outside of work, request different ways of working and believe that
the organisation genuinely enables balance will depend considerably on the skills of the manager in creating an open communication culture of trust and respect.

Woodall (1997) noted that managers' commitment to work-life balance policies cannot be presumed they should be educated and supported in terms of employees' needs. According to McCartney (2003) work-life balance arrangements should be promoted as been open and accessible to all. A powerful way of conveying this is to allow employees, through short speeches and presentations, to promote the benefits they have obtained as a result of taking up such options or through altering their working patterns.

2.3 FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Flexible work arrangements, as an employee benefit, began to increase in popularity in the early 1970s (Sladek, 1995; Sullivan and Lussier, 1995). Such arrangements refer to any working practice other than the normal working practice in the organisation; hence it incorporates a wide variety of working patterns (Work and Parents Taskforce, 2001). Flexible working provides employees with an opportunity to balance work with personal activities and responsibilities. For some employees such practices mean working hours which allow them avoid the delays at peak travel times thereby reducing the lengthy commute times to and from work (Cahill, 2003). According to a recent survey of Irish businesses by Deloitte and Touche over 30% of workers spend between one and two hours commuting to and from work each day, while 13% spend two or three hours (in Killoran, 2003).
In 1996, taking working arrangements separately, nine out of ten employers, had at least one family-friendly practice available while two thirds provided two or more. These proportions were raised considerably by taking into account paternity and maternity related arrangements (Forth et al., 1997). The International Foundation of Employee Benefits carried out a survey of 463 firms and found 34% of companies expected to offer flexitime by 2000 and 68% expected to have either on-site child-care or child care subsidies available (Luciano, 1992).

It is important to emphasise, however, the distinction between policy and practice. Having a family-friendly policy available does not necessarily mean employers will automatically promote the practice of family-friendly employment (Scheibl, & Dex, 1998). According to Marie Halpin, Equal Opportunities Manager, Bank of Ireland:

- It is crucial that the organisation not only develops the policies but also attempts to change the attitudes of those with responsibility for operating the policies (in Fisher, 1996: 26).

Finkel et al. (1994) and Perlow (1995) observed organisations where work-life programmes were available but the organisational culture did not encourage their use. Sprint employees, for example, expressed disbelief when the firm was listed in the 100 best companies for working mothers. Working Mother bases this award on an organisation’s pay, opportunities for women to advance, child-care assistance and other family benefits. Sprint was subsequently dropped from the Working Mother survey (Preece & Filbeck, 1999). On a later date Sprint’s corporate employee relations manager, discussing being dropped from the list, said, “we have to run a business” (Fierman, 1994).
Such a response may, in some way, explain why family-friendly policies and practices were not widespread among British employers in the early 1990s and were more prevalent in the public sector and larger companies (Brannen et al., 1994, McRae, 1991, Forth et al., 1996). Public sector organisations, along with service sector and large organisations (Persuad 2001) tend to show more commitment to work flexibility, which is the essence of work life balance, than other organisations (Mayne et al., 1996). According to Deirdre O’Driscoll, Irish Jobs Share director:

*When it comes to flexible working options, the public sector has led the way, but the private companies are still lagging behind* (in Hughes 2001: 11).

Studies by Casey et al. (1997) also reported that larger companies in Britain were changing from the eight hour day while smaller firms were retaining the traditional working day. Among organisations who refuse to stray from tradition, possibly a corporate norm exists which affirms the concept of a linear career, “male model of work” (Bailyn, 1993). According to this model, employees who work full-time, long daily hours and continuously from the end of education to retirement, making no allowances for family involvement are believed to be most productive (Scheibl & Dex, 1998). North Western Local Authorities’ Employers’ Organisation, in England, have shown, however, that flexible working arrangements can be successfully introduced in an organisation with as little as 15 employees, result being a drop in sickness rates from approximately 4% in 1992 to less than 1% in 1996 (Thatcher, 1996).

Presently, in Ireland temporal flexibility, which refers to variations in the number of hours worked, is the most commonly
recognised form of flexible working (Humphreys et al., 2000). Blyton (1996) reported that some arrangements, which aim to improve temporal flexibility, have the potential to facilitate employees in balancing work and family commitments, while also enables employers to provide a better service to the public in the form of longer working hours as well as retaining valued staff who may otherwise leave. The New York based Families and Work Institute found that retention is the reason most commonly given for having work-life assistance policies available (Families and Work Institute Web Site, 1998). Research has also found that benefits of flexible work schedules can be seen through their positive effects on job satisfaction, productivity and absenteeism (Baltes et al., 1999). In Rank Xerox’s supply company (UK), for example, the two saleswomen who avail of job-sharing were top of their sales league in 1990 (Fisher, 1996).

Individual differences affect the appeal of various flexible work options. Rau and Hyland (2002) investigated telecommuting and flexitime to find that individuals with high work-to-family conflict were more attracted to companies with flexitime while individuals with low work-to-family conflict were more attracted to organisations offering telecommuting. Obviously, employees also have a part to play in ensuring the success of flexible arrangements, by being flexible themselves, and willing to do whatever is required to make the arrangement work. For instance, a part time worker who is willing to work full-time if business needs require (Rodgers, 1992).

As identified by Butler and Connolly (2002) one of the problems associated with Family Friendly working is the potential negative impact on employees if the employee availing of flexibility is not replaced. Flexible-working arrangements may also be used by organisations to meet the firm’s need for flexibility rather than
being family-friendly (Purcell, 1997). It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish practices that are family-friendly from flexible working arrangements where flexibility is of benefit to the employer, for example temporary work and overtime (Casey et al., 1997). As suggested by the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT) that flexible working arrangements to be categorised as "family friendly" should be genuinely directed towards employee needs and mutually agreed by employers and employees (in Drew et al., 2002). Los and Gorz (reported in NWW, 2002: 6), using British Labour Force Survey data, highlighted, for example, that although two-thirds of all jobs created during the 1990s were availed of by females, many were part-time and "by definition almost exclusively insecure, poorly paid and in some instances without the full quota of employment rights that full time positions traditionally attract". Working practices, therefore, appear to have the greatest potential of being family-friendly if they have been developed in discussion with, or as a result of, employee concerns (Sceibl & Dex, 1998).

Research by Butler and Connolly (2002) reported that among union members, in Ireland, there is not only a demand for family friendly/work life balance systems, but also for more control and positive flexibility about how and when hours are worked. Some employers have recognised the importance of employee opinion, Dublin Bus and Eircom, for example, recently initiated an employee survey with the objective of questioning 30% of their respective employees on what they want from a work-life balance policy (Coates, 2004a).

As highlighted by Philips et al. (2002) a "one size fits all" attitude to flexible working is inappropriate. Organisations have, however, recognised this and are developing innovative family
friendly policies and forms of flexibility. At Larnrod Eireann, for example, "first day at school leave", entitles an employee to paid leave for their child's first day at school (Higgins, 2004). At Siemens, in Munich, voted by Fortune, 2004, as one of the ten great companies to work for, employees work as teams, setting targets for order completion, deciding their own schedules, arranging how many hours and what days each one will work (Moskowitz and Levering, 2004).

There are a number of commonly used forms of flexible work arrangements which will now be discussed under three categories; flexible working time, voluntary breaks and statutory/non-statutory leave arrangements.

2.3.1 FLEXIBLE WORKING TIME

2.3.1.1 Part-Time Working

Though there is no international, uniform statistical definition for part-time work, such an employee is generally defined as one who works less than the normal working hours. In Abbott Ireland, which is part of a world-wide healthcare organisation, for example, part-time working involves working twenty hours per week. Shifts operate on a daily basis, five days a week and include an 8:00am to midday shift, midday to 4:00pm shift, 4:00pm to 8:00pm shift and an 8:00pm to midnight shift (Coughlan, 2000).

The extent of part-time working has increased in recent decades in most industrialised countries (O'Reilly & Fagan, 1998). In Ireland the increase in part-time employment has been similar to other European countries. Part-time employment as a percentage of total employment has increased from 6.7% in 1983 to 16.7% in 1999 (Coughlan, 2000). Furthermore, as reported in Coughlan
(2000) 98.8% of part-time workers are not looking for full-time employment.

According to the Quarterly National Household Survey (Third Quarter 2000), over 15% of the total work force in Ireland work part-time, with 11.5% of the total workforce being women in part-time employment (in National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance, 2002). In the ESB, for example, 367 women and just 34 men are working part-time, out of a staff of 8,800 (Allen, 2004a). EU statistics indicate similar trends with approximately a third of employed women in the EU working part-time as compared to 6% of males (Coughlan, 2000). Such findings support the research of Dex & McCulloch (1995) who noted that females expressed contentment with such a flexible work practice that allowed them to combine paid work with family commitments. For most full-time working fathers however, part-time employment is not an option, as their full income is needed, due to the expense of children (Hatten et al., 2002).

Hessing (1994), believed that time management skills could be cultivated by combining family-care with paid work. In support of such a belief Patricia O'Brien, a part-time worker for Coillte, the Forestry Board, noted:

*part-time employees are far more conscious of time management and maximising the time when they are in work*

(in Allen, 2004b: 11)

A study by Bielensky (1994) showed that where employers initiated part-time employment to achieve perceived company needs, it generally was low skilled and of variable hours to meet the need for flexibility. According to the Work and Parents
Taskforce (2001) part-time workers are perceived as not being committed to their jobs and are more likely to be overlooked for promotion. These sentiments are supported by findings of a survey entitled *Work-Life Balance or Career Death: Issues & Paradoxes Facing Marketing & Human Resource Professionals*. Seventy six per cent of all respondents in the above study agreed there were fewer promotional prospects for part-time workers, while 78% of marketing and 68% of HR employees said that key-positions go to full-time staff (Savage & Janman, 2002). Furthermore, according to a survey of working conditions throughout Europe, part-time workers experience fewer opportunities for training, career progression, lower salary levels and reduced access to supplement payments and social protection benefits (Flynn, 2004).

Walton & Gaskell, (2001) noted that prejudice against part-time workers in the virtual organisation may exist not because they are out of the office at specific times of the week but because they are not contactable. Consequently, part-time employees may feel under pressure to keep in contact with the workplace outside work hours. Some cases found that part-time workers leave work on time but spend the evenings or weekends catching up with e-mails. To ensure the success of any flexible working practice it is, therefore, essential to have the correct workload for reduced hours and appropriate tasks and appraisal according to the amount of available time.

Protection of Employees (Part Time Work) Act, 2001, provides that a part-time employee cannot be treated less favourably than a comparable full time employee, in relation to conditions of employment. It provides that all employee protection legislation applies to a part-time employee in the same manner it applies to a full-time employee. Additionally, the purpose of the Act is to
improve the quality of part-time work, to facilitate the development of part-time work on a voluntary basis and to add to the flexible organisation of working time in a way that takes into account employers and employees needs. According to statistics from the Citizens Information Phone Service however, in 2002 over 3,000 calls were received from part-time workers with issues concerning denial of their legal entitlements under the Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001 in such issues as paid holidays, redundancy entitlements and protection against unfair dismissal (Harrington, 2004a).

2.3.1.2 Job-Sharing and Job-Splitting
Job-sharing often takes the form of split weeks and split days. It is an arrangement whereby the work of one full time position is shared between two employees, dividing pay and benefits proportional to the hours worked (Armstrong, 1997). To ensure effective job-sharing, good communication and management are required, which can be assisted when the job-sharer’s develop and operate close working relations (National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance, 2002).

Research indicates that job-sharing is predominantly practised by females as reflected in the Fynes et al. study (1996) where 74% of employees on job sharing were female.

According to Fynes et al. (1996) job-sharing appears to be present longer in the public than the private sector. Within the relevant public sector establishments, who offer job-sharing, over 20% offered such arrangements prior to 1985. In contrast within the private sector only 2% of firms offered the opportunity to share jobs prior to the mid 1980s. Such results, may, support the findings that 75% of private sector management perceived no advantages in job sharing.
Job-splitting is similar but different to job-sharing. It is an arrangement, which involves, splitting the duties of a full time job between two employees. This practice allows a post to be divided such that tasks requiring particular skills can be grouped together. As both employees have responsibility for their own tasks the need for co-ordination is reduced and the working time of employees who practice job-splitting can overlap (National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance, 2002).

Research has shown that in the Irish public service job-sharers are predominately female, in the lower grades, usually 30 to 39 years and are generally job sharing at a certain stage in their lives for family reasons. Clerical staff, within the Irish Civil Service, accounted for two thirds of all job-shares, with only 9% at higher executive officer and above and there were no job-sharers at principal officer level and above (Humphreys et al., 2000).

Humphreys et al. (1999) suggested that within the Irish Civil Service there was, in some circumstances, a strong cultural opposition by managers to job-sharing except at lower grades. Furthermore, in these circumstances when job-sharers were promoted they often are required to return to full time working. Such attitudes are defied however by Maggy Pigott and Judith Killick who share the post of joint head of the family policy division in the Lord Chancellor’s department in Britain. This is the fifth job they have shared and the third at a senior level in the British civil service (Walton & Gaskell, 2001).

The performance benefits of a job-sharing system were considered in a study entitled Desperately Seeking Flexibility. The research found that line managers reported 90.8% of their
job-sharing managers as effective in working as a team to carry out their duties. According to the study specific areas of strength of those participating in job-sharing schemes included: specialist knowledge, creativity, strategic thinking, communication, persuasion and influencing skills, personal motivation and commitment (in Savage & Janman, 2002).

2.3.1.3 Flexitime

Flexitime schemes, originally introduced during the 1980s, allow workers flexibility in their starting and finishing times, outside a specified core time, provided a set volume of hours are worked over a specific remuneration period (Employment Equality Agency, 1996). Firms have recognised that flexitime costs nothing in administration and training costs (Preece & Filbeck, 1999) while according to several studies is related to variables such as turn-over, organisational commitment, absenteeism, job satisfaction and health complaints (Narayanan & Nath, 1982; Pierce & Newston, 1983; Scandura & Lankau, 1997; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). According to an Irish study entitled Off the Treadmill: Achieving Work/Life Balance flexitime was available to some staff in 52% of the firms surveyed, making it the second most common flexible working practice (in Dobbins, 2003a).

Though flexitime allows employees to arrange, more effectively, their working time to fit in with commitments outside of the workplace, as well as easing the difficulties of commuting to work, management and staff concerns still exist. Managers are apprehensive that a “clock watching” attitude may develop among employees who practice flexitime possibly resulting in time management inflexibility when there are important work priorities. Employees, on the other hand, are concerned about the limitations in the amount of flexicredit that can be carried over
and the inflexibility of compulsory core-time bands (Humphreys et al., 2000).

According to Humphreys et al. (2000) flexitime arrangements are often limited to non-management grades within the Irish Civil Service, wider public service and organisations where they are practised. Kush and Stroh (1994), based upon the US experience, noted that where there is a lack of consistency in the management and monitoring of flexitime schemes and where such practices are not available on a consistent basis or to all workers, feelings of inequity and potential divisiveness may develop between members of staff and management.

2.3.1.4 Compressed Work Week

One of the reasons Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR), an engineering and construction firm, initially introduced an alternative working week was to attract a younger generation of engineers into the business. The KBR scheme involved compressing a working fortnight of seventy five hours into nine days, allowing employees a “flexday” every second Friday. The results included effective recruitment and retention, no indication of a decrease in staff performance, no changes to the work-time charged to clients (Carrington, 2003).

According to a report by Coughlan (2000) a compressed working week is generally defined as “any system of fixed working hours more than eight hours in length which results in a work week of less than five full days of work a week”. A thirty eight hour week, for example, could be worked over a four day week, by working nine and a half hours a day (National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance, 2002). This form of flexible working gives employees more control over their work schedule, enables more time for family-responsibilities, may assist
employees in addressing commuting issues, gives staff who cover for colleagues, the opportunity to gain experience in another job (Coughlan, 2000; Stredwick & Ellis, 1998). Catherine Bell, the most senior executive to hold a post on a flexible basis in the British Civil Service, works four days a week in the office and half a day at home, allowing her play a fuller part in her son’s upbringing (Walton & Gaskell, 2001).

According to an IBEC survey (1999) of five hundred and thirty nine manufacturing companies, 10% had a 4x12 hour continuous shift system. In general, in Ireland, compressed working time is associated with large organisations and shift working (Coughlan, 2000).

2.3.1.5 Annualised Hours

Annualised hours, also known as annual hours or “flexi-year” is a system whereby an employee is contracted to work a defined number of hours per year rather than per week (National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance, 2002). Such a practice gives management an opportunity to reschedule available working hours over the year to cope with peaks and troughs in production and service, attempting to resolve the problem of mismatch between employee working time and the hours required to cover the workload (Coughlan, 2000). In the Netherlands, for instance, enterprises practice shift systems which are longer during periods of heavy workload and shorter during quieter times (Blyton, 1996).

For workers the benefits of annualised hours include more time off, a higher level of guaranteed earnings, greater predictability and stability (Coughlan, 2000). For some employees, however, call outs to use reserve or extra hours which are owed by the worker to the organisation can cause problems. Employees with
children, for example, may find it difficult if not impossible to arrange child-care at short notice (Stredwick & Ellis, 1998). Heyes (1997), Purcell (1997) and Donaldson (1996) believe that family life may actually be obstructed by annual hours schemes and shift working. According to Humphreys et al. (2000) and Clifford et al. (1997) annual hours contracts are not commonly practised by the Irish public service or Irish organisations.

2.3.1.6 Term Time Working

Term time working, typically, allows employees work the same weeks as the school year while taking unpaid leave during the school holidays (Cahill, 2003). Such arrangements ensure the skills of employees with school going children are retained while facilitating their caring responsibilities during school vacations (Humphreys et al., 2000).

Term time working was introduced through much of the British public and private sectors during the 1990s. A study of 83 public and private sector organisations, in the UK, by the IRS (2000), found term time working was available to all employees in 16% of the organisations, while in 36% of organisations it was accessible to some employees.

Having being made available in The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, in Ireland, in 1997/1998, on a pilot basis, term time working has been extended across other departments. By the end of May 1999, three hundred and fifty two applications for term time working had been received by the civil service, 87% of which were from women. The largest grade group of candidates were at clerical officer level, with the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs having the widest variety of applicants in more senior grades up to assistant principal level (Humphreys et al., 2000). In 2002, 9% of all Civil
Service staff availed of term-time working – 92% female and 8% male (Allen, 2004c).

A study by Drew at al. (2002) found term time working to be available in 23% of those organisations surveyed. It was associated with a relatively low level of availability/ take up – in 83% of the companies that had introduced term-time working it was accessible to less than 5% of staff.

2.3.1.7 Teleworking / Telecommuting / eWorking
According to the National Advisory Council on Teleworking (1999) teleworking is “a way of working using information and communication technologies in which work is carried out independent of location”. Teleworking, telecommuting and eWorking though used interchangeably, can be used to describe different situations such as working from a home base, for part or all of the working week, working from a telecentre or telecottage (Coughlan, 2000).

Results of a survey by Henley Management College found that 70% of large and medium sized organisations anticipate introducing teleworking over the next few years (Littlefield, 1995). Furthermore, a report compiled by Amarach Consulting (1999), on behalf of Allied Irish Bank, reported that “one in ten workers will telecommute from their home some or all of the time in 2010”. The enthusiasm for alternative workplace arrangements may be a consequence of a number of factors. AT&T, in the USA, for example have reduced costs and saved some five hundred and fifty million dollars by doing away with offices people do not need, combining other offices and reducing associated overheads. Additionally, employees who work in an alternative workplace have the potential to increase productivity as they devote more time and energy to customers and less to
office routines (Apgar, 1998). A study by Nortel Networks reported a productivity increase of 22% as a direct result of working from a home office environment (Costello, 2004).

According to a report by Glass and Esters (1996) mothers who were able to work at home after childbirth had higher productivity and lower turnover. Alternative workplace practices may also benefit organisations in terms of recruitment and retention. American Express president and CEO Kenneth I. Chenault believes that, by giving employees the flexibility to work from home, the organisation may retain experienced staff (in Apgar, 1998). As noted by the Employment Equality Agency (1996) employees also benefit from location flexibility by reduced travel time, stress levels and achieve a better balance between work and family obligations.

Results of an Irish Congress of Trade Unions survey Meeting Working Parents’ Childcare Needs found, however, that only 2% of those surveyed had access to teleworking (Nexus Research Cooperative, 2002). Such a small percentage may possibly be explained by Chris Hudson, organising secretary of the virtual branch of the Communication Workers Union, who believes that Irish employers are reluctant to embrace teleworking. He cites the example of Scottish Widows in the UK where most employees are teleworkers, comparing it to Irish insurance companies where staff are, in general, still “wholly office based” (Molloy, 2004). According to a report by the National Advisory Council on Teleworking (1999), for Irish organisations to reap the benefits of teleworking, they need to facilitate appropriate training, the awareness of this method of work needs to be heightened, a fiscal and legal environment that supports teleworking as a method of work needs to be established.
2.3.2 VOLUNTARY BREAKS

2.3.2.1 Employment or Career Breaks

Jonathan Swan, information and policy manager at New Ways to Work, which gives advice on balancing work and life, believes career breaks are the most popular flexible benefit among potential employees. Similarly, according to Mike Emmott, adviser, employee relations, at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, a career break can be beneficial to both employer and employee. For an employer, granting an employee leave with the guarantee of their job back on their return will save on the wage bill assisting employers through difficult financial times. Additionally, by granting an experienced member of staff leave during times of recession the organisation will avoid the cost of re-hiring (Jones, 2003). For an employee, a career break can give them a chance to reconsider their work/life balance and increase their value to the organisation by bringing back new skills on their return (in Baker, 2001). One of the reasons Wakefield Council, in Britain, for example, introduced unpaid longer-term leave, paid-short term leave, term-time working and temporary negotiated hours, was to keep financial costs to a minimum (Bigwood, 1996).

Despite the benefits of career breaks, Forth et al. (1997), reported that the availability of such breaks, in Britain, were twice as frequent in the public sector as in the private sector. Similarly according to an ESRI report just less than 10% of private enterprises in Ireland offer staff employment breaks or extended leave arrangements while 82% of public sector organisations provide the option of employment breaks to at least some of their staff (in Fisher, 1996). According to Schiersmann (1996) costs are a barrier for the wider introduction of career breaks as suggested by a comparative review of family-friendly working in Europe. Employers fear that they will be unable to
replace employees who avail of career breaks and the training costs of replacement workers will be high. Holtermann (1995) estimated that it takes six weeks, on average, for a replacement to achieve the productivity levels of the outgoing employee. Employers may also fear that they will be inundated with requests for career breaks and part-time working, if available. On the contrary, however, research suggests that such fears are largely unfounded and few employees with family responsibilities can afford a reduction in income (Spearritt & Edgar, 1994). Reporting on the 2004 Irish Budget, Labour TD Roisin Shortall noted:

Compare the latest standard rate tax bands that apply to a married couple with one income (€38,400) to that of a married couple with two incomes (€58,800) and you see that our system is designed to encourage every parent into the workplace, regardless of their own personal preference (Shortall, 2004: 15).

Career breaks were introduced by the Irish public sector on a pilot basis in 1984. By 1995, it was estimated that a total of five thousand five hundred staff were on career breaks, over half of which worked in the health and education sectors (Humphreys et al., 2000). Research by Humphreys et al. (1999) found that within the Irish Civil Service, at least, there was quite an even gender balance of those partaking in career breaks with 40% of participants been male. Of those on career breaks, 26% were in the higher grades of the higher executive officer level and above. Gender differences in relation to motivation for the break, however, existed. Thirty-eight per cent of women compared with only 13% of men took career breaks for caring and domestic reasons. Men, it appears, were motivated to take career breaks by factors which would broaden their future career prospects.
Whilst career breaks remain generally popular, concerns do exist among managers in the Irish public service. Managers perceive difficulties in recruiting and training replacement staff and retraining permanent staff returning from career breaks (Humphreys et al., 2000). Healy and Kraithman (1996) noted that employees who take time off in the 1990s can face difficulties in the job due to rapid changes. According to Stredwick and Ellis (1998) a good employer will maintain regular communication with a staff member taking an employment break. The most common practice is for an employee to return for a minimum of two to four weeks a year enabling him/her to keep his/her skills up to date and providing an opportunity for additional training, if required.

2.3.3 STATUATORY / NON-STATUATORY ARRANGEMENTS
In Ireland, legislation exists that recognises an employee’s entitlement to remain in employment while combining caring and family responsibilities. Such legislation includes Adoptive Leave, Maternity Leave, Carers Leave and Parental Leave (ICTU 2003).

2.3.3.1 Adoptive and Maternity Leave
The Adoptive Leave Act entitles a mother or a sole male adopter to fourteen weeks paid adoptive leave and up to eight weeks additional unpaid adoptive leave. Under the Maternity Protection Act, employees are entitled to eighteen weeks paid maternity leave and eight weeks unpaid leave. Some Irish organisations, also offer staff enhanced adoptive and maternity leave to be taken at an employee’s own expense. A staff member who avails of such leave is guaranteed the right to return to work at the end of this period (Coughlan, 2000).
Scott (1993) reported that the percentage of mothers failing to return to work was reduced, from 24 to 12%, by providing a generous family-leave package for maternity leave. In contrast to such findings a 1996 survey concluded that only 6% of British employers provided enhancements to statutory maternity pay. One quarter of public sector organisations offered enhancements, while 4% of private sector organisations made such provisions. Such findings reflect the belief that within the private sector, company interest in social issues depends, in part, on the presence of factors that motivate the interest of the private sector (Scheibl & Dex, 1998).

2.3.3.2 Carers Leave

Work-family research has shown that not only child care but also elder care problems can result in increased turnover, absenteeism, workplace stress and work disruptions (Preece & Filbeck, 1999). According to Shellenbarger (1993), corporate surveys found that 33% to 45% of staff with adult dependants worked less effectively due to concern for their relatives. A study by Bevan et al. (1996) reported that one quarter of the organisations surveyed facilitated special leave for staff with elder care obligations, the public sector having the highest rate of provision.

In Ireland, the population aged over 65 is expected to increase from 414,000 in 1996 to in excess of 759,000 in 2026 and to over one million by 2046 (in Commission on the Family, 1998). Studies have estimated that in 1996 between 77,000 and 86,000 older people in Ireland needed some level of care, with 31,000 requiring a lot of care. Furthermore, it was suggested that 58,000 adults with disabilities would require care in 1996 and this figure may increase to 68,000, approximately, by 2011 (Joint Committee on Women’s Rights, 1996).
The Carer's Leave Act, 2001, gives Irish employees an opportunity to avail of unpaid leave from their job to care for someone in need of full time care and attention. The period of leave is subject to a maximum of sixty-five weeks in respect of any one care recipient, the minimum statutory entitlement is thirteen weeks.

2.3.3.3 Paternity and Parental Leave

By the end of 1999 all EU member states provided statutory parental leave, including paternity leave for some (O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003).

Paternity Leave is paid leave granted to fathers after the birth of a child, the extent and availability of paternity leave varies. In Spain, for example, such leave is two days, while in France it is three weeks (Deven & Moss, 2002). Currently, in Ireland there are no legislative or statutory entitlements for fathers to paid paternity leave. A number of Irish organisations have, however, a policy of granting a father leave at the time of his child's birth. Results of the IBEC National Survey on Pay and Conditions of Employment in the Manufacturing and Wholesale Distribution Sector, 1999, found a quarter of respondents grant one or more days paternity leave (in Coughlan, 2000). Trinity College for instance, allows three days paid leave to male staff on the adoption or birth of a child (National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance, 2002).

Forth et al. (1997) noted that 91% of fathers, in Britain, took eight days leave, on average, around the time of the birth of their children, much of it in the form of annual leave. According to a study commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission, Britain, 80% of fathers anticipated they would be able to take
paternity leave. The availability of leave, however, was not as extensive as employees believed, with just over 60% of employers actually allowing paternity leave (O’Brien and Shemilt, 2003). Such findings support results of a national survey, in Britain, of employers’ practices which reported that approximately two-thirds of managers “did not allow any paid parental leave to employees beyond what was their legal minimum entitlement” (Taylor, 2002: 17).

There is a wide variety of parental leave entitlements in the EU, varying from three years per family in France and Germany to six months in Belgium, Greece and the UK (Moss & Deven, 1999; Deven & Moss, 2002). In Ireland, the Parental Leave Act came into operation on 3 December, 1998. The Act provides an entitlement for men and women to avail of fourteen weeks unpaid leave from employment to care for children of up to eight years of age. The unpaid leave can be taken either as a continuous block of fourteen weeks, on smaller blocks of not less than six weeks or more favourable terms with the agreement of the employer. The Working Group, on the Review of The Parental Leave Act, produced a report in 2003 which recommended that parental leave be increased from fourteen to eighteen weeks and that there be an entitlement to paid parental leave (Dobbins, 2004a). However, the recent Bill published to amend the 1998 Parental Leave Act includes no such changes. Peter Flood, IBEC’s assistant director (equality) notes that IBEC is firmly against paid parental leave, arguing that such paid benefits would require funding “probably through social insurance”, resulting in a rise in PRSI for employees and employers and consequently increasing labour costs (Coates, 2004b: 11).

The Parental Leave Act, 1998 also allows for limited paid leave, force majeure leave, enabling staff to deal with family
emergencies. Employees may avail of three days paid leave in any one year or five days over a three year period. Force majeure leave is restricted to situations where the immediate presence of the employee, at the place where the ill or injured person is situated, is essential. Force majeure leave was used by 2% of the Irish workforce in 2002 (Coates, 2004b).

One of the first disputes concerning parental leave involved a Dunnes Stores employee. The employee, who wanted to avail of parental leave, by breaking it up over a period of time, brought Dunnes Stores to the Rights Commission, where they said the leave could only be taken as a continuous block of fourteen weeks or nothing. The Right Commission's result was in favour of Dunnes Stores, the employer, as they said an employee did require the agreement of an employer in taking broken leave (Frawley, 2000a). Obviously, with the recent amendments made to the 1998 Parental Leave Act the employee, discussed above, would have being entitled to avail of such leave in smaller blocks of at least six weeks.

A study by the Families and Work Institute reported that the average parental leave of four and a half months costs the organisation approximately 32% of an employee's annual salary. The cost of replacing an employee, on the other hand, is between 75% and 150% of the employee's salary (Scott, 1993). Some organisations have recognised the benefits of parental leave. The Bank of Ireland, for example, offer enhanced parental leave to permanent employees with a minimum of one years completed service. Such employees may take a total of twelve months unpaid leave, inclusive of statutory allowances, for each child under eight years (National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance, 2002).
A study commissioned by the Irish social partnership working group before the 2001 review reported that 6.74% of the labour force at that time were entitled to avail of parental leave, but only 20% of such employees had done so (Coates, 2004b). Such a low response may be because many employees are afraid to take parental leave. A survey by RecruitIreland.com found that 56% of respondents perceived that taking such leave would hinder their promotion prospects (Dobbins, 2003b). Furthermore, research by the Young Women Lawyers group, in Britain, found just 8% of the largest two hundred solicitors firms facilitated parental leave arrangements, while 60% of those surveyed said they would not be considering introducing such leave. These results not only indicate a low level of provision but also a high level of ignorance concerning parental leave (McGlynn, 1997).

It is believed that when parental leave is a family entitlement, mothers, in general, avail of such leave (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999). In Ireland, in 2001, 84% of all employees who availed of parental leave were women (Coates, 2004b). Similarly in Belgium, in 1999, 95% of people using parental leave were mothers (Deven & Nuelant, 1999). The lower levels of use of parental leave by men may be explained by the findings of Rost's (1999) German study, which concluded that for a number of employers, men's admission to parental leave indicated a license to be idle. In turn, possibly accounting for the 1998 German data, that found only 2% of eligible fathers availed of parental leave.

In an attempt to encourage fathers to take leave and strengthen their caring responsibilities with their infants, Nordic countries have marked a proportion of paid parental leave to be devoted exclusively to fathers. Such periods of paid leave occur after early paternity leave when a child is born (Bjornberg, 1994).
These designated “daddy periods” were first implemented in Norway in 1993. By 1997 nearly 70% of eligible males availed of this paid parental leave and by 2000 the percentage had risen to 85% (Rostgaard, 2002). As noted by Schiersmann (1996), in Scandinavian countries, the option of reduced working hours and extensive parental leave ensures optimum conditions for combining work and family.

2.4 WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

A Work Foundation survey carried out in 2001 highlighted that, for 70% of respondents, juggling home and work demands was a major source of stress (Jones, 2003). This stress could be a consequence of the work-family conflict, experienced when pressures from the work and family roles are mutually incompatible. (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Greenhaus and Beutell identified three forms of work-family conflict: (a) time-based conflict, where the time demands of one role intrude into the involvement in the other role; (b) strain-based conflict, where the stress symptoms such as fatigue and irritability produced in one role interfere with the other role (c) behaviour-based conflict, where behaviours that are functional in one role are not functional in the other role. As a result of the various role pressures experienced by women and men in today’s society work-family conflict is virtually inevitable (Goldsmith, 1989). A fact which is supported by the findings in Acor Services where 46% of employees find it increasingly difficult to meet personal and work commitments, one third of marriages end in divorce and 30% of employees maintain their health is suffering because of their work (Bunn, 2003).

Research conducted with 5,000 women performed by the health magazine Top Sante found nine out of ten women were
dissatisfied and "stressed out" by the pressures of work and home; 80% would prefer not to work and be with their children (Harrington, 2002). Such findings may reflect the results of various studies, which have shown that women regardless of the hours they work outside the home take responsibility for the household tasks and child rearing (Hochschild, 1989; Lewis & Cooper, 1987; Pleck, 1985). Pillinger (2002) and Sullivan and Lewis (2001) argued that typically, economically active females assume more family responsibilities than their male counterparts. As a result mothers, particularly those with children under 13 years, tend to experience greater conflict in achieving work life balance than fathers (Higgins et al., 1994; Fu and Shafer, 2001).

Linehan (2000) found that the married interviewees, in her research, perceived marriage and, particularly, family as being the main obstacles to their careers in international management. Participants proposed that this was a consequence of socialisation, where women are expected to balance, simultaneously, a number of tasks. Philpott (2002) noted the importance of recognising that the hours one works in waged employment are only part of the workload individuals face. A woman who is married or living with her partner, who has dependent children and who works full-time, on average spends four hours a day doing household tasks. A man in a similar situation spends almost two and a half hours a day on household tasks. Taking into account this unpaid work such men are working an average of 52 hours each week and such women are working an average of 62 hours each week. Presuming an average commuting to work-time and reasonable amount of sleep a typical married mother in a full time job has 45 hours a week, approximately a quarter of the time, vacant for "life". The case at Gateshead Council where a female employee was disciplined for fraudulently taking sick leave and was later discovered to be
nursing her sick child is an example of a woman attempting to balance the role of worker and mother (Cooper, 2001). Possibly such a scenario also supports the findings of Bailyin (1993) who suggested that working mothers do not "agonise" over their children while at work but instead separate their work and home lives. Holmstrom (2003) revealed that one of the problems facing women working in human resources and associated areas who wish to participate in flexible work practices is the need to maintain full time cover. Holmstrom also noted that if one is dealing with a disciplinary matter it may not be possible to leave at 5:00p.m, if people are depending on you.

Research by Barrett et al. (2000) notes that female employees are paid less than their male colleagues for the same or similar work. In 1997, for example, the average hourly female earnings were 84.5% of their male counterparts. The authors explain that this pay gap is referred to the "discrimination index" or the additional amount a female employee would have earned had her characteristics being rewarded in the same way as a male's. Some of the factors cited in the research, which have given rise to this pay gap include lack of female role models in senior positions, social and personal expectations held by women and men and occupational segregation. These findings are similar to those reported by economists Harkness and Waldfogel who studied the wage gap between seven industrialised countries to find, for example, in the United States women earn 78% of the male wage, in France 81%, in Sweden 84% and in Australia 88%. These figures can be largely explained by the fact that the early years of career building overlap with the prime years of childbearing and the years where women, not men, interrupt their careers to have a family. The larger percentage gap in some countries is related to their failure to develop policies in the workplace and society that support working mothers (Hewlett, 2002).
The *Quality of Working Life* survey of 5,000 managers by Umist and the Institute of Management, carried out in 1999, found that participants expressed dissatisfaction over stress and working hours; 10% worked more than 61 hours a week, 33% worked more than 51 hours a week, 82% worked more than 41 hours a week (Cooper, 2000b). A similar study carried out by the CIPD entitled *Married To The Job* which involved research with 291 people who work more than 48 hours a week showed nearly a third admit work-related tiredness badly affected their sex lives, while two fifths claimed it had caused arguments between them and their partners within the past year (Higginbottom, 2002a). Further research by DeLong and Delong (1992) found that men who work long hours acknowledge having poor relationships with their children resulting in family distress. Such findings support the work of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) who noted that as individuals become involved in a role they become preoccupied with that role, consequently affecting their efforts to fulfil the demands of a competing role. Various studies have predicted that the result of high involvement in a role creates work-family conflict in both the work and family domains (Frone & Rice, 1987; Greenhaus et al., 1989; Higgins et al., 1992). Work to family conflict, where one's work responsibilities interfere with one's home and family responsibilities, is predicted to be associated with job dissatisfaction, turnover intentions and stress. While family to work conflict, where one's unfulfilled family obligations may interfere with one's functioning at work, is expected to be connected with stress and absenteeism (Anderson et al., 2002).

Smith Major et al. (2002) revealed that work interference with family is significantly related to long working hours. According to a recent study one third of working mothers believed that if
they and their husband worked full-time while their children were young they would end up in the divorce courts (Womack, 2003). In the United States, the percentage of divorced working women is very high as they have the job of housekeeper, wife and provider. Additional conflict is created however when the question is posed as to who takes care of them when their working husband wants to be cared for? (Blears, 2001).

It is recognised that the way in which individuals, react to and deal with, the interaction between work and family domains, has important consequences for the individual and organisation (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000). Organisations such as Glaxo Wellcome, for example, prompted by growing competition for talent has come out strongly against “presenteeism” and in favour of flexibility (Cooper, 2000a). Similarly Randall Tobias, the CEO of Eli Lilly emphasises the necessity to focus on results as opposed to hours worked. In the past, he notes, those employees whose cars were still in the parking lot at 7.00pm where seen as “corporate heroes hard at work”. In reality however those staff members may have been poor organisers or spent time on the wrong things (in Morris, 1997).

Research performed by the Institute for Employment Studies in 2002 entitled *Work-Life Balance beyond the Rhetoric* established that employees prefer flexible work patterns and HR managers in general agree flexibility has definite business benefits. In reality, however, the study showed very few people shifted from conventional work patterns as they feared their career prospects may be affected and mangers even though they may have liked to be supportive did not know how to help (Holmstrom, 2003). The results of the *People Management Work-Life Balance Survey* 2002, conducted with Flexexecutive, a flexible working consultancy, found that, of the 250 respondents 80% thought
flexible working should be available to all workers, 90% believed part-time or flexible work arrangements were practised mainly by females, 84% disagreed that part time employees were less committed, 73% believed few promotional opportunities were available to part time workers and 64% thought moving to a flexible or part-time career would harm prospects of promotion (in Rana and Higginbottom, 2002). In support of such findings, research by Bailyn (1993), Schwartz (1996) and Solomon (1994) reported that, fear of negative career effects is a major barrier, preventing employees participating in flexible work practices.

O'Brien and Shemilt (2003) reported that the use of flexible working arrangements is generally low among fathers with flexitime, part-time/reduced hours and job-sharing being practised by 20%, 6% and 2% of fathers respectively. Drew et al. (2002) concluded that work/life balance initiatives are highly gendered. Women who seek flexibility often choose reduced hours such as part-time working and job-sharing, while the options of flexible hours, compressed working week or home working which involve working full time and no loss of pay, tend to be sought equally, if not predominantly by men. The authors of the study suggest, that it is perceived by choosing less than full-time hours indicates a lack of commitment to the job/organisation.

According to Leach (2001) work/life issues are still of great importance for those employees who can pick and choose their jobs. Workers are looking for a real work-life balance. As a consequence of the difficulty of finding suitable childcare and the long commute to work people are looking for companies who offer flexibility, are open to job sharing and tele-working (Browne, 2001). At the heart of this issue there is the fundamental point that changes in the workplace attitude are a
consequence, to a large extent, of the changes in the home where the burden of financial provision for a family is increasingly shared between both parents (Leach, 2001).

2.5 OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

According to Debbie O’Halloran, editor of Irishjobs.ie:

_The dark side of the tiger economy in Ireland is the toll that stress seems to be taking on the Irish workforce. Constantly changing technology has been blamed for causing high levels of stress in the workplace. However, technology is not the sole culprit. The balance between work and family has become increasingly difficult to maintain in the fast-paced competitive environment in which most people have to work. There are other factors, too, that contribute to stress in the workplace. These can be work overload caused by downsizing, long hours, bullying, pressure to perform and lack of job security (in Harrington, 2005: 15)._

Research into the effects of occupational stress began as early as the 1950s (Beehr & O’Hara, 1987). Research studies have illustrated that the number of employees suffering from occupational stress are increasing. An online recruitment site, CareerBuilder, noted that the overall percentage of worker stress increased by 10% between August 2001 and May 2002 (Cryer et al., 2003). Research indicates that excessive work is the most common cause of stress, with other factors being deadline pressures, aggressive management/ poor communication, unsupportive environment, and problems with sustaining a satisfactory work-life balance (Yates, 2002). Cooper identified the consequences of stress as increased sick and absence leave
and labour turn over (in Watkins, 2003) all of which can be costly for organisations. A report by the Small Firms Association identified that €112 million is being lost per year by Irish business due to absenteeism (Dobbins, 2002). A management consultancy organisation, The Hay Group UK, who employ 150 workers, have estimated that employee turnover could cost up to 40% of their annual profit (Hay Group, 2001). Results of a survey reported in O’Mahony (2001) found that it is the younger generation who are experiencing greatest pressure with 51% citing too much work as a source of stress and 48% of those aged between 35 and 44 also blaming too much work as a source of pressure in their lives.

Cooper (in Powell, 1999) identified that employees work long hours not only as a result of work overload but also deem it necessary to be seen to be working long hours, this according to Cooper is the “presenteeism” phenomenon. A CIPD survey on working hours entitled Living to Work revealed the percentage of UK workers, who consider themselves “long hour workers”, has risen from 10% in 1998 to 25% in 2003. More than a quarter of the 1,600 respondents said they suffered physical ailments due to their long working day. A similar proportion claimed their mental health, in terms of stress and depression, had been affected by the long-hours culture (Smethurst, 2003). Research evidence on health and safety associated with working long hours has prompted employer/employee and human resource management negotiation (Spurgeaon et al., 1997; Sparks et al., 1997; Cooper et al., 2001; Changing Times, 2001). The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have recognised the health risks involved in work-related stress and recently ordered West Dorset Hospitals NHS Trust to improve its methods of dealing with stress or face prosecution. An action which is a warning to all
HR professionals to re-examine how they tackle stress (in Roberts, 2003).

Research has found that nearly one third of Irish workers in the financial services sector are required to work more than ten hours unpaid overtime every week. In response to these findings Oliver Donohue, of The Irish Congress of Trade Unions, cautioned that nobody should work unpaid overtime. Employees may be falsely allured into thinking that if they work increased hours their efforts may lead to management positions (in Breslin, 2003). A study undertaken by the National Framework Committee on Work/Life Balance entitled Off the Treadmill - Achieving Work/Life Balance found that working long hours, was a standard practice among some Irish employees. Working longer than standard hours, regularly, was common for 86% of senior managers/professionals; 61% of junior managers/professionals; 30% of other non-manual workers; and 30% of manual workers (in Dobbins, 2003a). According to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions many Irish employees are tied to a working rhythm that diminishes their ability to combine non-work activities into their working lives (Fagan, 2003).

A study by web travel agent, Travelocity, found that 10% of respondents were deterred from taking leave because of the fear of returning to a backlog of work, while 25% of male respondents were unable to relax after a two-week holiday. A separate survey by Totaljobs.com revealed that 60% of the UK workforce do not use their full holiday entitlement and that half of those respondents who did take all their leave felt guilty for doing so (Deeks, 2000). Research by Haas and Hwang (1999) revealed that there are few procedures in place allowing fathers to negotiate their tasks and workload during periods of leave and
in some cases fathers are left to make their own arrangements. Mike Emmott, CIPD adviser on employee relations, warned workers to take holidays and avoid overworking. He advised that excessive hours could have a negative effect on job performance resulting in costly mistakes at work and also leading to strain on relationships with partners, children and friends (in Higginbottom, 2002a).

The results of a CIPD survey Married To the Job? found 82% of long hour workers respondents were male and 79% of the respondents were parents (Higginbottom, 2002a). Research found by the late 1990s British fathers were working the longest hours in Europe and fathers were working longer hours than men with no children (Deven et al., 1998). According to Cooper men view work with such importance, when defining who they are, that the connection between work and their private life is unbreakable (in Deeks, 2000). Hatter et al. (2002) noted for many men who become fathers there is a greater sense of responsibility as the family "provider" leading to an increased sense of commitment to their job to improve job security or even a desire to take on a bigger role or a promotion. Such pressure stems from socialisation where fathers are expected to be the breadwinner. Similar trends are revealed on comparing full-time employment rates between fathers and men without children: 86% of fathers worked full-time compared with 72% of the men without children (O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003).

It appears, however, that thirty to forty-something males are increasingly struggling to deal with the pressure of trying to be perfect at work and at home and are endanger of rapid burn-out (Bielenberg & Thompson, 2003). Burnout, a condition first used by Freudenberger in 1974, refers to a negative psychological response to interpersonal stressors, consisting of three separate
dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and decreased personal accomplishment (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

In a recent study the main cause of long term absence among non-manual staff has been identified as occupational stress (CIPD, 2001). Similarly, in an Industrial Society survey 705 respondents cited insufficient balance between work and family as a major factor in workplace stress (Industrial Society, 2001). According to the Health and Safety Executive approximately 500,000 members of the UK workforce experience ill-health due to work-related stress, resulting in 6.5 million working days being lost annually (in Wetherfield, 2002).

Stress has become a very important issue for employers since the Walker versus Northumberland County Council (1995 IRLR 35HC) case. In this case an employee was awarded £200,000 after suffering a second nervous breakdown due to workload. The claimant, who worked as a social worker, suffered a nervous breakdown due to what he described as an excessive workload. He returned to work after this breakdown requesting a reduction in his quantity of work. After time his workload began to increase and his repeated requests for extra staff were unfulfilled. Mr. Walker suffered a second nervous breakdown and retired on medical grounds. His claim against Northumberland Council was based on the fact that, in spite of his repeated requests and his employer’s knowledge of his medical condition action was taken to reduce his work load. This case demonstrates that a problem cannot be ignored in its infancy, which is essentially the “duty of care” obligation on an employer (Frawley, 2001).

According to Cassells occupational stress should be seen in the context of achieving the right balance between a high level of
economic performance and a good quality of life (in Armstrong, 2001). In terms of stress reduction, family friendly policies that facilitate flexible working arrangements and allow employees to deal with domestic demands without negative consequences should reduce stress (Frawley, 2001). The London Borough of Merton Council, for example, who were experiencing high levels of sickness, introduced flexible working arrangements. The results, employee sickness rates were halved while productivity increased by a third (Higginbottom, 2002b). Similar findings at Johnson and Johnson revealed that absenteeism amongst employees who practised family-sensitive employment arrangements and flexible time working was, on average, 50% less than the workforce as a whole (Families and Work Institute, 1993). Such findings support the belief that stress created by work and family may be reduced through flexible work arrangements. These practices result in less stress attributable to family issues, work issues or both which may in turn reduce the cumulative effect of stressors and lower burnout tendencies (Almer & Kaplan, 2002).

Higgins et al. (1993) emphasised, however, that the availability of flexible work arrangements has no effect on employee stress unless the employee’s immediate supervisor supports such work practices. A worker will not endanger his/her job security or chances of advancement by working in job arrangements his/her supervisor dislikes (Perkins, 1993). Similarly, according to Thomas and Ganster (1995) supervisory supportiveness was positively linked to feelings of control over work and family issues, such control being associated with reduced work-family conflict as well as other physiological and psychological signs of strain.
2.6 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS FAMILY FRIENDLY/ WORK LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

According to studies by Lewis and Lewis (1996) changes in family, workforce composition, the nature of work and employing organisations have brought about a need for a change in organisational values. Some studies assume that family and business interests are necessarily in conflict (Bailyn et al., 1996; Fletcher and Rapoport, 1996; Lewis and Lewis, 1996) while others believe that the goals of business, equality and the quality of life can be compatible (Bailyn, 1993). Obviously, a number of considerations need to be reviewed by an organisation before introducing family-friendly policies including organisational culture, size, labour market conditions and the business case. All of which may be seen as obstacles by an employer (Scheibl and Dex, 1999).

According to the results of a report by The Work and Parents Taskforce (2001) the most significant obstacles to flexible working are attitudinal and cultural barriers. As Friedman & Galinsky (1992) noted, work-life benefits can have no significance within an organisation if the interest in work-life issues is not part of the company’s culture. In organisations, for example, where the importance of controlling employees and the emphasis given to “face time”, as an indication of ones commitment is priority, difficulties can arise for women and men who wish to work reduced hours (Scheibl and Dex, 1999). In such organisations, family-friendly benefits may need to be accompanied by changes in organisational norms and attitudes concerning the appropriate interaction between family and work life (Lobel & Kossek, 1996).
It has been reported that organisations, which have implemented family-friendly policies and practices, in general, have found them worthless without managerial support (Galinsky et al., 1993; Rodgers, 1992). As suggested by Thomas and Ganster (1995) a family-supportive work environment comprises of two main components: family-supportive polices and family-supportive supervisors. Managers therefore need to be educated in employees’ needs, values, the business benefits of such arrangements and shown how family friendly policies can be utilised to meet company goals and objectives (Coughlan, 2000).

Such education may be significant in situations where no specific policies exist for alternative work arrangements and therefore practices arise as a consequence of employees negotiating with managers (Scandura & Lankau, 1997). Obviously, a manager’s response, in such situations, depends on the manager’s personal beliefs and experiences with balancing work and family (Powell and Mainiero, 1999). Teleworking, for example, though desirable in terms of cost reduction and work-life balance, may experience managerial resistance due to issues of control and trust. Such resistance may be reflected in the finding that, teleworking is the least commonly used non statutory family friendly arrangement in Ireland (Butler and Connolly, 2002). Similar resistance to job sharing can be based on a manager’s presumption that a staff member is not “sufficiently committed to work” or that such an arrangement is only suited for certain types of jobs (Humphreys et al., 2000).

According to Friedman & Johnson (1997) organisations are now recognising that within an unsupportive culture, no policy or practice can assist an employee. As culture is a set of unconscious beliefs and behaviours rather than attitudes and values employees consciously hold about their workplace, it is
important to recognise that organisational culture transformation is not easy (Woodall, 1997). Successful change may involve the development of a human resource management approach which establishes staff’s subjective sense of entitlement to flexible working arrangements and the establishment of new productivity and commitment concepts which are not related to long working hours (Lewis & Taylor, 1996; Lewis, 1997). Furthermore, it is important to recognise that the top layers of the hierarchy define expectations and behaviour. Therefore, as recommended by the United Nations agenda for organisational action to expand family-friendly working during the year of the family in 1994, “managers should lead by example”, cutting their own working hours and offering staff flexibility (Scheibl & Dex, 1998).

According to Judge and Bretz (1992) the congruence between individual and organisational work values is a better indicator of job choice than either promotion or pay opportunities. As the composition of the workforce changes to include more working women, working parents and working couples (Axel, 1985) the value of programmes that support the family and career paths are anticipated to become more important to the job seeker. “Careers were originally designed to suit traditional men whose wives raised their children” (Hochschild, 1989, preface), those employees working to the traditional career path were expected to put their work first, regardless of their family circumstances, in order to move up the corporate ladder (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997). Now, however, due to changes in the composition of the family and the work-force, the probability that male and female employees have household duties in addition to their work responsibilities is increasing (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998; Gilbert, Hallett & Eldridge, 1994). As a result employees are attracted to organisations that provide suitable career paths and an appropriate person-organisation fit, defined by Chatman.
Schwartz (1989) suggested an alternative to the traditional career path, a dual career path, enabling employees choose between a career primary path, similar to the traditional path, and a career-and-family path allowing staff work fewer hours and travel less in exchange for fewer promotional opportunities and lower earnings. Although such a system enables women and men to reduce their work responsibilities temporarily, critics fear that staff who choose the career-and-family path may find it difficult to return to a career primary track. Furthermore, it is also argued that a two-track system may reinforce stereotypes, regarding women’s commitment and dedication to their careers (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997). The persistent wage gap, for example, between men and women is mainly due to the penalties women meet with, when they interrupt their careers to have children (Hewlett, 2002). Vinnicombe and Sturges (1995) suggest that some organisations operate a double standard for marriage, viewing the married male manager as an asset, with a stable support network at home, allowing him give his undivided attention to work, while viewing the married female manager as a liability, likely to neglect her career at the expense of her family.

Hall (1990) argued that the above dual career path system, suggested by Schwartz, was not needed as both men and women endeavour to balance work and family. Hall, therefore, suggested introducing the flexible career path, recommending that organisations offer one career path and family-friendly benefits to all staff. An advantage of this system may be the sense of staff equality it provides by offering a single career path system.
Obviously, the business case for family-friendly systems focuses on the “bottom line”, advantages that will evolve as a result of developing such policies (Coughlan 2000). Employers are most probable to perceive, increased administration and the disruption of having to cope with staff absences, as the main disadvantages in providing family-friendly working arrangements (Forth et al., 1996). Such “costs” however can be compensated for by a number of positive impacts - lower staff turnover, reduced casual sickness absence, improved morale, commitment and productivity, becoming an employer of choice - all of which have direct financial considerations, the business case (Drew et al., 2002). Consequently, there is a growing awareness of the importance of carrying out cost benefit studies, due to the potential error in employer’s perception that the expansion of benefits may result in reduced productivity, while increasing costs (Bevan et al., 1996; CCC, 1993).

Undoubtedly, large rather than small firms are more capable of absorbing any disruption and increased administration costs incurred by the introduction of flexibility for workers (Scheibl & Dex, 1998). The Irish Equality Authority reported “additional time demands on supervisors” as the main perceived problem associated with family friendly working arrangements (Fisher, 2000). This is an obvious concern for small and medium sized organisations who do not have the staff to absorb the additional work with ease (Frawley, 2000b). Furthermore, with statistics showing that small business owners work an average 50-hour week, with nearly a quarter putting in between 56 and 70 hours, one in four take less than one week’s holiday a year, 99% feel stressed at work while one in five feel stressed more than three quarters of the time (Business Journal, 2002). It may be the owner who is resistant to flexible working practices.
According to Scheibl & Dex (1998), however, it may be beneficial for small firms to consider their own business case for flexibility. A study of family-friendly arrangements in small and medium sized Irish enterprises, for example, found a 100% of those companies operating such arrangements reported them to be "successful" or "very successful", sighting "improved productivity and motivation" as employer-identified benefits (Fisher, 2000). North Western Local Authority, in Britain, whose work force consisted of only 15 employees, reported a reduction in sickness costs, on the implementation of family-friendly policies, in the form of short day and week working, annualised hours and term time working (NWW, 1993). Similarly, Classic Cleaners, plagued by the cost and time required to cope with staff turnover, introduced a programme that allowed its 11 staff in two outlets to work hours that suited them and the business. The company saw immediate benefits as retention radically improved, absenteeism dropped and the business saw a 15% increase in turnover (Clutterbuck, 2003).

It has also been recognised that the availability of flexible working arrangements is dependent on the nature of the organisation. Table 2.1 shows the varying availability of working time arrangements by sector, where a higher percentage of availability is shown within the public sector. Humphreys et al. (2000) observed that limitations in terms of labour supply and constraints in the public service's ability to respond to changing market pay rates make it essential that other aspects of the employment package offered by the public service's are considered competitively attractive, flexible working practices possibly playing an important role in this regard.
TABLE 2.1 Availability of Working Time Arrangements by Sector in Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Flexitime</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
<th>Term-Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manufacturing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing Footwear Textiles-14</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Engineering-35</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Electronic Engineering-38</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food And Drink-54</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Manufacturing-143</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceuticals-31</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private Services</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services-76</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services-51</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure, Hotel &amp; Catering-64</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Distribution-61</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Distribution-63</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Private Services-94</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Service</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Department-18</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority-18</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Board/Hospital-66</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Public-62</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Drew et al. (2002)

As business needs are of paramount importance and the merits of flexible working continue to be debated a somewhat cynical view may exist towards alternative working in the absence of knowledge or experience. Research findings, therefore, play a significant role in assisting employers recognise the benefits of such practices. The findings of Dex and Smith (2002, on behalf of the UK Joseph Rowntree Foundation) through analysis of the UK Workplace Employee Relations Survey, for example, set out to quantify the benefits of family friendly working practices. The research reported that approximately nine out of ten organisations with experience of such practices found them cost effective, improved productivity and performance were
associated with the availability of these arrangements, including, paternity leave, parental leave, the possibility of changing from full time to part time working and job-sharing. Furthermore, according to Jane Lorigan, group marketing director of irishjobs.ie:

*Good employers are already assisting their employees achieve an appropriate work-life balance. It is those employers who will attract and retain talented employees in an increasingly competitive market where money is no longer the sole driver* (in Sheehan, 2005b: 9).

A survey by irishjobs.ie found in excess of half of Irish workers would like flexible working hours and 35% of participants would agree to a drop in income in return for shorter working hours (Sheehan, 2005b).

### 2.7 SUMMARY

This chapter has set out some of the key issues and concepts arising in the literature in relation to family friendly / work life balance arrangements. It considered current socio-economic conditions, recognising that all employees regardless of their personal responsibilities are seeking to balance their work and life commitments. Additionally, it has emphasised the perceived challenges towards such practices.

Family friendly / work life balance arrangements, appear to be a modern but significant human resource issue. This study, therefore, endeavours to discover the extent to which Irish companies employ such options, to determine what type of employee, generally, avails of them and to discover the deterrents, benefits and limitations of such arrangements.
Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*To research is to search again, to take another more careful look, to find out more* (Selltiz et al., 1976: 90).

3.1 DEFINITION OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

According to Churchill (1991: 75) part of problem definition involves specifying the objectives of the research being done. It is only when the problem is precisely defined can research be designed to provide pertinent information. Furthermore, the culmination of the problem definition process is a statement of the research objectives (McDaniel and Gates, 1999: 64). Joselyn (1977: 46) believed “all the effort, time and money from this point on will be wasted if the problem is misunderstood and ill defined”.

The research objectives of this thesis are:

- To explore the reasons why family friendly / work life balance policies were introduced within Irish organisations.
- To investigate how family friendly / work life balance policies are implemented.
- To establish the factors influencing the introduction of family friendly / work life balance policies.
- To identify characteristics of policy users, in terms of gender and position within the organisation.
- To address the influence of family friendly / work life balance policies on career progression.
• To consider the role of the supervisor / manager in the implementation and operation of family friendly / work life balance arrangements.
• To determine the benefits and limitations of family friendly / work life balance policies.

3.2 THE PHILOSOPHY OF RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a framework or blueprint for conducting a research project. It details the procedures needed to obtain the required information. Its purpose is to design a study which will test the hypothesis of interest, determine possible solutions to the research problems and provide the information needed for decision making (Malhotra, 1996: 21-22). Easterby-Smith et al., believed "research design" is more than the methods by which data are collected and analysed. It is the overall configuration of a piece of research: what kind of evidence is gathered from where, and how such evidence is interpreted in order to provide good answers to the basic research question (1991: 21). A qualitative research design was chosen for this study, comprising of a number of long-interviews and using a loosely structured interview guide to discern the perceptions of the interviewees.

Burrell and Morgan observed that all organisation theorists approach their work with a "frame of reference" consisting of a series of assumptions, whether they are explicitly stated or not (1979: x). Morgan and Smircich suggested that the appropriateness of a research approach "derives from the nature of the social phenomena to be explored" (1980: 491). Easterby-Smith et al. noted that a knowledge of philosophy can help the researcher recognise which design will work and which will not (1991: 21).
Though there is never a single, perfect research design that is best for all research projects Emory and Cooper (1991: 15-16) advised that good research should meet the following tests:

- The objective of the research should be clearly defined and sharply delineated in terms as unambiguous as possible.
- The research procedures used should be described in adequate detail, to enable another researcher repeat the research.
- The procedural design of the research should be devised with care to yield results that are as objective as possible.
- The researcher should report, with complete truthfulness, flaws in procedural design and estimate their effect upon the research results.
- Analysis of the data should be adequate to reveal its significance and the analysis procedures used should be appropriate.
- Conclusions should be confined to those justified by the research data and limited to those for which the data provide a sufficient basis.

Easterby-Smith et al. also advised that it is unwise to conduct research without an awareness of the background philosophical and political issues (1991: 2). Some of the philosophical issues involved in choosing a qualitative approach will now be discussed.

3.3 QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGIES

Quantitative research is used to gain reliable, hard statistics about specific market conditions or situations (Arens, 1999: 194). Quantitative methodologies are based on positivism (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 22). Positivistic views hold that the social world exists externally, and that its properties should be
measured through objective methods not “inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition” (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 22). In the quantitative (positivist) approach, reality is viewed as external and objective, concerned with locating truth (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 22). The basic point about positivism is that it is a philosophy which both proclaims the suitability of the scientific method to all forms of knowledge and gives an account of what that method entails – divergent versions notwithstanding (Bryman, 1988: 14).

Quantitative methods use standardised measures that fit diverse opinions and experiences into predetermined response categories (Patton, 1987: 9). The quantitative project requires investigators to construct a “sample” of the necessary size and type to generalise to the large population. The quantitative approach measures the reactions of a great many people to a limited set of questions, thus facilitating a broad comparison and, if appropriate, statistical aggregation of the data (Patton, 1987: 9). In the qualitative case, in contrast, the issue is not one of generalisation, it is much more intensive than extensive in its objectives (McCracken, 1988: 17)

Qualitative methods, on the other hand, as defined by Van Maanen are “an array of interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (1983: 9). The term qualitative means an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, frequency or intensity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 8). Qualitative methods have their philosophical origins in phenomenology or subjectivism (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 22). A phenomenologist believes that the world and reality
are not objective and exterior, but are constructed socially and given meaning by people (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 24). A phenomenologist views human behaviour as a product of how people interpret their world. Hence the task of the phenomenologist, and of qualitative methodologists, is to capture this process of interpretation (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975: 14).

Qualitative methods consist of three kinds of data collection: in-depth open ended interviews; direct observation; and, written documents, including such sources as open-ended written items on questionnaires, and personal diaries (Patton, 1987: 7). Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right and it crossects disciplines, fields, and subject matter (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 1). It enables the evaluator study selected issues, cases, or events in depth and detail; the fact that data collection is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth and detail of qualitative data. According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975) by reducing people to statistical aggregates sight is lost of the subjective nature of human behaviour. Qualitative methods enable one to know people personally and to see them as they are developing their own definitions on the world. One experiences what they experience in their daily struggles with their society.

In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research is intensive rather than extensive in its objectives (McCracken, 1988: 17). Qualitative research uses a lens that rings a narrow strip of the field of vision into very precise focus. The quantitative researcher on the other hand uses a lens that permits a much lens precise vision of a much broader strip (McCracken, 1988: 16). In qualitative research, the investigator serves as a kind of "instrument" in the collection and analysis of data (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Cassell, 1977). This metaphor has proven to
be useful as it emphasises that the investigator cannot fulfil qualitative research objectives without using a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect in ways that are various and unpredictable (Miles, 1979: 597).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1981) qualitative methods are preferable to quantitative methods when the phenomena to be studied are complex human and organisational interactions, and therefore not easily translatable into numbers. When researchers use such methods as interview, observation, use of non-verbal cues and unobtrusive measures, they use tacit as well as propositional knowledge to ascribe meaning to the verbal and non-verbal behaviour that is uncovered (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 88). Marshall and Rossman believe that those who conduct qualitative research face a challenge as there are no explicit, guaranteed recipes to follow for pulling together a coherent, convincing, winning research study. Proponents of qualitative research do best by emphasising the promise of quality, depth and richness in the research findings (1989: 19). Geertz advises that those who are convinced that a qualitative approach is best for the question or problem at hand must make a case that "thick description" and detailed analysis will yield valuable explanations of processes (1973: 5).

Disadvantages associated with qualitative methods are their labour intensive nature; analysis and interpretation of data may be difficult; and in the past, policy makers gave low credibility to studies based on a qualitative approach (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 104). The credibility of this research method appears to be changing however as management research moves into the post-positivist era (McCracken, 1988: 14). Filstead (1970) believed:
The qualitative perspective in no way suggests that the research lacks the ability to be scientific while collecting the data. On the contrary, it merely specifies that it is crucial for validity — and, consequently, for reliability — to try to picture the empirical social world as it actually exists to those under investigation, rather than as the researcher imagines it to be (1970: 4).

Qualitative data have been described by quantitative researchers as "soft", "unscientific" and "non-reproducible"; while to the qualitative researcher neither the data nor the method are "soft" or "unscientific", they are rich. Fineman and Mangham suggest that in their experience it has being the "soft" qualitative parts that have saved many of the research studies of the day, not the "hard" quantitative parts. Whereas qualitative data can be "rich" and "deep", quantitative data which are obtained at a distance from everyday activities may have ceased to "live" (Fineman and Mangham, 1983: 297). Wells identifies the crucial aspect of qualitative data as the richness of the information generated:

"Compared to words, numbers are sort of round and smooth. They don’t have little fish-hooks of meaning standing out all over them" (1976: 13-16). In support of a qualitative approach some researchers (Van Maanen, 1983; Fineman and Mangham, 1983; Geertz, 1973) make reference to the thick description, rich insight and full, rich, earthy holistic and real data which arise from qualitative studies.

According to Bennett (1991), when choosing a research methodology it is important to know if the research is concerned with exploring what might be, or verifying what is, and to choose methods appropriate to this. There are other points that should be borne in mind when choosing an appropriate research method. These include:
(1) Answering the research questions: The method chosen must allow the research questions to be answered. It is clearly important to know and thoroughly understand what questions researchers are seeking to answer. A clear statement of the research questions will enable both the level of research and level of rigour to be more adequately determined. It will also enable a check to be made on the understanding of the nature of the research problem involved.

(2) Current state of knowledge: If little is currently known about the nature of the variables involved in the research problem, it is probable that qualitative, exploratory research methods will be needed. If, however, a review of the literature shows that a good deal is already known, it may be possible to isolate the key variables involved. This would determine the extent to which a hypothesis or hypotheses could be established and made available for testing, in turn leading to a choice of method which would allow hypothesis testing to be carried out. Even when the variables are known in advance, however, their very nature may prevent the use of experimental research methods.

(3) The nature of the variables involved: The choice of method will also be governed by the extent to which the variables involved can be manipulated and measured in a controlled way. In the physical sciences it is often possible to make the subject of the research do what you want it to do. In the social sciences this is not always the case (Bennett, 1991: 89).

The author on reviewing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, as above, decided to draw on the merits of qualitative methodology for this study. Following the advice of Bennett (1991) and McCracken (1988), the long interview
technique was found to be an appropriate methodology to answer
the research questions in the current study, as interviews, semi-
structured or un-structured, are appropriate methods when:

- it is important to understand the constructs that the
  interviewee uses as a basis for his or her opinions and
  beliefs about a particular matter or situation
- the step-by-step logic of a situation is unclear
- the subject matter is confidential or commercially sensitive
- the interviewee may be reluctant to be truthful about issues
  other than confidentially in a one-to-one setting (Easterby-
  Smith et al., 1991: 74)

3.4 THE LONG INTERVIEW

Fontana and Frey (1998: 47) believed interviewing is one of the
most powerful and common methods used to try to understand our
fellow beings. According to McCracken, the long interview is
one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury. For
certain descriptive and analytic purposes no instrument of
inquiry is more revealing. The method can take one into the
mental world of the individual and glimpse the categories and
logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take one into
the “lifeworld” of the individual, to see the content and pattern
of daily experience. The long interview gives one the opportunity
to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the
world as they do themselves (McCracken, 1988: 9).

The label “qualitative interview” has being used to describe a
wide range of different types of interviews, from those that are
non-directive or open, to those where the interviewer takes a
prepared list of questions and is determined to ask these
questions. In between these two extremes is “an abyss of
practice” (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 73). According to Jones
one issue that researchers need to consider to ensure interview success is how much structure to put in the interview. She makes the point that:

*There is no such thing as a “presuppositionless” research. In preparing for interviews researchers will have, and should have, some broad questions in mind, and the more interviews they do and the more patterns they see in the data, the more likely they are to use this grounded understanding to want to explore in certain directions rather than others (1985: 47).*

The type of interview one selects depends upon one's research, the subject in question, the type of information needed, the setting of one's research and the characteristics of the interviewees (Kane 1983: 62)

The first step of the detailed, qualitative interview begins with an exhaustive review of the literature. A good literature review, according to McCracken has many obvious virtues. It enables the investigator to define problems, assess data and provides the concepts on which subjects' precepts depend. A thorough review of the literature allows the data of one's research project take issue with the theory of one's field and it is a way to manufacture distance (McCracken, 1988: 29-31).

Based on the literature review (Chapter 2) an “interview guide” was created by the author which provided some structure for questioning and ensured the researcher covered what were considered to be the more pertinent issues (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 73; Patton, 1987: 111). The “interview guide” can be used as a loose structure for the questions, allowing for deviation from the sequence to follow any interesting or unexpected line of
enquiry and to facilitate an unbroken discussion while ensuring that the interviewer covers all the issues mentioned (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 75). According to Oppenheim (1992: 67) a particular skill of a good interviewer is finding the balance between flexibility in reacting to the interviewee’s response and standardization in the questions asked.

3.5 THE INTERVIEW POOL

A key difficulty in qualitative research, when using the interview technique, is to determine the precise number of interviewees (Mintzberg, 1979: 584). According to Oppenheim (1992: 68) there is no definitive answer to the question of how many interviews need to be conducted, quality rather than quantity should be the essential determinant of numbers.

In the current study the approach adopted in selecting the number of interview participants was based on a strategy called “theoretical sampling”, where the actual number of cases studied is relatively unimportant (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 69). McCracken endorses the use of small samples, stating that “for many research projects, eight respondents will be perfectly sufficient” (1988: 17). Mason also suggests that qualitative samples may be small for the practical purposes of costs, in terms of time and money and for generating and analysing qualitative data (1996: 96).

The potential of each case in aiding the researcher to develop insight into the area being studied is what is of importance (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 56). As noted by Emory and Cooper (1991: 321) three broad conditions need to be met by the interviewee to ensure interview success; an understanding of the respondent of his or her role, adequate motivation by the
respondent to co-operate, availability of the information needed from the respondent.

The interview pool, for this study, consisted of twenty people representing ten human resource representatives, and ten employees who were availing of family friendly / work life balance policies. Participants were from ten organisations representing a diverse group of private and public sector companies. It is interesting to note that of the ten interviewees practising alternative working arrangements, nine were female and only one was male. Table 3.1 presents details of the ten organisations involved in this research study.
TABLE 3.1 Details of the Ten Organisations Involved in this Research Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Organisation</th>
<th>Business/ Sector</th>
<th>No. of Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GlaxoSmithkline (Cork)</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical Manufacturer, Private Sector</td>
<td>500 (100,000 worldwide)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pfizer Pharmaceuticals (Ringaskiddy, Cork)</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical Manufacturer, Private Sector</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depuy Johnson &amp; Johnson (Cork)</td>
<td>Medical Devices Manufacturer, Private Sector</td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Scientific (Cork)</td>
<td>Medical Devices Manufacturer, Private Sector</td>
<td>900 (16,000 worldwide)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heineken Ireland</td>
<td>Brewing Company, Private Sector</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Irish Bank (Cork City Centre Region)</td>
<td>Financial Institution, Private Sector</td>
<td>250 (23,000 worldwide)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Retail Organisation, Private Sector</td>
<td>11,000/12,000 in the Irish division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Service Executive: Southern Area</td>
<td>Managing Health Service, Public Sector</td>
<td>16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork City Council</td>
<td>Provision of Local Government Services, Public Sector</td>
<td>1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork County Council</td>
<td>Provision of Local Government Services, Public Sector</td>
<td>2,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 GAINING ACCESS

Martin has argued that "the venerable university name is as much a factor in gaining access as anything else" (1985: 15). Considering Martin's belief, a direct approach for gaining access was adopted for the purpose of this study in the form of an introductory letter on headed notepaper from the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Cork Institute of Technology. A few days later the researcher made follow up telephone calls to
establish if the organisation was willing to participate in the research study. The author was fortunate in that all those approached were available and willing to be interviewed; therefore, suitable interview dates and times were confirmed.

The author followed the recommendations of Groholt and Higley (1970) who believed that initial contact, with possible participants, should be made three to four weeks in advance of the time the researcher wishes to conduct the research interview. Interviews with respondents in managerial positions typically have to be arranged some time in advance as they may often be away on business.

3.7 INTERVIEWING

Miller advises that in general interviews should be kept within a forty-five minute time span. Public opinion interviewers have reported that most respondents begin to weary and show less interest in the interview at this point (Miller, 1991: 159). During the interview stage of the current research the recommendations of Miller were taken into account and the duration of interviews conducted ranged from twenty to fifty minutes.

Additionally, Hart's (1991) research suggests, it is unwise to arrange appointments shortly before lunch or at the end of the day unless the interview can be completed with certainty. Hart believed that respondents' impatience may be problematic and such arrangements can be risky if the respondent is late for the interview (Hart, 1991: 192). She also recommends that arriving "just on time" is, in general, unsatisfactory where the respondent's time is restricted; as the interviewee may not be called until the interviewer arrives meaning ten to fifteen minutes may elapse before the respondent is free and
consequently causing difficulties if he or she has stipulated an hour for the interview. Hart recommends that by arriving a quarter of an hour early, one may compensate for such a situation (Hart, 1991: 193). All of the interviews for this study followed Hart's timing suggestions.

The chosen setting for interviews should be quiet, private, comfortable and not intimidating (Oppenheim, 1992: 69). Taking Hart's recommendations into account that the location of the interview is not without importance, and her suggestion that most interviewees will suggest a quiet office as an interview venue (Hart, 1991: 193), all of the interviews for this study were held in participants' offices.

During the opening stage of each interview a few minutes was engaged in idle chat to give the respondent an opportunity to feel comfortable with the interviewer (Berent, 1996: 32-39). This provided important time to reassure the respondent, because it is in these opening stages that he or she sets his or her defences (McCracken, 1988: 38). As Selltiz et al., advised:

_The interviewer's manner should be friendly, courteous, conversational and unbiased. He should be neither grim nor too effusive; neither too talkative nor too timid. The idea should be to put the respondent at ease, so that he will talk freely and fully (1965: 576)._}

All interviews were recorded on tape. The key advantage of tape-recording was to relieve the interviewer from the burden of intensive writing in order to concentrate on the interview process. By comparison with note-taking, which involves a good deal of on-the spot selection, and which undermines the reliability of the data collected, tape-recording ensures complete
transcriptions for analysis (Martin, 1985: 13 - 23). According to Oppenheim (1992: 67) it is essential for exploratory interviews to be recorded on tape as so much will have escaped the interviewer in the actual interview situation. Interviewees were asked to feel free to turn off the tape recorder when they so desired (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 79). This latter contingency did not arise, however, in any of the interviews conducted.

The fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is “to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms” (Patton, 1987: 115; McCracken, 1988: 41). The use of interviews was particularly advantageous in the context of this research study, as interviews provide depth; information from non-verbal behaviour; an opportunity to probe; greater sensitivity to misunderstandings; and, more spontaneity in the answers given (McCracken, 1988: 65).

The twenty interviews which were conducted for this research yielded a large amount of relevant data and as Oppenheim (1992: 68) suggested helped in the formulation of the research problem. On completing each interview the author asked if direct quotes could be attributed to the interviewee. All interviewees agreed to this, and all expressed an interest in the study, and asked for a summary of the research findings. All interviews was transcribed verbatim immediately after each interview.

As a research technique interviewing consumes large amounts of gross and net time – arranging, travelling to and from each interview, actual interview time, transcribing, analysing, and collating overall findings (Miller, 1991: 161). In this study, however, it was felt that the particular strengths of interviewing far out-weighed any weakness, especially in the use of immediate
follow up questions and the yield of rich sources of data on people's experiences, opinions, aspirations and feelings (May, 1993: 91), as revealed in Chapter 4.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Confronted with impressions, documents and field notes, the qualitative researcher now faces the challenging task of making sense of what has been learned and translating his or her interpretations into a body of text which communicates these understandings to the reader (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 313-314).

In qualitative research, the investigator serves as a kind of "instrument" in the collection and analysis of data (Cassell, 1977: 414; Reeves, 1979: 528). This metaphor is a useful one because it emphasises that the investigator cannot fulfil qualitative research objectives without using a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect in ways that are various and unpredictable (Miles, 1979: 597). According to Patton (1990: 146) the analysis of qualitative data is a process demanding intellectual rigour and a great deal of hard, thoughtful work.

Glaser and Strauss perceived an undue emphasis by researchers on verification of theory and not enough on discovery. They developed the grounded theory approach in which researchers would seek to generate theory on the basis of observations made in the course of conducting research (1967: viii). The grounded theory approach methodology begins with qualitative data (e.g., a transcript) and then engages in a "process of sifting and categorising in an attempt to develop hypothesis grounded on the data" (Beard and Easingwood, 1989: 3). Easterby-Smith et al. considered the grounded theory approach particularly good for
dealing with transcripts. This approach recognises that the large amounts of non-standard data produced by qualitative studies make data analysis problematic (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 108).

A model of data analysis, developed by Easterby-Smith et al., was chosen for the analysis of data in this study. The first step of analysis according to this model is familiarisation. This involved re-reading the interview transcripts to enable some first thoughts to emerge and notice what was of interest. The second stage is reflection. This was a process of evaluation and critique, as the data were evaluated in the light of the literature review in Chapter 2. The third stage is conceptualisation. This meant that the author needed to go back to the data and search for concepts and methodically highlight them where they appeared. Different coloured pens were used to highlight the different concepts. The fourth stage is recoding. This involved going back to the data and comparing what was actually said in order to redefine and recode the concepts. This is called laddering. Laddering took place both up and down the databank, this meant enlarging or collapsing the codes selected. The final stage is linking, which meant linking all the variables which were identified as important into a more holistic theory. This involved linking the empirical data with the more general models in the literature review, and took the form of going backwards and forwards between the literature and the evidence collected in practice (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 108-111).

Miles believed, the analysis of qualitative data is perhaps the most demanding and least examined aspect of the qualitative research process (1979: 595). The author agrees with McCracken (1988: 41) that the exact manner in which investigator will travel the path from data to observations, conclusions, and scholarly
assertion cannot be fully specified. The above details, however, show how the analysis of data for this particular research study was conducted.

3.9 SUMMARY

The empirical element of this research study was completed using a qualitative methodological approach, which involved interviewing a total of twenty people, who were considered relevant to the research study, from ten different organisations, representing a diverse group of private and public companies. The method of analysing the qualitative data was that of Glaser and Strauss and Easterby-Smith et al. The results of the research findings and an analysis of the data are presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings of the research study. The findings from the in-depth face to face interviews are discussed. As indicated in the chapter on research methodology, based on the literature review an interview guide was developed. This guide provided the basis for the discussion of the topics in this chapter. Direct quotations from the interviews are presented, following Patton’s observation (1987) that direct quotations are a basic source for raw data in qualitative evaluation. Patton also noted that direct quotations reveal the respondents’ levels of emotion, the way in which they have organised the world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions (1987: 11).

The findings of this research will be presented under a number of thematic areas. The results of this work are frequently compared and contrasted with data from prior research.

4.2 THE SCOPE FOR FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES/ WORK LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

4.2.1 Why Were Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies Introduced?

According to Fynes et al. (1996) an important question is how compatible are the driving forces for flexibility from an employer and an employee perspective. Employers on the one hand pursue worker flexibility in terms of organisational
efficiencies and gains by hours worked and staff multiskilling to remain competitive.

Employees on the other hand could be seeking to achieve flexibility as it influences their freedom of choice when balancing work and home life. As revealed in this study such is certainly the case during periods of economic prosperity:

*If you go back to the boom years, there is no doubt you will see a peak in the number of applicants for flexitime, the economy was good. In most cases the spouse was working as well and was well earning enough money so they were able to meet their financial obligations by one or other working less hours* (HR Representative, Public Company A).

Governments in turn may be concerned with temporal flexibility impacting on the rate of unemployment and achieving a greater balance so that more of the workforce has access to paid employment. According to the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern:

*In the days before social partnership and the economic boom of the 1990s, we will recall that for many people in Ireland, the issue of balancing work and life would have being a problem they would have loved to come up against* (in Dobbins, 2004b: 27).

Such sentiments are further expressed in this study by one respondent of a public sector organisation:

*If you go back into the late 1980s, in the public service job-sharing had being introduced to develop employment opportunities where people who could avail of half time*
working would do so if they were financially able to do it and that created employment. That is the original thinking for job sharing as we would call it (HR Representative, Public Company A).

The contrasting driving forces for flexibility from an employer and employee perspective is the first of the dominant themes to emerge from an analysis of the data. Each interviewee responsible for the implementation of family friendly policies was asked why such practices were introduced. The findings reveal that some of the reasons cited were to attract new staff and retain existing staff together with satisfying employee needs. The selected quotations in this section are representative of such sentiments:

*It would be part of a strategy to attract and retain staff in a very competitive market environment where one is trying to attract the best talent then family friendly policies at certain stages of people's careers become critical in terms of one either staying or going. So we would have quite a selfish business reason for considering not alone the introduction but the extension of them as well (HR Representative, Private Company E).*

*What we would have found here is a lot of people would have chosen to leave work to mind their children because they could not cope with both family and work. So if one was going to suffer you were going to leave work rather than let your family suffer and this way we could actually hang onto the good experienced staff (HR representative, Public Company C)*
We have a lot of communication channels here and a lot of cross functional teams and we have communication forums as well. And that is one thing that people have always asked for, is more flexible working arrangements. So it would have come from a demand from employees (HR Representative, Private Company C).

It was something that was very much needed it was being requested and it was actually all the requests that came in that pushed us to bring the policies (HR Representative, Private Company B).

Such findings resonate the beliefs of Michael McDonnell, Director of the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development in Ireland, who noted that flexibility will be forced on employers as a consequence of the increasing number of young people who are seeking an environment that is in tune with their life style. Furthermore, McDonnell states that the progressive companies of the future wishing to attract and retain the best talent are considering this concept and developing a work system that is more in tune with people's desires (in Allen, 2004d). Similarly, a study commissioned by the Mid and North Anglia Branch of the CIPD in England, reported that often the main reason why many of the organisations, involved in the research, adopted family-friendly policies was simply because employees asked for them (Coussey, 2000).

Each employee interviewed who avails of family friendly policies, when asked the reasons why they partake in such arrangements cited family reasons, be it for young or old family members:
I have two year old twins. I just wanted to spend the time with them. I thought there is no point having a family without spending as much time as possible with them but I still want to keep my hand in at work and obviously for money reasons as well I still wanted my salary (Employee Representative, Private Company C).

It was just after I had my second baby so I felt that it would be easier. I had worked full time with my first and then when I had my second I started on enhanced maternity leave, which means I had the option of being able to come back for three months on reduced hours. I then applied for flexible working and I worked three days a week after I had my second child. So it was for family reasons (Employee Representative, Private Company F).

My mother in law is 83 and we all take her one day a week and if I was working full time I would not be able to take her at all. So there are six of us and we take her one day every week so it means I change mine around the week I am off. I work Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Monday, Tuesday and I take her Thursday that week and I’ll take her Tuesday the following week I am off. It works in well that way for me I can do my share for my husband because he has to go out to work. So I can do our share for him this way (Employee Representative, Private Company E).

Such a response reflects changing social conditions in Ireland where more married women are working. As noted by Dr. Fine-Davis, a senior research fellow at the Centre for Gender and Women’s Studies Trinity College Dublin, the participation of married women in the labour force has increased from 7.5% in 1971 to 46.4% in 2001, being higher in the childbearing age
group (25-34): 64.7%. Similarly, attitudes to maternal employment between 1975 and 1986 changed noticeably. In 1975, 68% believed it was bad for young children if their mothers went to work while in 1986 this dropped to 46% (Larkin, 2004a). As highlighted in this study such changes in social attitudes make it even more important for employers to meet employees' needs to reconcile the demands of work and home life in order to retain skilled, experienced staff, particularly women with young children:

I do a four day week instead of five. I have three small children so one day a week allows me that one day with them. I could not have kept working a five day week so it probably would have meant I would have left and got something else. So instead of loosing somebody that you have put six years into, if you are able to accommodate them you are going to get another twenty six out of them, if they can work to suit their life then. And at the end of the day the way I look at it children are not small forever so what is the point in loosing people for the sake of small children because in another five years there are going to be other people with small children (Employee Representative, Private Company B).

I have studied and I have obtained a degree with the assistance of this organisation since I started working. So they retained the experience that I built up over the last twenty years and the knowledge I have of the systems and of the whole organisation. It could be that I would have had to give up if I could not continue going on a full time basis. But this way I can actually reduce my hours further if I want to, I can go back longer hours anytime I want to within reason, once there is not a work partner depending
on me or something within the work organisation. So basically they are retaining the expertise and the cost that they have put into training me over the years (Employee Representative, Public Company C).

In addition, considering the issue of an ageing society, 11% of people in Ireland are currently aged over 65 and this will increase to 24% by 2050. Combined with the shortage of nursing homes more and more employees will have to take on the role of carer to dependent relatives in the future (Allen 2004d) which in turn will increase the demand for worker flexibility. During the 1990s in the UK it was estimated that 7 million people were caring for elderly relatives. Of the one in seven adults (over 16) who were caring for an elderly, sick or disabled person in 1991, over 40% were employed indicating a large percentage may have withdrawn from the labour market as these responsibilities inhibited them from working and caring (Scheibl and Dex, 1998). Obviously, a similar situation could arise in Ireland leading to increased costs through staff turnover and absenteeism if elderly care issues are ignored by employers. US companies, for example, are losing up to $30 billion per annum as a result of employees taking time off work to care for elderly, sick and disabled family members. In terms of wage loss and other expenses the estimated cost to individual “caregivers” can in some instances be as high as $659,000 (Dobbins, 2004b).

This research illustrates that, though contrasting driving forces for flexibility from an employer and employee perspective exist, employee demands have a major influence on employer practice, acknowledging employers need to listen to staff demands in order to retain good employees. Employers recognise that satisfied employees give rise to greater staff retention and attraction consequently improving organisational profit. Staff members
partaking in such arrangements tend to place a high value on leading a balanced family/work life and in turn re-emphasises the psychological contract between employers and employees. In summary, this study highlights that, with changing social needs, the provision of alternative working arrangements in any organisation will ensure a "win-win" situation for both employers and employees.

4.2.2 How Are Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies Introduced?

The data presented in this section considers the steps taken by organisations during the introduction of non-traditional working arrangements.

Family friendly policies obviously cannot be introduced within any organisation on a "whim", they need to be planned and introduced in a structured fashion. This research reveals that policies and procedures need to be agreed, contracts need to be adjusted to reflect new arrangements, controls and checks need to be implemented to ensure the system is working effectively from a cost and benefit perspective:

*There was a lot of time put into introducing family friendly policies. Anybody who works from home, they do a separate contract on a pilot basis, we do monitor it. So I suppose there is a bit more work in it* (HR Representative, Private Company C).

*There were some discussion through a trade union official and it came up through the participation forum, most of the discussion would have being held in the forum. We would then have that ratified, we produced a document, we sat with the trade union, we were effectively changing some
basic terms and conditions, for example, the implications of job-sharing in terms of pension benefits, sick pay benefits and how you accrue holidays and so forth (HR Representative, Private Company E).

An interesting aspect, emerging from this study is the importance of establishing if an organisation is at an appropriate stage of development for the introduction of non-traditional working arrangements. Two of the interviewees in this research illustrated that during the start up phase of each organisation there was no emphasis on family friendly policies:

2002 would have been the first family friendly policies that would have been introduced probably because previous to that it would not have been an option as we were in start up phase. There was a huge emphasis on transferring product as opposed to having policies and procedures or anything like that. The key at that stage was to get the plant up and running and to get it fully staffed so really it was only 2002 when things began to calm down that we would have introduced family friendly policies as such (HR Representative, Private Company D).

We had one good person who left, because they just could not work 39 hours a week, they had a young family. We were not ready for family friendly policies, you need to be established enough to be ready for it. We were just in start up then and there was absolutely no way we could do it (HR Representative, Private Company C).

Within any workplace, depending on the type of work done and the profile of the workers; male/ female, number of employees, age range etc., the alternative working arrangements required
vary (ICTU, 2003). It appears, for example, considering gender influenced caring responsibilities (Sullivan and Lewis, 2001; Pillinger, 2002) and the tendency for managers to work long hours (Worrall and Cooper, 1999) that there is potential for some forms of alternative working arrangements to appeal more to women than men, notably reduced working hours. The importance, therefore, of ascertaining organisational and staff needs, through discussion, before deciding on suitable options is acknowledged in this study, giving recognition to the concept that needs are individual to the company and/or employee:

The company did establish a team who took a sample of the kind of requests that were being asked and then this team looked at how we could manage it. The sites are all completely different, it might work here and it might not work in another company (Employee Representative, Private Company B).

Our company is not unionised, we are a team based organisation, so we would have had a fair idea of what was going on in the teams. I did a proposal which the team leaders took to their teams and individuals signed up with their teams (HR Representative, Private Company A).

We look at each individual case separately and we will look at the needs and merits of each case. Because everybody is different one cannot blanket, it is very difficult. So we are saying, yes if your job can dictate it or if it works well then we will go with it (HR Representative, Private Company C).

The importance of discussion and implementing an appropriate policy is again reiterated in this research by one interviewee who
highlighted the insignificance of introducing a policy which does not fulfil its purpose:

In terms of being an employer of choice we are not going to continue our policies that are not benefiting the employee or the employer and our aim is to provide a work environment where people like to come to work and are happy working here and still get the work done. And if the policy is not working, it is pointless leaving it run if it is not working (HR Representative, Private Company D).

In keeping with the recommendations of ICTU (2003) many of the organisations in this study were found to pilot the introduction of family friendly or work life balance options and review the pilot in the light of any individual or business needs, supports and adjustments which may be required e.g. changing core hours, implementing a communication system, balancing employees pay needs:

We never go straight in we always run pilot programmes first. We say we will introduce it as a pilot, see will it work, see what does not work and try and tweak it and only then after that will we run it as given. So when anybody goes and does three days a week they do sign a contract and say we will review it after a year. So we generally only give it for a year to begin and see will it work (HR Representative, Private Company C).

We would have introduced such policies in a structured fashion. The way they are actually structured is we piloted the process for six months and review it after six months to see if it is working. If it is not working the option is revoked. We are running a profitable business and there
has to be a balance between employee and employer. There has to be a benefit to both before an arrangement can continue (HR Representative, Private Company D).

When I was introduced first day to job sharing in 1989 it was a pilot scheme and there were only certain areas that you could job share in and there were certain areas that you could not job share in (Employee Representative, Public Company A).

A lot of people that have availed of flexible working, have availed of it for a year, where they are then going to review it. They are just going to see themselves how they are getting on (HR Representative, Private Company B).

I raised it at our last board meeting where all the team leaders were present, to establish if the flexible working arrangements were running successfully and if we needed to amend the process. So the team leaders are gone back to talk to their team members about that and at our next meeting we should have feed back on whether it is necessary to amend the process in any way. Maybe alter the core hours? We began with an 8.30a.m. start, it would not surprise me if there might be a request from a small number to accommodate an 8.00a.m start (HR Representative, Private Company A).

Another finding of this research is the organisational tendency to introduce alternative working programmes on a phased basis. Such a system ensures the individual attention of each family-friendly/work-life balance programme during its implementation, increasing the ease of introduction and potential success:
The flex time was probably two years ago and the job sharing was last year. It has been introduced on a phased basis and every year we have nearly had something added. I would not go the big bang approach, it has probably worked quite well for us to go in stages (HR Representative, Private Company C).

Different policies were introduced at different times. I know the work sharing was introduced in 2003 and the adoptive leave in 2001. The Carers Leave is new as well, that is where you can take time off to take care of a parent or a child. But they were all different times (HR Representative, Public Company C).

According to this study, identifying and agreeing appropriate alternative working arrangements, formal/structured policies are prepared by organisations, detailing the available options and how they will operate in practice, making such information available to all staff members. These sentiments concur with the following statement:

They were introduced with the launch of a flexible working options programme, it was very structured and the options available were job sharing, personalized hours and career breaks which had always been available. It was an application process and it was very structured (HR Representative, Private Company F).

In addition, as highlighted by Kodz et al. (2002: ix) it is important that all employees regardless of their caring responsibilities are given the option of flexible working:
Individuals with childcare and eldercare responsibilities, clearly have particular needs. Nonetheless many employees now recognise that options to work flexibly should be available to all employees, not just those with caring responsibilities.

The findings of this study concur with such beliefs, acknowledging the importance of making such arrangements accessible to all employees, in order to avoid claims of discrimination:

_one cannot say it is family friendly because it is discriminatory against people who do not have families_ (HR Representative, Private Company C).

Bearing this in mind however Cahill (2003) reported employees, in general, with a good track record of work attendance and output, which have a good reason for seeking flexible work arrangements are more effective. The need for a consistent employment record has also been highlighted by the participants of this study:

_you have to establish a record with the company because if you have not continued service with the company you cannot get a true reading on a person's performance and obviously a poor performer is not going to be allowed go job-sharing or work part time because there is a performance issue or an attendance issue. We feel 12 months continued service is needed before you can really gauge somebody's performance_ (HR Representative, Private Company D).
Employees need to be with us over twelve months. Obviously if you look at it they need to be with us to establish an employment, and that they are going to come back before we give them the twelve months leave. It is really standard procedure that they would be with us twelve months (HR Representative, Private Company G).

We have a probationary period of 12 months. It is largely to get the people used to the organisation and understand what is involved in it. It does not make sense to take somebody on, they work for a month and then they take off for another three or four months in their first year. It is more practically based then that although the probationary element is a factor as well (HR Representative, Public Company B).

In addition, evidence in this research highlights the significance of staff co-operation, communication and co-ordination when sharing a role and the importance of the level of work commitment compatibility between role sharing partners, which if ignored could lead to job dissatisfaction and increased stress, hence defeating the purpose of such work practices:

At the moment I can not see any disadvantages to the job sharing from my side because I have a good partner. If it was somebody that you were not getting on with or was not as committed to the job as you, it would be a disadvantage (Employee Representative, Private Company E).

I come in to do my work from 9.30 to 2.00 and then one of my colleagues covers the afternoon post. Certainly we had to sit down before hand and apportion out who is responsible for what. It was hard to actually physically
manage that at the start, but now it is like anything else, it is a working relationship and you build on it. Obviously I am totally dependent on the good will of that person because she does not need to do flexible working, she is here all day anyway in her own post. But certainly you are dependent on the good will and support of your colleagues (Employee Representative, Public Company A).

Furthermore, a concern expressed, in terms of the introduction of alternative working arrangements, is the potential inadequacies which may arise during the hand over process of a job sharing position:

I have two secretaries job-sharing to support me in my role. My boss thought I was mad to agree to it, he would never have done it in a million years. He felt that the difficulties regarding hand over of issues would not be managed and handled in a most effective way and that issues would fall through the cracks (HR Representative, Private Company E).

Such concerns highlight the importance of developing proposed working strategies and adjusting working systems prior to the operation of such practices. The significance of recognising the importance of employee involvement in decision making in the organisation of such work systems and responsibility for subsequent execution of such decisions is also revealed in this study:

From my experience I feel that if you want to avail of something like this you have to be sure of the position that you are in, you have to be very confident in what you do and you have to be aware of how you are going to manage
it, before you ask anyone else to support it. You have to be in the position to realise that you have to see the big picture and that is how we approached it. We agreed I would be here every morning from 9.30am to 2.00pm, then one of my colleagues covers the afternoon post. We went to the line manager and said this is what I am willing to do and I have devised this strategy. This is my back up strategy and this is what is going to happen when I am not here. And I always feel that, and I am not alone in this, others in my situation would be doing the exactly same thing, we are always one step ahead and that is the key to the success. You have to manage it, it is like managing a function, it is like managing a job, even though it is your job (Employee Representative, Public Company A).

We sat down the two of us, ourselves first, and we went through the type of work that was there. We wanted to be ready before we went to the supervisor, then she had to go to the manager of the call centre and then she had to go to HR. We had to put a contract together and we had to be interviewed. They were asking us how we would overcome different things for example, e-mail, as certain things need to be done through e-mail. So we both have each others passwords and I would go into her e-mail at the end of the day and I would delete anything that would be irrelevant, so that she would know when she comes in and she would not be going through lists of irrelevant messages after being out for a week. So we had to go through all those things and check out with the reps. (Employee Representative, Private Company E).

The HR department would put a lot of onus of responsibility on the people availing of alternative working
arrangements. So, with job sharing they would communicate openly in their voice mails or messages, "I am here on site whatever Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, I am not here Monday, Friday if I am not here who to contact", one can be organised that way. So, if we find that somebody was not organised well then it is a loss to the business so then we would question can they do the job sharing or flexible arrangement they are availing of? So really it goes back to the person's responsibility to be organised and get the job done (HR Representative, Private Company C).

Hansen (2002) noted that many organisations do not systematically collect and review data on staff participation in work life balance and the impact on unscheduled absences and turnover. Such sentiments concur with the findings of this research, where monitoring of family friendly / work life balance policies, in terms of specific business benefits was absent among participants of this study:

*It is very hard to monitor because it is so wide and there are so many different grades and each case is totally different. You see the advantages whereas you cannot actually monitor it on paper* (HR Representative, Public Company C).

*As an organisation we would obviously have to monitor absenteeism and we have a very robust performance management system which obviously gives us feed back on job satisfaction and we also have an annual staff survey which gives us feed back on, for example, staff attitude in terms of how they are feeling around job satisfaction as well. I am not sure that there is a direct link or anybody is
focusing particularly on that and its co-relation with the flexible working options programme (HR Representative, Private Company F)

We conduct attitude and opinion surveys, we call it organisation diagnostic. It allows us to identify the areas of dissatisfaction and then we can target our resources to try and correct whatever may be wrong. I just do not know whether we track specifically family friendly policies. There are a number of questions where one can track a trend, some of which would be if not exactly related to family friendly or directly family friendly but they would be related to family friendly and one can get a feel for how one is perceived (HR Representative, Private Company E).

Unfortunately, because of the huge numbers we do not have central statistics on sick leave and absences, it is managed locally (HR Representative, Public Company A).

The benefits are not monitored, we deal with the problems that arise and we are as flexible as we can be in relation to it (HR Representative, Public Company B).

Additionally, this study reveals that, though the fluid introduction of alternative working arrangements may be ensured by taking all the above considerations into account, organisations need to continuously consider such policies in terms of external organisational factors:

When the flexible working options programme was introduced in 1996 one's contract was for three years. At the end of the three years one had the option of returning to one's full time service but if one did not take that option
one then remained on one's reduced working arrangements for ever more. So one had a once off chance three years into the contract to decide, I want to stay with this or I want to revert back to full time. And that proved actually to be too restrictive, again from both sides, so it was reviewed in 2000 and a new flexible working options programme was introduced. That actually introduced a further review every two years after the initial three years. Individuals felt that three years into it, having this once off chance to decide one wanted to actually change one's working arrangement or revert back to full time was not flexible enough, that one might not, at that point, be ready. But in another three or six or whatever number of years one may well want to do that and one would lose that opportunity. And likewise manpower needs and staff needs and whatever can change over time. In 1996 we did not have a manpower need but the Celtic Tiger started roaring soon after that and we were in the recruitment market by 1998. So we suddenly found that if people were staying on the flexible working options programme forever, we had no control over whether we needed them back on a full time basis or not, so we had actually lost the option of suiting our own needs as an organisation (HR Representative, Private Company F).

It is clear, therefore, from this research that a number of factors need to be reviewed before introducing alternative working arrangements including (i) organisations need to ensure they are at an appropriate stage of development for the introduction of such programmes, (ii) employers need to identify what type of programmes are most suitable for employer and employee needs, (iii) flexible working should be introduced on a phased basis, (iv) a period of review should be put in place during the
introduction of each policy, giving each party an opportunity to return to the previous arrangement if they so wish, (v) employees with a satisfactory employment record and history, in general, are most effective in an alternative working arrangement (vi) a co-operative and compatible work ethic should exist between staff members sharing a role (vii) working strategies should be put in place before operating such programmes (viii) monitoring such arrangements from a cost and benefit perspective which may convince sceptical employers of the business benefits of such practices. Overall, taking all the above considerations into account should ensure the fluid introduction of alternative working arrangements. The continued success of such practices should be further ensured by adjusting policies as appropriate to changing economic and social trends.

4.2.3 Factors Influencing the Introduction of Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies

The original factors influencing the introduction of family friendly practices, in general were national social policy and legislation:

*It would be wrong to say we went and designed any of these ourselves. They came either through national agreement with the unions or arising out of statutory or quasi statutory requirements the thing evolved and we responded to requirements rather than us actually dreaming up of any of these ourselves. And as a result our policies are evolving and have changed around and a lot of the stuff that we have arises out of originally what were statutory requirements like maternity leave and things like that, I mean the genesis of a lot of these arose out of those statutory requirements. So I would say they evolved in*
response to changing social needs outside and statutory needs first and subsequently out of social demands (HR Representative, Public Company B).

Another reason for the introduction of such policies is the evolution of such practices, influenced by circumstances of organisational size and location. The development of non-traditional working arrangements in terms of size and location concur with previous research, for example, Casey et al. (1997) suggest that larger organisations in Britain are moving away from the eight hour day while smaller firms are retaining the traditional working day. This study illustrates that a similar situation prevails in Irish organisations:

My wife does not avail of family friendly policies. She is in private industry and it is a small business so missing one person for a fifth of the week would be a substantial loss (Employee Representative, Public Company B).

Such a structural obstacle is genuine for small firms when one considers the increased disruption and administration costs involved for all organisations, regardless of size, when introducing flexibility for workers:

It is an expense to the employer in areas of health and safety and where we have to provide training for instance, on moving and handling, lifting techniques and all that. So if you have one person filling the post you do it once and that is it. If you have two people filling or maybe three you have all that down time on training and that and it does impact it from there (HR Representative, Public Company A).
I think family friendly policies are expensive because they do involve retraining (HR Representative, Private Company B).

Additionally, large and public organisations have been pushed to consider family friendly policies due to the active involvement of trade unions:

The development of the policies, was done by way of representation from the union as opposed to actually employees themselves (HR Representative, Private Company F).

We did not want any confusion with regard to what benefits would be, so we did sit more on a ratification basis and a negotiation basis with the trade union to say this is what our employees wanted us to do, this is the draft document, happy to take your input and let's finalise, sign off and it becomes a working agreement between parties and that is what we did (HR Representative, Private Company E).

Such an influence is largely absent in small organisations (Scheibl and Dex, 1998). An interesting finding arising from this research is that obstacles also exist for employees wishing to avail of flexible working in small, tightly resourced businesses, when no suitably qualified partner is assigned, with whom one can share the work load:

For myself for planning a family I would feel personally that I would prefer to be working in a larger organisation than working in a smaller one to try to rear a family because I just do not think it would work, because of the
level of work. You have more cover in a larger organisation (HR Representative, Public Company C).

It is obviously worthwhile for small firms to examine their business case for alternative working arrangements, however, when one considers the results of a study of small businesses in East Anglia, by the Judge Institute in Cambridge, which revealed that those employees who report the highest levels of trust and loyalty are employed by businesses who try hardest to meet their needs for flexibility (in Clutterbuck, 2003). In order to reap the full benefits of such practices, however, it is important that policies are openly supported and encouraged by the organisation and employee concerns, are addressed.

Changing lifestyles and the potential uptake of flexible working in the future, as predicted by one respondent, may also promote and force such arrangements on firms regardless of their size:

*I think looking into the future in 20 years time it will be an option for everybody to work that way and many people will work that way for a variety of reasons. Obviously the child rearing issue is by far the most popular and common issue that arises. But I can see, because flexibility is there and is becoming more and more established and people are aware of it, the number of people who will be looking for it other than for child rearing reasons will increase* (HR Representative, Public Company B).

According to Scheibl and Dex (1998) the more common work life balance policies become the greater the availability of experience and models on which to draw from make implementation and transition costs lower and increase the ease at which employers can adopt such working practices.
Another interesting finding, together with size, emerging from this study is the significance of company location, in terms of commuting costs and time, when choosing appropriate flexible working practices, to meet the needs of both employer and employee:

_We are a good bit away from population centres, we are twelve miles south of Cork city, three miles from Carrigaline, there is no public transport of any sort to this site. So people consider that, it is not economic to work a short day. People will work two and a half days or they will work four days but we do not have people requesting a short day_ (HR Representative, Private Company A).

_My distance from my place of employment means that I would not be interested in working mornings only. I have a long journey so I do it always in a block of two, two and a half days or three days_ (Employee Representative, Public Company C).

_One option I would have loved to do is come in at 8.00am every morning and worked until 2.00pm, over the five days that is actually 30 hours. Then I would be there every evening to do after school activities or whatever it is, but I live 40 minutes drive away so taking Friday off saves me the drive. I think those that are doing the shorter hours during the week, live locally and so it is only a matter of popping in_ (Employee Representative, Private Company B).

The significant impact and importance of commuting to work, in Ireland, is clearly highlighted through the results of a comparative study of working parents in Ireland, Denmark,
France and Italy, which reported that the average commuting time for the four countries was thirty minutes, the Irish time being the longest at nearly forty minutes (in Feehan, 2005).

According to the current study a firm’s location is also important in terms of time-zone differences relative to its parent company as expressed by two participants:

*We have a time constraint as well, we work with the States, they do not come in until 1.00pm our time. So somebody that is working part-time here is not going to have any sort of a hand over with the States. All those things are taken into account, for example, will the person be able to do their job because if their job involves a lot of contact with the States and they are leaving at 1.00pm and the States are coming in then, obviously they cannot do their job part-time, it is just not possible or feasible (HR Representative, Private Company D).*

*We have two head quarters, we have Britain on one hand and we have the United States on the other. Therefore, a mid day finish on Friday, for example, which is common enough in some industries not far from here was not practical here because our masters in the States would not be beginning work until 2:00pm. On Friday, therefore, if we had closed we would have had only four day contact. Therefore, we have to have key people here on site on Friday evening. So what we have done is we have a rota system within the team but we try to have as many day workers as possible finish at 3.30pm on a Friday (HR Representative, Private Company A).*
It is interesting, however, to consider the contrasting view of one interviewee, employed by a multinational organisation, who believed that the issue of time constraints, in terms of finishing early on a Friday, could be overcome and work to the advantage of corporate needs:

*When we started up we always finished early on a Friday. Our general manager, who has since retired, was very good like that, he said it was going to be a huge advantage to people to finish at 1.30pm on a Friday. If one employee, for example, has to ring the States well they might have to stay and do that specific thing. That does not mean that all employees need to stay late on Fridays. Since the beginning all the salaried employees would finish at 1.30pm. It actually works more to our advantage because people are here longer during the week (HR Representative, Private Company C).*

Such sentiments suggest that multinational organisations may have the potential of using the business excuse of time-zone differences to mask a culture committed to traditional ways of working. This is a significant finding emerging from this study, highlighting the covert influence of organisational culture on alternative working arrangements. Evidence exists, in this research, to suggest that such policies, though in place are not openly encouraged or readily available:

*We only consider the requests we get (HR Representative, Private Company A).*

*At the moment now actually I am looking to come in earlier, one or two mornings a week because my little boy would be starting school and it would mean if I come in*
earlier I could leave earlier and I would be there to pick him up from school. But this may not be possible because of my position on the front line and because one of the other supervisors is working a three day week and one of the days revolves around the supervisor not being here. If I finish at 2.00pm there is nobody there till 4.00pm, that two hour gap could stop me getting the position. Then again that is where flexibility comes into it, you are looking at it on a wider scale and maybe looking at other people coming into the position to fill the gap when I am not there because the other supervisor would be in at 4.00pm (Employee Representative, Private Company G).

Such findings pose the critical question whether the policies put in place are in reality easily accessible or simply an organisational myth? Obviously the reality is very much dependent on the corporate culture from the top down and the perceived value of employees as an asset to the company.

In addition, this study reveals the contrasting family friendly attitudes within public and private organisations:

* I look at my wife she works in private industry and if she is not at work the work just does not get done and because it is a business if you are down one person for a fifth of the week you are down that work load your profits are down, you are losing money. Whereas the flexibility of the public service is just fantastic. (Employee Representative, Public Company B).

Most certainly, to be realistic in my circumstances I feel that and I have no hesitations in telling anyone that I do not think I would have ever been able to stay in the
workforce only for the fact that I worked for this public sector organisation. I would have never been able to hold down a 9.00am to 5.00pm job. If I had been working in private industry and if I had not taken the career path that I had taken at the start I certainly would not be working, I would not have worked for a long period of time while my children were younger. Certainly it gave me that opportunity to stay within the workforce and it aided me and supported me when I had to take time off (Employee Representative, Public Company A).

Obviously such sentiments reveal the values and behaviours of public organisations which go beyond the measurement of short-term costs and benefits. According to Cooper (2001: 32):

Flexible working is one area about which local government, along with other public-sector bodies, could teach the private sector a thing or two.

As parents are spending so much time at work the workplace has become important when dealing with the dilemmas of balancing work and family life. Time may, therefore, be its own persuader in shifting all employer attitudes toward the acceptance of work-life balance as a core employee need.

In summary, this research illustrates the overt influences of size, trade union presence and location in the introduction of family friendly policies. Additionally, the significant obstacle of organisational culture also emerges from this study and the possible potential of creating a false psychological contract between employer and employee by having non-traditional working policies available, in theory, but not accessible, in practice.

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4.2.4 Who Avails of Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies?

Originally, the thinking behind flexible working arrangements was that they would be family friendly, making it easier for women to work. Though the focus has swung from family friendly to work-life balance however, the perception that flexible working practices only apply to women with children still prevails. Such was revealed in a recent survey of 1,000 Irish companies, carried out by Michael McDonnell, director of the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (in Allen, 2004d). This research confirms that, though non-statutory family friendly policies have been extended to work-life balance opportunities, open to employees both with and without a family. Staff that avail of such policies, in general, tend to have family commitments as illustrated in the following quotes:

_We would say it is work life balance. Now, generally, people who do take it tend to have children, that is just the way it works out_ (HR Representative, Private Company C).

_When we say family friendly policies we probably refer to them as work life balance policies within the company. They are not geared primarily at people with kids yet it seems to be those that primarily avail of it_ (HR Representative, Private Company D).

_I avail of these policies for family reasons. I have four children and at the moment they are between 12 and 5, all national school ages_ (Employee Representative, Public Company C).
I have three small children, I have three under six, so they are full time work now at home (Employee Representative, Private Company B).

On considering the family commitments of the employees availing of family friendly policies in the current study, seven of the ten interviewees had more than one child at the time of interviewing. Furthermore, the results reveal that two of the participants started to avail of family friendly practices on the arrival of their second child. Such a result concurs with the findings of Noreen Fitzpatrick, project co-ordinator of the EU-funded Work Life Balance Network, who noted that women tend to withdraw from the full time labour market after having their second child (in Coates, 2004c).

Such a departure from full time employment may be influenced by child care difficulties. Results of a recent survey by the Central Statistics Office found that childcare costs in Ireland are high and significantly more expensive in Dublin where the average cost per hour ranged from €4.09 to €5.47, representing a weekly average cost of between €159 and €213 for parents engaged in full time employment (in Sheehan, 2004). Furthermore, the Babies and Bosses report, published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 2004, estimated 210,000 to 220,000 formal and informal childcare places will be needed by 2010. Considering the present number of places in nurseries, playgroups and childminding, it observed that this indicated a additional demand for around 76,000 places (in Allen, 2004e). According to an Irish Congress of Trade Unions survey the responsibilities of childminding have an influence on respondents’ decisions to partake in such working arrangements as part-time working, job-sharing and flexitime, which is especially the case for women
Such sentiments are reflected in the findings of this study:

*It is childcare, that is the problem, your findings should be that childcare is a disaster in this country. It is too expensive and it is too inflexible and you can not rely on it and the only people you can rely on at the end of the day are yourself and your husband. They are the only people who will do things properly* (Employee Representative, Private Company B).

*My son is in a creche for three mornings and he is with my sister in law for two mornings. He has to be collected by 1.00pm from the creche for half days, otherwise I am paying for a full day and for the sake of half an hour paying €26 or €27 a day as opposed to €40* (Employee Representative, Private Company F).

The authors of *Off the Treadmill: Achieving Work/Life Balance*, a survey of 912 Irish organisations found that 17% of female employees work part-time in comparison to 1% of male employees. Four per cent of female employees had a partner full time at home, in contrast to some 30% of males. More than 62% of male employees worked more than the organisations standard hours while only 38% of women did (Drew et al., 2002). Such findings are supported by this research where nine of the ten interviewees partaking in work life balance policies are women. This research shows that in Ireland today, women hold a greater proportion of the caring responsibilities, one of the reasons cited being cultural, where the man is still seen as the bread winner:

*I do not think it has anything to do with the company. I think it is to do with the family situation in Ireland*
because it is available to everybody, everyone can apply
(HR Representative, Private Company D).

McCarthaigh (2004) reported the results of an EU survey on male
attitudes to parental leave, which again resonate the cultural
implications of men availing of this statutory entitlement. The
study revealed that most European males, including Irish males,
are hesitant to take parental leave for a number of reasons,
including the belief that it is more for females, as well as lack of
payment. The EU survey also revealed that 31% of participants
believed their career would be affected if they availed of such
leave. Such findings are confirmed in this research where one
interviewee reported the gender imbalance toward family friendly
policies as a consequence of the nature of the roles held by men
and women in the workplace:

I think if the men were actually in the jobs that family-
friendly policies would relate to they probably would avail
of them. But if you look at our figures the majority are
females, the majority of clerical officers would be females
so if you are going to see how many women versus men
apply for job sharing at clerical officer grade obviously it
is going to be more applicable to women. And then when
you go up to the engineers and the planners they are
mainly men and very few planners and engineers would
avail of the service. Because the salary would be so high it
would probably be more practical for the woman if she is
at clerical officer level to take the option than the man
(HR Representative, Public Company C).

As noted by Larkin (2004b) women tend to assume a caring role
in families. It has been suggested that for women career
development is influenced by attitudes on motherhood (Amos-
Wilson, 1993) and elder care responsibilities (Mutschler, 1994) and graduates with childcare responsibilities participate less in working life (Huldi, 2002). From the comments of some respondents, this research suggests that those who wish to progress in an organisation are required to work longer than standard working hours:

*At different stages of peoples careers and at different levels of organisations to succeed in the role and in order to be considered for development further, people have to put in enormous amount of time in order to get ahead relative to the competition of similar people working in the same area or other areas* (HR Representative, Private Company E).

*We do go through a training programme with them, if they want to move on there would be a time where they would have to do extra hours within the business* (HR Representative, Private Company G).

*Our people who work in manufacturing look for long rather than short hours. There is a big over time culture in this industry* (HR Representative, Private Company A).

Such sentiments suggest that excessive time demands of management appear to be a form of performance criteria and control by keeping workers visible (Bailyn, 1993). The requirement to work long hours to progress in management, could however, be seen as a barrier to non-traditional work arrangements and a form of indirect discrimination against employees who can not invest such hours due to responsibilities outside work. As noted by Professor Pat O'Connor, Professor of Sociology and Social Policy and Dean of the Faculty of
Humanities at the University of Limerick, "women are not stupid", they look at people at the top level of the organisation, who are commonly men with stay at home wives or who are earning salaries large enough to pay for excellent childcare, and think this is not going to be me. Consequently, they limit their horizons, as they feel they are never going to be promoted and putting in the extra effort would be worthless (in Coates 2004d).

This research observes that employees who negotiate flexible working may be perceived, as making a decision between their career or their responsibilities outside work:

*If people are seriously considering part-time work they have taken a decision that their career is not the ultimate objective in their life* (HR Representative, Private Company A).

*There is a little bit of having to choose between one or the other, career or family* (Employee Representative, Private Company F).

Obviously, such sentiments reflect a cultural emphasis of long hours at the workplace which is perceived as an indication of ones corporate commitment. This is again reiterated in this study by the limited number of promotional opportunities available on a reduced hours basis. The results of this research reveal that those availing of family friendly policies are not guaranteed promotion, thereby limiting the opportunities of those employees who are not available to work full time:

*We have one lady who is taking a change in career, she has just accepted the opportunity and she has been on part-time for about six years. She will have to go back to full time*
work, for a while. I had another case recently where somebody could have got a promotion and she thought about it and she decided to postpone and go part-time instead (HR Representative, Private Company A).

Whether employees availing of family friendly policies can continue such practices on promotion is very much dependent on what role they are moving into or what they are doing (HR Representative, Private Company C).

Obviously, if you are working at grade x in this department and you are promoted to grade y, and the higher job is in another department, it necessitates changing the basic contract and whatever atypical arrangements might be agreed in the new department. You can avail of the typical contract in the new job but if you are working mornings only for instance or some atypical arrangement and you are promoted, we would say these are full time jobs. These are permanent pensionable jobs and while the work sharing scheme applies, if you apply for it in the promoted position we are not guaranteeing you will get it (HR Representative, Public Company B).

Taking on family friendly policies does hinder one’s career prospects in that you are limited, there are only so many jobs. For example, there is a grade six competition coming up and none of those jobs that were advertised could be worked on a flexible contract (Employee Representative, Public Company A).

According to the results of a study by IBEC (2002) one of the reasons cited for women’s lack of progress in Irish organisations is that they are unaware of the strategic importance of the
decisions they make around their careers, being more job focused than career focused. This is supported by three of the respondents who revealed the necessity to move to a lower level role before being considered eligible to partake in flexible working arrangements:

*We had a team lead who wanted job-sharing more than she wanted the team lead role so she agreed to go back and get herself reclassified to a lower level so that she could avail of the work week on, week off arrangement (HR Representative, Private Company E).*

*The role I had before I availed of family friendly policies would have been, a bit more senior to the role I have now (Employee Representative, Private Company A).*

*I was the staff manager up to three and a half years ago and then I had a new baby so my life changed. So then my position went from me to another person and I was changed to a supervisor (Employee Representative, Private Company G).*

Such findings which reveal the impact of sole care giving responsibilities, supports the question raised by Coyne (2002: 447) that care giving may have become “the new class ceiling”.

The results of this research clearly illustrate that due to poor-child care facilities and the prevailing societal and cultural norms, that women are the primary carers, those who most commonly avail of non-traditional working arrangements, are females with family commitments. It is suggested that society assumes women avail of alternative working arrangements because they prefer to put family life before their careers. In
reality, however, as found in this research women may be forced to become the primary carers as men are unwilling to change their lives. Gosta Esping-Andersen, economist and author of *Why We Need A New Welfare State*, observed:

> Women are converging with men in educational attainment, in participation rates and, especially, in lifelong employment. The amazing thing is that women have done all the changing, while men stubbornly cling to a life course model that closely resembles that of their fathers and grandfathers (in Feehan, 2005: 2).

It is important to consider, however, if Irish men are being encouraged to change their attitudes to caring. In Ireland, legislation is derived from the Constitution which came into effect in 1937. Despite amendments over the years, the Constitution has not adequately addressed many social changes over the intervening years. The Irish Constitution specifically mentions the role of the women in the home and as mothers (Articles 40.3.3 and 41.2.1). There is no mention of the word "father" in the Constitution however, and there is no mention of men in their domestic context. According to Connelly (1993: 5), it is clear from the constitutional provisions "that it is in their role as wives and mothers that women are especially valued". If the appropriate steps were taken, however, to encourage men to become more involved in the role of caring, would attitudes to family friendly policies change? Would there be an adjustment to the beliefs that taking time off from work indicates a lack of organisational commitment, while being the last to leave at night demonstrates organisational commitment?

In addition, this study reveals that, due to limited availability of promotional opportunities on reduced hours basis and the
perception that staff who negotiate flexible working are making a decision between their career and their outside work responsibilities, employees practising flexible working options appear to avail of lower level organisational roles. Such sentiments obviously have a dictating effect on women’s career paths, acting as a barrier to promotion and resulting in a lack of corporate gender balance. This theme will be dealt with in the next section.

4.3 BARRIERS TO FAMILY FRIENDLY / WORK LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

Another interesting observation are the barriers which prohibit employees from partaking in non-traditional working arrangements. Such barriers can be divided into the following thematic areas (i) role or position held by the employee (ii) career progression (iii) role of supervisor / manager, each of which will be discussed below.

4.3.1 Role or Position Held by the Employee

This study illustrates that restriction in terms of flexible working is not dependent on the family circumstances of an employee but their role within the organisation:

Another very important thing that you have to do is look at the role and make sure that it is something that can be achieved in the number of hours that the person is contracted to work. Otherwise, it just means either things do not get done or the person themselves leaves feeling under pressure in the evenings or on the day that they finish (HR Representative, Private Company F).
Everybody is eligible to apply. Obviously, it is not going to suit every area, it is not going to work in every area because there are some jobs which are not possible to job-share. You can not split some jobs in two (HR Representative, Private Company D).

An assessment form (specifically prepared by the organisation) is completed with the colleague before we decide on that colleague going on the job sharing opportunity or the reduced working week or whatever it happens to be. Between the supervisor and themselves they will decide whether that role can go into a job sharing role. People have applied for flexible working arrangements and when we have assessed their role we have discovered that, this role cannot be a part-time role so they have been turned down (HR Representative, Private Company B).

Certain roles lend themselves more easily to job-sharing and flexible hours than other roles and an organisation needs to be aware of that. I do not think somebody can expect to have a certain role within the organisation and then expect to be able to be flexible. The organisation has to have goals, missions etc. and some roles lend themselves more easily to job sharing and to part-time hours. The role I am currently doing certainly would, whereas the role I previously had would not. So I can understand why they may be, different roles might not lend themselves as easily (Employee Representative, Private Company A).

Now there are some jobs like our team leader jobs and our supervisory jobs, which could not do shorter working because they are supervising people so they have to be
here. So it is very much dependent on the job as well (HR Representative, Private Company C).

On analysing the roles of the employees participating in this study, it is interesting to note the absence of interviewees holding technical roles and the contrasting high number of employees involved in roles of administration and co-ordination:

*It is probably easier to introduce flexible working policies where you have very task oriented or administratively intensive jobs* (HR Representative, Private Company D).

*Our flexible policies are mostly confined to female secretarial support type roles at this stage and maybe that is all we can do. The activity that people are involved in will determine whether we can do it or not* (HR Representative, Private Company E).

Such findings support the results of a TUC survey (1995) which revealed that only one in five managers used part-time workers for technical and technological roles, while 60% used part-time workers in administration.

Additionally, the TUC (1995) reported that only 19% of managers used part-time workers in jobs involving customer care and public relations. Such sentiments concur with the findings of this study where difficulties in the introduction of flexible working arrangements within customer or public related roles are highlighted:

*In this organisation, one has doors that open to the public at the same time every day five days a week and when you have something that you need continuity in terms of*
knowledge of customers or relationships with customers it can mean that operating part-time working arrangements can be more difficult. Obviously, if you have a department or back-office type work that can be carried on and handed on to somebody else to do the next day or even to do that afternoon or whatever it can operate even better. It probably is more successful in a department environment because we have a customer relationship type approach in terms of our customers we obviously want to know them. We want to know what their needs are so as we are in a position to provide for them when required and to anticipate their needs. You can only do that if you actually know your customer very well (HR Representative, Private Company F).

At the end of the day it is all about services. What we have to be conscious of here is that we would have a huge number of internal customers on our own department, the personnel department or the HR unit, as well as the thousands with whom we have to deal with who apply for jobs. For example, if you are an applicant for a job and you send in your application form and you want to ring up, you might be planning a holiday or whatever, you might want to schedule your time and you would like to know when the interviews were likely to take place. But if you ring up today you expect to get the answer today there is not much point in telling you well ring next Monday that person will be back from her job sharing week off. We would hope that the quality of the service would remain but I suppose, the actual personal touch, within the service is probably diminishing a little (HR Representative, Public Company A).
Obviously, as recognised in this research, difficulties are inevitable in attempting to introduce alternative working arrangements, particularly in more senior positions within the organisation:

*It is easy enough to organise work sharing for a large number. As you progress through the grade structure the numbers obviously go down and down and even within sections and departments the numbers go down so it becomes more problematic to accommodate people at higher level (HR Representative, Public Company B).*

*As you go up the promotional ladder, the opportunities for flexible work are less but still the opportunity is there in some areas. But if you are a grade three level you will obviously have more opportunities to job-share in different areas, and there would be greater numbers of vacancies for job sharers. Whereas as you go up the promotional ladder the vacancies are fewer but they are still there (Employee Representative, Public Company A).*

*In some situations an employee in a higher grade position could job share, where it was deemed that it did not militate against the level of the service. In such a situation a full time employee of a lower grade would work half time in the higher grade position and half time in her own role. Initially, this did cause a certain amount of resentment because people more often than not deferred to the person who was there the whole time, be it in their lower grade position or when acting up into the higher position. So it was suggested that, the burden of the management role fell on the person who acted up half the time in the position of*
higher responsibility (HR Representative, Public Company A).

Despite such difficulties some participants of this study are looking ahead, anticipating inevitable changes in attitude to working patterns and recognising the importance of flexible working arrangements. Such organisations are extending these policies, making them available at all levels of the organisation demonstrating that such arrangements are possible even in senior posts.

Going back five or six years, when one took promotion one had to come back full time, it was a full time position on promotion. So I made the choice of coming back full time. Since then the family friendly policies have been extended and everybody has the option now, more or less, if you get promotion if the job suits you can still avail of family friendly policies like work sharing (Employee Representative, Public Company C).

Three of our managers are working alternative working arrangements - our operations support director is doing three days a week and then we have two other managers who work from home on Friday (HR Representative, Private Company C).

Our director of IT is working four days a week (HR Representative, Public Company B).

In contrast, however, some participants involved in this study expressed resistance to the availability of all flexible working arrangements, particularly reduced hours, at certain levels and/or roles within the organisation, masking an organisational culture
unsupportive of flexible working arrangements at all levels of the organisation. Such sentiments are typified by the following:

*Primarily flexi-working and job-sharing would have been the two core aspects of flexible working arrangements that we introduced. Certainly job-share has not been capable of being taken on board at senior management level. We have only one IT manager, we only have one organisation and development manager. In my organisation there is no one else to share with and there is too much work for one person anyway. So to train two people to the stage at a senior management level, investment in training and development, to bring them to the stage where you could just allow them to job-share would be a waste. There is probably a level where you are talking about single roles and it is very difficult. This is purely in relation to job-share, it is very difficult, but it is possible. One is not going to invest either the time or money (HR Representative, Private Company E).*

*We have taken the view consistently that where you have a top position in the organisation, we do not facilitate it at that high level. Years ago we were in the Labour Court where two night superintendents were seeking job-sharing. And we just said it was not practical because the way the night duty works is you work a week on, a week off which means you are on and you are off the following week, so it balances out then, over the two weeks you work the average. But what happened was people sought to work job sharing on night duty which effectively meant that instead of working 26 weeks you worked 13 weeks and if you took annual leave then it would come down to about 10 weeks in a year, the person would have been on duty. It was*
considered that this was totally impractical at a management level. You would not be available to come on days every so often to be up skilled or up dated or to be available. We felt that for anybody who was with us 10 weeks a year it was totally impractical to consider that person was making managerial contribution to the organisation. This goes back to an earlier question you asked about "is it available to everybody?". It is but, if you are actually running the organisation in its totality we would be of the view it is not practical on a part-time basis (HR Representative, Public Company A).

Managers can avail of some of the family friendly policies, for example, taking a career break or paternity leave. Yes they can, for example, one of my senior team members has gone away to New Zealand for a year. So they can avail of some of them, but regarding part-time working or job sharing they cannot at present, maybe sometime down the line but not at the moment (HR Representative, Private Company G).

We believe certain roles could not be split between two people as there would not be another person as qualified. We probably could through mentoring, coaching etc. get another person qualified but it would just involve an awful lot of training and cost for the company (HR Representative, Private Company B).

We look at the individual circumstances and we would also have to consider if the skills that people have are specific. If we have a specific requirement and we have only one person with the appropriate skill we might not be able to accommodate them. So we look at each case on an
individual basis. It is not universal. We cannot do that, unfortunately, because there are skills which are not available. If we can accommodate two people job-sharing in a job we will do that, but there are times when that is not possible (HR Representative, Private Company A).

It is interesting to note, and as illustrated above, two of the three pharmaceutical organisations participating in this study were hesitant to introduce alternative working arrangements within certain roles. This finding confirms the opinions of Dr. Drew, senior lecturer in the department of Statistics at Trinity College Dublin, who suspects women's under-representation in science, technology and engineering masks a culture that is unenthusiastic toward family-friendly, not because its business would collapse if workers were not present for certain periods but due to an ingrained macho culture (in Coates, 2004c).

In summary, this research suggests that the influence of the level and role held by an employee when implementing alternative working arrangements is significant. This study illustrates the high number of employees involved in administration and co-ordination roles availing of such practices and the contrasting organisational attitudes to the introduction of such arrangements at more senior levels within the organisation. This research illustrates that female employees are the main participants in family friendly policies. Within Ireland, women account for 75.9% of the clerical and occupational secretarial group, in 2004 only 13.3% of TDs in Dail Eireann were women, which was below the average EU 25 countries rate of 22.1% (Sheehan, 2005a) and in 2003 the top ten Irish firms had only six women out of 137 directors on their boards (O'Mahony, 2003). According to Mary Kelly, chair, National Women's Council of Ireland, 40% of those taking decisions need to be women, in
order to get critical mass in the decision making process in companies or politics (in O’Mahony, 2003). Considering, therefore, the male dominance in positions of decision-making in Irish corporations and government one would question if alternative working practices will ever be considered to be a priority?

4.3.2 Career Progression

It is important that work life balance policies are made available to all employees, attempting to ensure that gender and hierarchical differentials do not negatively impact on individuals’ career prospects (Rana and Higginsbottom, 2002; Coyne, 2002). Yet, according to Bailyn (1993), Schwartz (1996) and Solomon (1994) a major barrier which inhibits people from availing of flexible working practices is the fear of negative career impact.

From the results of the current investigation and prior research evidence is accumulating which demonstrates that the number of male employees who avail of alternative working arrangements involving loss of hours or pay is limited. According to the Central Statistics Office only 3.5%, of the 15% of the total workforce in Ireland working part-time are male (in Harrington, 2004b). Such findings are supported in this research where the proportion of male employees practising alternative working arrangements is low, if not, absent:

The region that I look after is Cork City and there are roughly 250 people in this region and there is only one man on the flexible working options programme in the region (HR Representative, Private Company F).
I would say it is 100% female. We would have had males requesting career breaks to go abroad but that is not very common. I would say in the last five years we probably would have had three males but we would have had twice as many females (HR Representative, Private Company A).

At the moment it is only females who have availed of work-life balance options (HR Representative, Private Company B).

There are only four men job sharing. It is quite low, it is mainly females, we could have about twenty females (HR Representative, Private Company C).

More females apply. You have to put that in perspective because we would probably be 30% male, it is definitely 60:40, female to male, so it is inevitable, that females are the largest number of applicants. There is no way that the number of applicants for flexitime is 60:40 female to male, it is predominantly a female application (HR Representative, Public Company A).

We have some but not many males who are availing of such policies. We have two males who are working 4 days a week for childminding reasons. We had at least two who were on the term time leave last year and I am not sure what the situation is this year (HR Representative, Public Company B).

We have no part-time male working and only one male job-sharing (HR Representative, Private Company D).
This low take up of family-friendly policies by male employees may reflect a belief that there is a stigma or career penalty attached to practising such arrangements. According to Debbie O’Halloran, Editor of the National Recruitment website, Irishjobs.ie:

*Men feel they would not be taken seriously at work by either their boss or colleagues if they were to work part-time and look after babies* (in Harrington, 2004b: 11).

The one male participant availing of alternative working arrangements in this study revealed:

*I raised eyebrows when I started taking time off just to look after the children. It was not seen maybe as manly leave* (Employee Representative, Public Company B).

In support of such sentiments a comparative study of working parents in Paris, Bologna, Copenhagen and Dublin, found that French and Irish respondents believed that male employees who practice family friendly arrangements, e.g. job-sharing, part-time work, are considered less serious about their career than those who do not (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2002). These findings suggest that employee’s needs for flexibility may not be compatible with the demands and expectations of some management. According to Guest et al. (1996) regardless of the structural changes the traditional organisation and the traditional career are still common among a number of leading organisations and “Taylorism, chaining people to their desks and just turning the wick up under them to get more out of them” continues to be practised by senior managers.
According to the findings of a study by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2002) some employees believe that in order to get ahead it is necessary to work over and above the normal hours and to bring work home. Such demands obviously discourage the practice of non-traditional working arrangements at senior levels:

I do not think we have any employee at senior executive level on a work sharing basis. I would be slow enough at the present to apply for that given that my children are at a certain age, I know I still want work friendly practices. I would not be refused it but I would think it would be difficult enough to juggle the work and the responsibility at that level, with the hours off that I would be looking for. So there might be that inhibition, there might be something there that is blocking people from going for promotion because they know themselves it is difficult at that level (Employee Representative, Public Company C).

Despite such difficulties however it is clear from this research that with additional determination, commitment, organisation and effort such barriers can be overcome enabling one to practice flexible working with success:

One of our operations support directors is doing three days a week and then we have two other managers who work from home on Friday. The person still has the same objectives. Generally, what we find is people nearly do more work in three days then other people do in five (HR Representative, Private Company C).

I went for a grade seven, a senior post, knowing what type of work was involved at that post. I am happy to do it but I
am putting in more than three days work in three days. I think when you have children you get used to balancing things. From the minute you have a child it is a matter of compromising for ever more as there is always a pull on your time and resources. While I have to get out of here reasonably early in the afternoon because I am releasing a baby sitter I would take work home no difficulty and start again when they are gone to bed (Employee Representative, Public Company C).

For work I see difficulties in that at my level (grade seven) it is difficult to walk out from work. I do not mind, I take phone calls at home in order to facilitate my own peace of mind. While I do not get paid there are occasions, I always tell the people here, I am available anyway, ring me if you need me. I would rather deal with an issue while I am off rather than be coming in and facing the problem on the following Monday. You will not have that at lower grade positions where people are work sharing, it is just at the level of responsibility I am at, you do not forget your work when you go home (Employee Representative, Public Company C).

When I went for promotion and got different jobs the work gets a bit more responsible and I need to be involved on a daily basis and I actually physically need to be here. That is why I changed to every day, every morning (Employee Representative, Public Company A).

Our director of IT is working four days a week. When she is not there her staff just muddle along (HR Representative, Public Company B).
It is important to note that at least two of those employees holding senior positions and availing of flexible working, illustrated above, originally worked in their current position on a full time basis. As expressed by one participant of this study, it is beneficial to have previous role knowledge and experience, at any level:

*I have being doing the same job for the last five years. So if somebody else came in to do it yes it would take them five days to do it but I have been doing it so long I can do things a lot quicker than other people, than a new person* (Employee Representative, Private Company B).

Such a finding however reiterates the potential organisational hesitancy to award promotional opportunities on an alternative working arrangement scheme as discussed earlier.

Possibly for some employees the additional effort, commitment and organisation, considered above, defeats the purpose of alternative working arrangements, particularly when there is no suitably qualified partner designated with whom one can share the work load and responsibility, as suggested by the following:

*One person on the management team here considered part-time working last year or the year before and was actually offered it, we came to an agreement and she decided for her own reasons not to take it up. But it was discussed and agreed. I think she went part-time for a while actually and came back on full time later. When she worked part-time nobody took on her role in her absence, she delegated* (HR Representative, Private Company A).
This result supports the experiences of Sandra Booth, a consultant at Addenbrooke's Hospital in the U.K, who, though she was contracted to work on a three day week basis, found herself working far longer hours and consequently reverted back to full time employment:

*I worked three days a week but made myself available on the phone on other days and immediately found that I was contacted frequently at home. I also found that I needed to start work earlier and finish later as the job expanded. This was pleasing in one sense, because the service was in demand, but it meant that I worked much longer hours than I was contracted for* (in Walton and Gaskell, 2001: 27).

As discussed, this research reports that the number of males participating in alternative working arrangements, in particular, those involving reduced hours, is low due to feared stigma or career penalties. This suggests that, in many organisational cultures, practices and views that reinforce the traditional linear career model remain embedded.

Furthermore, the perception exists that employees wishing to progress within an organisation are expected to work over and above the normal hours, obviously deterring employees aspiring to senior levels from availing of reduced hours and other alternative working arrangements. In some instances, women who do choose a path of intense career and family commitment adopt a "superwoman strategy". This strategy has been defined by Parasuraman and Greenhaus (1993: 196) as "extensive career involvement with a frenzy of activity at home, including extraordinary efforts to spend more time with children". Cross-cultural research has found that "superwomen" with a young family spend more time with their children than male managers.
do; they find themselves less able to relax at the end of the day; and are more vulnerable to feelings of guilt, role conflict and work overload.

In conclusion, a finding emerging from this study is the recognition by women, the primary carers, that if they aspire to senior positions, the additional work demands may lead to a work/life imbalance rather than a work/life balance, causing many to decide, to realistically limit their career prospects. It is important to bear in mind that for some career driven female employees the sacrifice of having a family is too great. The results of a survey, cited in Corcoran (2005a), revealed that 25% of female participants were actively choosing not to have children because of consequential career effects.

Though this study reveals that employee's may practice alternative working arrangements successfully at senior levels they need to be more organised, committed, ambitious, focused, and work harder to achieve success. In some cases, the senior role may require so many hours the participants may find themselves working full time, as the role can not be performed on a flexible basis in the absence of additional organisational support. Taking such additional efforts into account some questions need to be asked, for example, are those employees availing of family friendly policies forced to work harder than their full time colleagues to ensure success and continuance of the policies?

4.3.3 Role of the Supervisor / Manager

Many employees view the importance of lower level managers as being even more critical than top-management support in addressing diversity and work-family issues (Nord et al., 2002). According to Thatcher (1996) when senior management or
headquarters have accepted the case for alternative working arrangements the matter of selling such arrangements to line managers also needs to be addressed.

Kropf (1999) recognised that poor supervisor skills and behaviours can inhibit the practice of work life balance. Similar findings emerge from this study, emphasising the importance of the supervisor's/ manager's role in accommodating the operation of such programmes:

*The first time I applied for an alternative working arrangement my supervisor would not give it to me. The supervisor that I have now is a married man with two kids. When I told him I am looking for part-time, he asked what did I want? I said what can you offer and he said three days a week. I know what it is like he said, he is full time here and his wife is part-time, so they are paying a childminder €230 a week for two kids, for part-time childminding. He totally understood* (Employee Representative, Private Company D).

*We would have maybe one or two engineers now that would be on job sharing and their senior engineers would maybe be against it because they feel that they have to cover the work load and it does not work, but again that is in small offices whereas in large offices it does not apply because of the staff* (HR Representative, Public Company C).

*Whether supervisors support work/life balance policies depends on who your supervisor is. It would just depend on who you are working with* (Employee Representative, Private Company B).
It depends totally on the service that you are providing whether are not job sharing or flexible working is suitable and the manager is confident that it can work in a particular area (Employee Representative, Public Company A).

Obviously, there is a potential tension between managers and their employees in terms of non-traditional working arrangements. The increasing demand for flexibility (Kropf, 1999; Thomas, 2000) may be perceived as an additional pressure, by already stretched managers (Glynn et al., 2002), as work life balance requires careful planning (Thomas, 2000). In Clutterbuck (2003: 133) one manager commented:

*The main impacts of our work-life balance initiative on me have been to increase my workload, because of the additional administration, and to make it more difficult to meet my production targets. As a result, my bonus this year is going to be smaller - and I'm the one with increased stress.*

The results of this study are consistent with the above statement, by recognising staffing issues and increased work load, on the part of the supervisor as barriers to family friendly policies:

*Family Friendly Policies bring a huge work load. For example, if you are running a unit and you have ten staff, well you have to facilitate those ten with their time-off, their annual leave, their training leave, etc. But if you have eight of those ten job sharing then you have to deal with 18 staff. So you have to prepare rosters to suit, you have to provide your cover and deal with holiday*
requirements, leave requirements, training requirements (HR Representative, Public Company A).

It would be mostly supervisors who would have difficulties with family friendly policies rather than colleagues because of the work and trying to allocate the work. Sometimes if someone is working 80% of the time we physically cannot supply them with someone who is only going to work 20%, one day a week, and they are down 20% of a person (Employee Representative, Public Company C).

If you grant too many job-sharers in one area it causes a shift because your supervisor may increase from supervising 24 people to 35 or 40 people. So even though they are still only monitoring 39 hour week they are monitoring extra people. I am not so sure that we balance the time correctly, we still have all the same expectations when they were monitoring 24 people and managing 24 people and leading 24 people. It can put a bit of a time constraint on your production supervisor primarily (HR Representative, Private Company D).

In some departments manning has become critical on Fridays and particularly in the Summer. On Fridays people want to take leave and people want to take long weekends and also you have all the people on term time missing (HR representative, Public Company B).

This research also highlights that, in some organisations, the Human Resources Department, have withdrawn themselves from the management and monitoring of such practices:
We would generally do the policies here in HR, but it is up to the manager to monitor it and manage it (HR Representative, Private Company C).

We monitor work-life balance policies through the employee and through the team leader we would never circulate questionnaires or anything like that. It is done, very much on a relationship basis with the employee and the team leader or production supervisor (HR Representative, Private Company D).

Such findings concur with the sentiments of Budhwar (2000) and Whittaker and Marchington (2003), who reported that, in practice, line managers have a distinct responsibility for human resource management as they are closer to their employees than specialist human resource staff. The prospect, therefore, of assimilating a role in managing work life balance that has a variety of forms and facets could be less than attractive for managers who may be hesitant to assume an increasing responsibility for human resource management activities (Glynn et al., 2002). Considering such it is important that line-managers recognise the practical importance and clear role of flexible working in terms of staff retention and retaining employee expertise as illustrated in this study:

Work life balance policies definitely contributed to our retention, manufacturing team leaders or production supervisors were getting badly hit. There were people leaving, they had childminding issues and if they had been able to go part-time or job-sharing they would not be leaving. So there was a clear advantage, it was an easy sell, I mean if I am telling you as a production supervisor if you allowed these two people to job share neither will
leave and you are not loosing skill, you are going to go for it, it is mutually beneficial (HR Representative, Private Company D).

What we would have found here is a lot of people would have chosen to leave work to mind their children because they could not cope with the two. So if one was going to suffer you were going to leave work rather than let your family suffer and this way we could actually hang on to good experienced staff. Even though not on a 100% basis but even 50% of the time was better than loosing them altogether (HR Representative, Public Company C).

Furthermore recognition must be given to the reality that, such practices are required by employees for limited periods only:

If we have very good people that we want to retain, what typically happens is you might have somebody who might go on shorter working week for a few years but then they will probably come back full time again, as it goes through cycles of peoples lives (HR Representative, Private Company C).

This study also reveals the importance of managers’ own experiences of alternative working arrangements, on influencing their opinions toward such practices:

If a supervisor has difficulty with one person on a work sharing basis it will reflect when we go for the next person that applies for it, they will not be so keen. So work sharers and all people availing of work friendly policies have a responsibility as well to ensure that it works well
from their own point of view and for future applicants (Employee Representative, Public Company C).

There is a problem beginning to arise in some cases, in that the flexibility that is being afforded to a lot of people, has become a right. It is necessary to point out to people occasionally that flexibility is a two way street, it generally works. But sometimes when issues arise then they give rise to some tensions within sections or departments and people will moan and say "if we did not have these family work friendly policies we would not be having this discussion" (HR Representative, Public Company B).

The findings of this study clearly highlight that although firms may encourage alternative working arrangements through their policies, supervisors hold an implicit influence when developing a culture in which flexible working arrangements are part of the accepted practice. According to this research negative supervisory opinion toward such practices exists, due to the potential increased work-load attached to non-traditional working systems, when preparing work-rotas and dealing with staff absences. This study also reveals the influence of the level of success experienced by managers in relation to employees already availing of flexible working options when smoothing the way for subsequent implementation.

In conclusion, irrespective of company policy the findings of this research illustrate the importance of a supervisor's influence when enabling the practice of family friendly arrangements. Such highlights the significance of developing a supportive relationship between the organisation and the supervisor and the supervisor and employees in terms of family friendly / work life balance arrangements.
4.4 BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF FAMILY FRIENDLY / WORK LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

Currently, there is a limited amount of published material noting the specific benefits and limitations of non-traditional working arrangements. The data presented in this section therefore considers such issues.

This study has found that there is no easy solution to the subject of child care in Ireland. Though tax relief has long been an issue of debate for parents paying for childcare there was no provision for childcare in the budget in December 2004. According to SIPTU national equality secretary, Rosheen Callender:

*People are leaving the workforce now due to lack of or expense of childcare in their area. OECD and European Commission reports have warned the Government that something needs to be done in this area – it's an economic as well as a social problem and should be recognised as such* (in McGovern, 2005: 8).

As recognised in this study, however, though childcare is expensive in Ireland, work and family life can be better supported, through, either parent, availing of alternative working arrangements:

*Family friendly is if you have children and if you are trying to care for small children, you are trying to alleviate the amount of hours that they are with other people or childminders. Whereas if you have a wife or husband on shift they are alleviating that purely by their job because they are at home one or two days during the*
week, they are not in full time care (Employee Representative, Private Company B).

Having alternative working arrangements available is good will really and it is demonstrating an understanding of what people have to do to have their family intact and it is a support system to help them through that particular stage in life when they need the support (HR Representative, Private Company A).

I am very lucky that I have reduced hours. If I did not have the option of reduced hours I do not think I would be working. I do not think it is possible with three kids to be able to keep all the balls in the air (Employee Representative, Private Company F).

I would not be able to cope with five days work and the kids as well. I believe that I would miss out on family life because I would be so tired at the end of the five days (Employee Representative, Private Company C).

According to the results of a study by Gallie and Paugam (2002) 31% of participants across the EU always/often found their work stressful, 25% of workers regularly arrived home from work exhausted, 20% were often/always too tired after work to enjoy the things they would have enjoyed doing at home, while 19% reported that their job always/often inhibited them from giving the time they want to their family. The findings of this study highlight however that, though economic necessity forces both parents to work, flexible working enables parents to fulfil their desire to be close to their children, continuing the traditional parental role:
I think it is important that kids do have their parents around more, and to have the option of working reduced hours is the happy medium (Employee Representative, Private Company F).

At least I have a bit of contact with the school as well because when I was working full time the teachers knew only a childminder as opposed to me. So now I get to meet the teachers one day a week, at least. And for the children I am there to collect them from school and after school activities are always during the week so they can do their dancing or football etc. on a Friday because I can take them (Employee Representative, Private Company B).

I think it is important for the children that they can be at home in their own environment after school. Also, I will be there to do their homework with them and if they have any after school activities I am able to do it rather than relying on grannies and neighbours, not so much neighbours but friends. So at least I am at home every day to do those bits with them (Employee Representative, Private Company F).

For myself, initially it obviously gives me time at home, so I balance out the work life and commitments at home. I have more free time to focus on my children's out of school activities. I can organise them towards the days I am off so that I am at home and able to drive around (Employee Representative, Public Company C).

Furthermore, this study reveals that for many women flexible working has actually created an opportunity to remain within the
workforce and avail of the social, intellectual and financial benefits of work:

_Coming to work is a rest away from babies and I think if I stayed at home full time my brain would not be functioning as well as it should be because it would not be working at its full potential. As well as the social side of work you are also doing something that is fulfilling_ (Employee Representative, Private Company C).

_I need time away from the house and away from just having to go to town, all those things, keep your brain working. To be working with other girls is a great social aspect to the job and there is great camaraderie, we have different outings and things_ (Employee Representative, Private Company E).

_My mother is 56 and she is still working part-time and she loves it. She does not have to work now but she says she loves the company of the women. It is just 20 hours but she just loves the break out of the house_ (Employee Representative, Private Company D).

_There was a social aspect to my staying at work and I was just lucky to be there when job sharing was introduced_ (Employee Representative, Public Company A).

The significance of women remaining in the workforce was further heightened by Noreen Fitzpatrick, project co-ordinator of the EU-funded Work Life Balance Network:

_The extreme scenario is that women who drop out of the workforce and subsequently split with their partners can_
lead themselves into a poverty trap (in Corcoran, 2005a: 11).

Such sentiments concur with the findings of a gender report published by the CSO entitled Women and Men in Ireland 2004. The findings of this study noted that, the proportion of women in Ireland at risk of poverty, after social transfers and pensions, was 23% in 2001, this was the highest rate in the EU 25 countries (in Sheehan, 2005a).

In addition, it is evident from this research that by meeting staff needs to reconcile the demands of work with the demands of their home life; employers enjoy the benefits of increased loyalty, productivity and job commitment. Additionally, it is suggested that, employees availing of the benefits of alternative working practices may be more reliable and dedicated than their full-time colleagues:

*Because I am so pleased I have been given the opportunity, it is helping me greatly. So it definitely makes me more enthusiastic to get the job done and to do it right and to make sure the quality is near to a 100% as I can get it as I do not want anything to fall down because I am really benefiting* (Employee Representative, Private Company E).

*When one is working full time and one is under pressure, one can not give the same time or loyalty to the organisation really compared to when one is working part-time* (Employee Representative, Private Company F).

*I come in and I have only so many hours to do what I have to do and I am conscious of that everyday so that I have become more organised. I am focused, certainly I am more
conscious of what I am actually doing. People in a 9.00am to 5.00pm job come in and they have all day to do the job. But I cannot do anything in the afternoon so whatever I have to do has to be done within my time frame every single day. So certainly the time management aspect of it is critical in that I have to mould myself into that frame of mind, that I have to organise my workload, I have to review it, and keep looking at it and it just becomes a habit (Employee Representative, Public Company A).

I am far more conscious of someone talking and chatting, if you have to get something done you just have to get it done. I would think people sometimes have to work through lunch a bit to try and catch up or you just have to manage it really (Employee Representative, Private Company B).

You have more motivated people, who are working the hours during the week and they are nearly doing five days work in three or four days (HR Representative, Private Company C).

These sentiments are reflective of the findings of O’Connell et al. (2003), who noted that organisations can assist in the reduction of work stress and work pressure, impacting on employee satisfaction through flexible working arrangements, allowing employees greater control and discretion over their jobs.

The significance of considering an employee’s value in terms of their contribution to the organisation as opposed to their working patterns is also illustrated in this study, by revealing that the provision of flexible working leads to increased employee cooperation, smoother running of the organisations operations and
subsequently contributes to the organisations competitive advantage:

*It actually suits my supervisor as well. He may turn around and say to me, at the end of the month we would be very busy getting all the product shipped out, and he would say to me, will you come in for me on Monday for the full day if you can arrange something. I am just lucky with this guy because he is married with two kids himself and he knows, so it is good. And I would say no problem and come in (Employee Representative, Private Company D).*

*I have never had to work the day I am off even though I have always offered to work it. I am actually working it tomorrow now which is unusual, but my boss has been away for three weeks and he is back tomorrow and then I am on holidays. So I said I will actually work the Friday so that we will get to meet. But apart from that I have never been asked to work it, but, I offered to work it (Employee Representative, Private Company B).*

*Operations run 24 hours so before what used to happen is people would be in from 8.30am to 5.30pm and all the quality and engineers and support would be gone at 5.30pm. Now with flex time some people start later and stay until 7.00pm or stay until 8.00pm so you have longer coverage now, you have a longer support time for operations (HR Representative, Private Company C).*

Contrary to such employer benefits, however, it is evident in this study that staff availing of non-traditional working systems feel an obligation to perform well and without criticism. In doing so, however, they themselves may experience extra pressures:
I think it would be dreadfully unfair if I was asked to do something and I said well I do not have time, because I am simply not putting in the hours. It is something I have been very conscious of since I started working four days, is that it is an excuse I can never use to say I do not have time to do something (Employee Representative, Public Company B).

It occasionally did feel like I had missed episode one, you know, that I am playing catch up on a Tuesday morning. There is a slight feeling of dislocation almost on the Tuesday because I arrive in and everybody else is up and running and I am just starting (Employee Representative, Public Company B).

When I moved onto a supervisory role I probably did depend on the assistant staff officer to give me a report on the Tuesday morning as to what happened on the Monday (the work-sharing day off) and I could pick up from there. So I did not meet with any resistance as such, but that is not to say that there was not talk behind doors (Employee Representative, Public Company B).

Furthermore, the findings of this study highlight that although alternative working arrangements allow a more balanced work family life, some flexible practices result in employees, particularly females the primary carers, sacrificing their own personal needs. Such sentiments support the work of Hochschild (1989) who noted that, women who engage in paid and unpaid work experience “time poverty”: 

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The only disadvantage is that I have no time for myself now. Some people who are working reduced hours, work three full days instead of five mornings. They have time to themselves the days they are off work and their children are at school to do house work or shopping, etc. or get your hair done. That is the only disadvantage of working five mornings, I have no time for myself. It is work and then home with the kids every afternoon. But that is the way I chose it to be. I find it stressful at times because I get up in the morning, I rush, I drop the kids to school, I rush to work and then I am literally rushing out at 1.00pm to collect them from school. So really the day is all go so it can be stressful at times (Employee Representative, Private Company F).

Working the flexible working contract in the way I am working it, I have no break for myself. I work five days a week 9.30am to 2.00pm, to be available to collect my children from school. I leave home in the morning at 8.15am, I do not get home in the evening until 2.50pm. (Employee Representative, Public Company A).

It is important to bear in mind, however, that although disadvantages do exist in terms of "time poverty", such arrangements were chosen at the discretion of the employees themselves.

As discussed above, though there are definite benefits to flexible working any reduction in working time involves a proportional reduction in income, which unfortunately for many employees is an unaffordable option:
People cannot afford it because it is unpaid. It is the whole thing with family friendly, people are dropping back their hours so they are dropping back their pay (HR Representative, Private Company C).

Loss of income is the only disadvantage (Employee Representative, Private Company C).

According to an Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) survey on the needs of members only 9% of the parents working, who were entitled to parental leave have been able to avail of it, with 84% of those who did take it being women (in Corcoran, 2005a). This may be due to the unpaid nature of the statutory leave entitlement, as reflected in the findings of a recent study where 85% of mothers who did not take up parental leave would have done so if it had been paid and 77% of fathers expressed the same sentiments (in Fine-Davis, 2005). These findings are reflective of the societal expectations of today and the high cost of living, obviously increasing the difficulties of those trying to balance home and work:

*It is difficult with the prices of houses and everything and there are so much pressures out there anyway, people are going on holidays more than they would have when we were kids* (Employee Representative, Private Company F).

The OECD report *Babies & Bosses* revealed that part-time work does not pay for those relying on paid childcare and as a result many women are deprived of the choice of part-time working, if they do not have access to unpaid childcare (in Corcoran, 2005a).

It is clear from this research that employers and employees should be open-minded in terms of family friendly / work life
balance arrangements. By considering the benefits, as discussed above, organisations should recognise the significance of alternative working arrangements as a valued means of achieving business needs rather than another problem to manage. As noted in this study due to the financial implications of mortgages and childcare costs a working practice involving a reduced wage is not an option for many employees, depriving them of even the choice of work/life balance. Considering such one would ask what steps can be taken to address such issues and why is the Government not prioritising these issues?

4.5 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the main findings from the field research, based on data from interviews conducted with twenty people, ten human resource representatives and ten employees, who were availing of family friendly/work life balance policies, from ten organisations. From the discussions with the participants it is clear that family friendly/work life balance initiatives are an important issue within Irish society for employers and employees alike. These arrangements enable employees to achieve a work-life balance, making them more efficient at work and at life, while employers benefit in terms of a committed staff, reduced absenteeism and turn-over. As recognised in this study, to achieve significant results organisations must not only introduce policies but also support individual employees and culture change, the latter involving a change of attitudes and behaviours of line managers at all levels, where necessary. This research highlights family friendly/work life balance arrangements as a growing issue within Irish society, revealing the challenges which exist to enhance its importance as a human resource matter, developing approaches and policies that extend such benefits to all employees and increase male participation.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

While research in the area of family-friendly work arrangements and work-life balance is rapidly increasing there remains scope for a more comprehensive treatment of the issue in an Irish context. This study, therefore, addresses the subject of family friendly / work life balance policies in Irish organisations with the overall purpose of increasing ones understanding and adding to the literature research in this area.

The foundation for this study is the analysis of the perceptions of human resource representatives and employees availing of alternative working arrangements in ten different organisations, including public and private sector organisations. As a result, the research provides an insight into family friendly / work life balance practices drawing on the experiences of a varied, well informed sample of interviewees in the subject area. Though a variety of flexible working arrangements were considered in this study, it is important to note that nine of the ten research participants practising such arrangements availed of a reduced-hours working week.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions that follow are based on the data generated from the author's field research in conjunction with appropriate literature.
5.2.1 Why Were Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies Introduced?

The findings of this study reveal that due to changing social attitudes and conditions in modern Ireland where more married women are working, society is ageing and an increasing employee desire to balance work and home commitments in a way that suits them, the provision of flexible working practices is inevitable. Faced with such pressure Irish organisations are introducing such practises, in turn harnessing the benefits in terms of recruiting and retaining experienced employees while maintaining a positive psychological contract with employees and building a good reputation with both staff and customers. "It would be part of a strategy to attract and retain staff in a very competitive market environment where one is trying to attract the best talent" (Chapter 4: 87).

5.2.2 How Are Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies Introduced?

The research results indicate that, the introduction of family friendly / work life balance is unique to each organisation depending on organisational needs. Common to all organisations, however, is the recognition that staff numbers and skills have to be maintained on an ongoing basis, ensuring that a business can fulfil its objectives in an effective manner. In addition, ever fluctuating labour markets and economic environments provide a challenge to organisations as they endeavour to reconcile their business needs with staff needs. "In 1996 we did not have a manpower need but the Celtic Tiger started roaring soon after that and we were in the recruitment market by 1998" (Chapter 4: 104).

The study highlights the significance of formalising alternative working options into specific policies, increasing the ease at
which employees may avail of such working practices. By doing so organisations may be seen to support flexible working in a positive manner improving the status of employees working non-standard hours and in turn possibly encouraging full-time workers to consider reducing their hours. Additionally, as illustrated in this study, it is important that employers recognise the diversity of work-life balance and extend the benefits of flexibility to include all staff members regardless of gender or martial status. Such findings reiterate the practical significance of adjusting the focus from family friendly to work life balance ensuring equality among individual employees and displacing claims of discrimination. “One cannot say it is family friendly because it is discriminatory against people who do not have families” (Chapter 4: 98).

Though it is important to ensure alternative working is made available to all employees a finding emerging from this study is that the outcome of individual applications for alternative working should also hinge on a satisfactory employee record. In addition, for those requesting to share a role, similar work related values and good levels of communication and coordination may make the difference between success and failure.

The findings of this research highlight that, although organisations monitor personnel data such as absenteeism, turnover etc. the specific benefits of family friendly/work life balance policies, in general, remain un-assessed. This reveals the need to develop and implement more systematic methods of monitoring specific gains.
5.2.3 Factors Influencing the Introduction of Family Friendly Work Life Balance Policies

As identified in chapter 4 structural constraints imposed by the size of organisations were found to militate against the introduction of alternative working arrangements. Deterrents such as fears of increased training costs and increased loses due to staff absences were cited in this study. "It is a small business so missing one person for a fifth of the week would be a substantial loss" (Chapter 4: 106). Such is supported by the WERS data (Cully et al., 1999) which noted that family friendly policies were more apparent in large organisations, particularly in the public sector. Additionally, the absence of trade union presence within small firms may create a difficulty in relation to the negotiation of change in terms of job design and workplace practices. As recognised in this study, however, difficulties in terms of size should not be overestimated and all organisations regardless of size or trade union presence should objectively consider the business case for flexible working.

Another interesting factor, emerging from this research, when deciding on appropriate flexible working options is the importance of considering commuting times to work. The findings of this study illustrate that, in general, those employees who experience long commuting hours choose to work fewer full working days as opposed to working reduced hours each day for five days. "I live forty minutes drive away so taking Friday off saves me the drive" (Chapter 4: 109).

In addition, recognition was given to contrasting organisational views in terms of country time-zone differences, as a barrier to the introduction of flexible working within specific roles. It was suggested in this research, however, that firms may have the potential of using this as an excuse to hide a controlling
company culture disinclined to work more flexibly. Furthermore, it is noted in this research, and supported by the findings of Drew et al. (2002) that the Irish public sector has taken the lead in introducing flexible options which contribute to the reconciliation of work and life commitments.

5.2.4 Who Avails of Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies?

This research reinforces the findings of previous studies, demonstrating that participation in family friendly and work life balance initiatives is highly gendered. Such is clearly reflected in the fact that nine of the ten participants availing of family friendly policies were female. The study highlights that childcare difficulties are a dominant reason for practising alternative working arrangements. “It is childcare that is the problem, your findings should be that childcare is a disaster in this country” (Chapter 4: 116). Considering such sentiments it is obvious that concerns in terms of childcare combined with cultural and societal norms where women are seen as the primary carers lead to a high number of female employees availing of such policies. Such, however, may lead to inequality in terms of career progression of male and female parents. As recognised in this study many Irish organisations continue to measure organisational commitment and success relative to the time spent in the workplace, perceiving employees who negotiate flexible working as making a decision between their career and responsibilities outside work. “If people are seriously considering part-time work they have taken a decision that their career is not the ultimate objective in their life” (Chapter 4: 119). These sentiments obviously favour male employees over female employees, who more commonly avail of flexible working. To address the issue of equality, therefore, in terms of
career progression the challenge of enhancing the role of the male as carer needs to be considered.

5.2.5 Role or Position Held by the Employee

According to this research the role held by an employee is a significant issue in relation to the refusal of requests for flexible working. It is perceived in this study that flexible working schemes are easier to manage in administration roles while customer care and public relations roles involving client continuity create difficulties when implementing such practices. Also, it is assumed that roles requiring specific skills and involving supervision are suitable only to traditional working practices. It is important, however, for firms to acknowledge that flexible working can only be appreciated through experience and all roles should be reasonably considered regardless of tradition.

As recognised in this study, though difficulties are inevitable in introducing alternative working options, such practices do have the potential of operating at every level of the organisation. Contrasting organisational opinions to this belief, however, were revealed in this study, where some employers facilitated flexible working at senior levels while others demonstrated hesitancy towards such a prospect. The wider implementation of such practices appear to be curtailed by the adoption of a traditional linear model of career progression which considers those employees seeking flexible working options as potentially lacking organisational commitment. Obviously, such perceptions will also reduce the variety of potential employers for those wishing to avail of flexible working options, possibly providing an explanation for the under representation of women in science, technology and engineering as noted by Dr. Drew, senior lecturer in the department of statistics at Trinity College Dublin (in Coates, 2004c). Furthermore, as suggested by Drew et al. (2002)
and supported by the findings of this study, an added challenge will be to prevent the development of a twin-track where men continue to avail of full time employment, holding the power of change and decision making, while women work reduced hours in lower level positions.

5.2.6 Career Progression

An important finding emerging from this study is that having family friendly / work life balance policies does not necessarily result in the practice of such arrangements. Employees often choose not to avail of these options due to fears of negative career consequences and the stigma attached to such policies. As revealed in this study, for example, a limited number of male employees partake in alternative working arrangements involving loss of hours.

Furthermore, due to the greater workload and responsibility, within senior organisational roles, the perception may prevail that alternative working arrangements are not an option at such levels. "I do not think we have any employee at senior executive level on a work sharing basis" (Chapter 4: 135). The findings of this research reveal, however, that such arrangements are possible at positions of responsibility, if one is willing to invest the time, effort and commitment. Though the ease of working flexibly may increase with role knowledge and experience, it is important to note that the additional effort needed to ensure success, within senior positions, may lead to extra stresses and tensions. In order to experience the full benefits of family friendly / work life balance practices these issues need to be addressed through greater organisational support.
5.2.7 Role of the Supervisor / Manager

According to the findings of this study, though human resource practitioners play a significant role in promoting and setting-up new work patterns there is a limit to how far they can make things happen as the implementation of such practices, in reality, are devolved to line managers. "The first time I applied for an alternative working arrangement my supervisor would not give it to me" (Chapter 4: 140). The disadvantages cited include increased administration and disturbance as a result of having to deal with staff absences and the provision of cover. Such sentiments of increased administration due to the need for more cover or more workers recur in other studies also (Bailyn, 1993, Holtermann, 1995, NWW, 1993). It is important, however, that supervisors consider these disadvantages in terms of changing demographic trends, such as, increased labour market involvement by women with childcare responsibilities, recognising that though staff needs vary and the provision for flexible working may be for a limited period of an employee’s life cycle, such practices may be an important measure in retaining valued employees.

As revealed in this research a supervisor’s appreciation of flexible working is somewhat, reflective of the level of success of those employees already availing of flexible working. According to Coussey (2000) those staff members availing of alternative working, in a sense, forge the way for further change as their success can be used as an argument for future development of such working options. Furthermore Woodall (1997) noted that managers must be educated and supported in relation to staff needs and their commitment to family friendly policies can not be taken for granted.
5.2.8 Benefits and Limitations of Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Policies

As identified in Chapter 4 family friendly / work life balance initiatives offer considerable scope for the reconciliation of domestic and work demands at different stages of peoples lives. For many couples, the constraints of finance mean that both have to work, unavoidably adding to stresses and tensions. As revealed in this study, however, by availing of alternative working arrangements one can continue to earn an income (a reduced income if one avails of reduced hours), while limiting time and role strain and enjoying a traditional parental role.

A clear appreciation of having access to flexible working options is highlighted by participants of this study through their emphasis of high work commitment, quality and productivity. This draws attention to the reality that flexibility is not at the expense of an organisation, much to the contrary, as employees practising non-traditional working options, work more intensely, in a more focused manner, producing a high quality job at a reduced wage (if working shorter hours). “So it definitely makes me more enthusiastic to get the job done and to do it right and to make sure the quality is near to a 100% as I can get it as I do not want anything to fall down because I am really benefiting” (Chapter 4: 150).

Unfortunately, some employees may experience additional pressures, however, when attempting to complete all work-tasks on a flexible working basis. Furthermore, as highlighted in this research, some employees availing of flexible working options to juggle home and work responsibilities, reduce childcare costs and fulfil a traditional parenting role, in reality do not achieve a personal work-life balance. “That is the only disadvantage of working five mornings, I have no time for myself. It is work and
then home with the kids every afternoon. But that is the way I chose it to be” (Chapter 4: 154).

As revealed in this study many alternative working arrangements involve reduced hours and reduced earnings and are hence an inaccessible option for many employees who can not afford to avail of them. The challenge therefore remains to develop innovative flexible working options that do not imply a loss of earnings.

5.3 Implications for Practice

It is clear from this research that, due to the stresses and strains of balancing home and work conflicts in modern Irish society, a wide scope exists for the operational expansion of family friendly / work life balance arrangements. This study recognises that though there is no one size fits all policy and needs vary, depending on organisational size, profile of workforce and company location, a similar procedure can be followed for the development of such practices by all firms.

As acknowledged in this research an initial step in the introduction of family friendly / work life balance practices is to establish the wants and preferences of employees, considering such in terms of the needs of the organisation. This step could take the form of a negotiation/ discussion process consisting of both employer and employee representatives, during which the working arrangements that would best suit staff could be decided. At this stage the most suitable options should be piloted, to assess and resolve any potential difficulties before extending the option to the whole organisation. Once complete policies should be agreed and introduced, including an explicit acknowledgment of the importance of family friendly / work life
balance arrangements within the organisation, citing the reasons for introducing such practices.

Obviously, the success of family friendly / work life balance arrangements lies not in the creation of the policy but in its successful implementation. To increase the ease at which employees may apply for alternative working practices, ensuring uniformity in the processing of requests, a formal method of application should be devised. Organisations should consider, where necessary, the re-allocation of the work of those employees availing of flexible options, ensuring a reduction of an employee's hours does not create a potential negative impact by condensing their workload into a reduced time-frame or reallocating their responsibilities onto work colleagues who are already very busy.

Additionally, as revealed in this research, one cannot underestimate the influence of the line manager in the successful implementation of flexible working. The provision, therefore, of training is essential, in terms of the practical issues to be addressed to ensure the successful introduction of flexible working, for example job redesign and the redistribution of tasks. Furthermore, through training supervisors will recognise the significance of valuing employees for their contribution to the organisation rather than the number of hours they work.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of agreeing a policy which is accessible to all employees, male, female, with or without family responsibilities. By ensuring greater equality of opportunity, organisations will offset the potential workplace tension created by childless employees feeling that they are going without, while parents enjoy flexibility. Furthermore, by considering work-life balance in terms of career planning,
companies will play an important role in addressing the current
gender imbalance, enabling both male and female employees to
avail of such options without fears of negative career impact,
ence permitting a greater sharing of caring responsibilities.

It is clear from this research that, in addition to organisations
developing flexible working options, a need exists for the
introduction of systematic methods of monitoring such
arrangements on a regular basis. This would enable organisations
to perform a cost benefit analysis with greater precision,
appreciating the benefits of flexible working in terms of
retention of skilled and experienced staff, rate of absenteeism,
productivity levels, workforce motivation and corporate image.
Emphasis is also given in this study to the regular review and
appropriate adjustment of polices in view of varying labour
market conditions, ensuring that business needs can continue to
be fulfilled in an effective manner.

As revealed in the findings of this study a manager’s own
experiences of alternative working arrangements have an
influential role to play in the operation of such practices. This
obviously emphasises the responsibility of employees to respect
such arrangements, working within the approved policy
procedures, bearing in mind that their success can be used as an
example to enhance the ease of further implementation.

Overall, the main findings from the interviews highlight the
importance of a relationship of co-operation between employers
and employees when implementing and operating family friendly
/work life balance arrangements. All parties involved should be
aware of the objectives and expectations to be met and their part
in doing so. A formal method of application should be devised,
increasing the ease at which employees may partake in such
working practices and demonstrating organisational approval. The business goals to be achieved by those employees choosing to avail of such practices should be clearly specified; ensuring both employee and business needs continue to be met while accommodating flexibility.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research
This study has taken as its unique focus the issue of family friendly / work life balance in an Irish context. It has investigated the assumptions put forward in current literature and empirically assessed these assumptions adding to the corpus of knowledge on the subject in Irish organisations. A development of this study might comparatively investigate the strategic planning, implementation and operation of family friendly / work life balance policies trans-nationally, simultaneously comparing statutory arrangements. The importance of such an investigation is heightened in the European Union due to increased labour mobility.

Though the findings of this research indicate that flexible working options produce business benefits, the lack of a systematic method of monitoring specific gains is highlighted in this study. Future research, therefore, could examine this issue, developing effective monitoring techniques for flexible working. This, in turn, would assist employers in distinguishing the benefits of one arrangement over another, establishing the advantages and disadvantages of the issue in a systematic manner.

As identified in chapter 4 the participation of alternative working arrangements is highly gendered, with more women availing of reduced hours and men predominantly preferring options which imply no reduction in hours. This may be a result
of societal expectations or a genuine employee fear of the perceived negative career consequences. Future research might, therefore, assess career planning in terms of alternative working and investigate the positive and/or negative organisational implications of adopting the perception that availing of such options demonstrates a lack of commitment to ones career and to the organisation.

On considering the findings of this study there is a consensus that the ease of introduction of family friendly / work life balance practices is influenced by barriers to change. Further research might therefore focus on change in relation to culture, in terms of attitudes and values towards flexible working options and the recognition of an employee's contribution to the organisation in relation to the value of their work as opposed to the amount of time they spend at work. Societal changes also may be a subject for investigation, assessing how males and females currently share their family and domestic commitments and how such could be better adjusted to prompt greater gender equality. Additionally, future studies could examine the degree to which family friendly / work life balance options effect traditional gender roles.

As identified by the findings of this study many employees avail of flexible working patterns to enable them fulfil their caring responsibilities. There is scope for further research, however, into the widening workplace arrangements needed by all employees, men and women, married and single, young and old, with and without children. In addition, due to societal and cultural changes, specific needs of employee groups such as single parent families and those from different ethnic backgrounds also merit research.
Finally, considering lengthy commuting times and traffic congestion with the development of sophisticated information and communication technologies, future research may examine innovative working methods from a variety of locations.
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APPENDIX

Interview Guide for Human Resource Representatives

- Can you tell me about this organisation?

- How many employees are in the organisation?

- When were family friendly / work life balance policies first introduced into this organisation?

- Why were family friendly / work life balance policies introduced?

- How were family friendly / work life balance arrangements introduced? In a structured fashion involving staff and/or trade unions or in an informal manner?

- Are family friendly / work life balance practices available to all staff members regardless of gender, family status?

- Is there a stereotypical type of employee who, generally, avails of family friendly / work life balance arrangements? Why do you think this is the case?

- Do you think that, partaking in family friendly / work life balance practices may have negative career consequences?

- Does this organisation facilitate employees, who avail of family friendly / work life balance options, to successfully apply for promotion and continue to practice such arrangements?
• Are family friendly / work life balance practices considered to be suitable, only, for specific roles and levels within the organisation?

• Was there resistance to family friendly / work life balance arrangements among managers and supervisors?

• What are the business benefits or specific gains this organisation experienced since introducing family friendly / work life balance practices?

• Is there a specific method in place for monitoring such benefits?

• What difficulties has this organisation experienced in terms of the operation and implementation of such practices?
Interview Guide for Employees Availing of Family Friendly / Work Life Balance Arrangements

• What is your current position within the organisation?

• How long have you been availing of family friendly / work life balance arrangements?

• How were family friendly / work life balance policies introduced within this organisation?

• Why did you choose to avail of family friendly / work life balance practices?

• If it was for family reasons, how many children do you have and how old are they?

• What family friendly / work life balance arrangement do you practice? Why did you choose this specific arrangement?

• What do you see as the benefits and difficulties of family friendly / work life balance options?

• Some employees fear that by applying for family friendly / work life balance arrangements they may be perceived as putting their career on hold. What is your opinion of this?

• Do you think a supervisor/ line manager has an influential role in the implementation and operation of family friendly / work life balance arrangements?
• Do you think your job-focus, commitment and loyalty to the organisation has changed since partaking in alternative working options?

These questions were the lead questions for each of the areas explored in the interviews. Supplementary questions were asked where appropriate in order to explore more fully the experience of the interviewees.