

Striving to achieve it all: men and work-family-life balance in Sweden and the UK – implications for well-being and HRM

Abstract

Our research paper investigates how men voice their experiences of the three dimensions of well-being: happiness, health and relationships (after Van de Voorde et al., 2012) in balancing their work and non-work lives. We discuss how their perceptions and practice relate to human resource management (HRM) in the workplace, and identify the key tensions in managing their engagement and well-being. This paper builds on research published in *Construction Management and Economics* in August 2013 (Vol. 31, No. 8: Raiden and Räisänen, pp. 899-913) where we critique the work-life balance literature for largely limiting the construct as being a female-oriented entitlement. Consequently, little attention has been paid to how men experience their work-life situations, especially the men who are keen to share the family care. We contribute to filling this gap by critically examining how male academics in construction-related departments at Universities in Sweden and the UK construct their relationships with family and work. The data consisted of the career-life stories of seven male academics from each country. These were at different phases in their career trajectories and held different university positions. A narrative analysis approach was then applied on the data. Three core narratives emerged: family connected with partner; work as key priority; and desire to pursue personal projects, which competed with each other for the narrators' sparse time. A salient feature of all the narratives was the men's struggle to accommodate family and (personal) life with work, which to them was the prioritised sphere. This struggle left many feeling that they had no time to do a good job in any sphere, and in Sweden in particular the combination pressure was intense. In this study, well-being emerged as a critical albeit difficult to articulate feature since it was embedded in all the three elements of the work-family-life triad, often with conflicting outcomes. The purpose here, therefore, is to revisit the data using a well-being lens.

Keywords

Happiness, health, relationships, men, academia, narratives

Introduction

Work-life balance has been defined as *"the ability of individuals to pursue successfully their work and non-work lives, without undue pressures from one undermining the satisfactory experience of the other"* (Noon and Blyton, 2007: 356).

However, much of the extant literature (e.g. McDonald and Jeannes, 2012; Korabik et al, 2008; Gambles et al, 2007; Kossek and Lambert, 2005; Roper, 2003; Rapoport et al,

2002) has been predicated on a traditional view of work-life balance as being the purview of employed women with children, despite recent societal and regulatory initiatives aimed at encouraging men to more actively engage in sharing the caring and home chores (e.g. Lewis and Cooper, 2005; McDonald and Jeannes, 2012). This politicisation of fatherhood (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006) has enabled men to show more caring qualities in the workplace, and to voice their needs to accommodate their private identity with their work identity (Brandth, 2012). These men represent a generation keen to actively take part in family life rather than predominantly being associated with the work domain and the role of breadwinner (Bjørnholt, 2010; Linkow et al, 2011; Ranson, 2011). Some argue that these 'new men' only *appear* to be more sensitive and care-oriented than their traditional men counterpart, and do not in fact meet the requisite for emotional and practical participation in the home that the label ascribes (Aarseth, 2009: 425). Allard (2007), who examined Swedish men's use of paternal leave, found that the main barriers to family-friendly arrangements for men were fellow colleagues and work cultures in organisations; this in spite of paternal-leave legislation. Since much of the research on which such evidence is based tends to be quantitative, we still know little about how work-life arrangements play out in the daily lives of men, how men combine their work and family care in practice and how they verbalise feelings of well-being. This gap warrants qualitative research on how individual men construct their lived experiences of coping with the different roles in their work and personal sphere.

For several decades, Scandinavian countries have consistently topped global gender-equality index tables (Hausmann et al, 2011: 8), and in countries such as the UK, media tends to see the Swedish model as an exemplar, as the following quote indicates.

"You won't find parents in Sweden or Norway agonising over how to find quality time with their offspring." (Woods, 2012)

However, as some of the literature alluded to above suggests, this assumption may not hold true, especially not in all professions and workplaces. For example, knowledge-based work worldwide is often described as highly rewarding and self-fulfilling due to its embeddedness in workers' lives; work can be carried out anywhere at any time (Gallie et al, 2012; Ford and Collinson, 2011). Academia is certainly one sector in which intrinsic motivation to 'do well' drives commitment to work, and where self-management of 'protean careers' and academic freedom contributes to elevated levels of interest and attention to work (Enders and Kaulisch, 2006).

We compare how men manage their work-life balance in academic contexts in Sweden and the UK. Our aim is two-fold: (i) to examine academic men's narratives of how they manage work and life in practice, and (ii) to query the currently debated gender-equality image of Sweden. To do this we pose three research questions:

1. How do academic men in Sweden and the UK organise their everyday lives, and what level of emotional engagement is afforded to different work/life-roles?
2. What affordances and/or constraints do they perceive in their negotiations of work and life?

3. How do the findings inform current theorising on work-life balance, and what are the practical implications for individuals and family well-being, organisational performance and social policy?

Specifically, in relation to more recent attention and interest on well-being, we explore what the implications are for well-being in terms of the three components: happiness, health and relationships (Van de Voorde et al., 2012) and how these may connect with HRM issues.

In the following section we first provide an overview of previous research and current theoretical perspectives on work-life balance in context of our research. We then briefly discuss 'well-being' and account for our research design and the methodological approach chosen. The results are subsequently presented, organised according to the three storylines that emerged from the data. Finally, we discuss the findings from the cross-national comparison and consider practical as well as research implications together with future studies of work-life balance. This section develops critical discussion specifically about well-being and HRM and concludes our paper.

Work-life balance in context

For modern families, where both spouses often pursue careers, combining child-care, work and care of self is proving to be a difficult balancing feat, which van der Lippe et al (2006) have termed 'combination pressure'. The downside of joint participation in both the financial well-being of the family and the care at home is that rather than easing the pressure on mothers, stress and experiences of work-home interference are becoming part of normal life for both fathers and mothers (ibid: 315). Expected influences that have been found to increase combination pressure include demanding jobs, long working hours and child-care. What was less expected is that combination pressure is higher and more widespread in acknowledged gender-equal contexts such as Sweden compared with relatively less acknowledged gender-equal contexts such as the UK (van der Lippe et al, 2006).

Contrary to earlier definitions of work-life (and work-family) balance with clear-cut divisions between 'work' and 'life', for many professionals the notion of work as a necessary evil is outdated (Eikhof et al, 2007: 326-327). Rather, the opposite seems to apply; work can be a source of satisfaction and self-fulfilment (ibid; see also Ford and Collinson, 2011: 263-264). Affective commitment, an emotional bond with an organisation and to 'the job', has been found to have a distinctive buffer effect on strain-based conflict as well as time-based conflict¹, thus effectively mediating work-life difficulties (Buonocore and Russo, 2012: 4, 12; see also Gourlay et al, 2012 on emotional engagement). Moreover, work plays a prominent role in shaping an individual's identity (Solomon, 2011: 341; Watts, 2007). However, from a boundary-

¹ Time-based conflict occurs when the amount of time devoted to one role makes it hard (or impossible) to participate in another (Buonocore and Russo, 2012: 1). Strain-based conflict refers to emotional exhaustion occurring when the stress, fatigue or anxiety of one role reduces the effectiveness of the other role (ibid).

theory perspective, emotional engagement with work influences the extent to which an individual integrates or segments role domains, which in turn has implications for an individual's work-life boundary management style and the flexibility or permeability of these boundaries (Glavin and Schieman, 2012).

In academia work incorporates relatively high levels of boundary flexibility since much of the work can, theoretically, be carried out anywhere and anytime (Solomon, 2011: 336, 339-340). Because workers in this environment also tend to be highly emotionally engaged with their work, boundary flexibility is often combined with boundary permeability. For example, ideas for research projects or publications may occur during a family outing; one may find it difficult to disengage from data analysis during a school run; and, curriculum design or lecture plans may take form while out walking the dog. Glavin and Schieman (2012: 76-77, 92) find that such role blurring is associated with the 'greedy-role' perspective and 'creep', which increase the likelihood that work will encroach on non-work roles rather than the other way round. Since professional workers, such as academics, benefit from job control (e.g. schedule control and decision-making latitude), but operate within demanding jobs (often with pressure to perform and aspirations for higher status), their work-life boundaries are likely to blur. While schedule control may contribute to 'family-friendliness', much of the role blurring occurs at the expense of family life, rather than to facilitate it (ibid: 94; Solomon, 2011: 341-342).

Over the past decade in academia, these factors have intensified as the world of work has been progressively undergoing a wave of rationalization processes, involving an emphasis on higher productivity and accountability. In addition, a shift from an elite to mass higher education due to external pressures, such as decline in public funding and introduction of 'new managerialism' in the public sector has escalated the work burden (Deem, 2003: 240-241; Solomon, 2011). This has challenged professional autonomy and discretion, previously highly valued aspect of knowledge work, due to the close performance scrutiny and regulation of staff (Deem, 2003: 242). Rising expectations have also caused junior faculty in particular to suffer significant anxiety and stress over their work performance (Solomon, 2011: 336). At the same time, the changes have initiated increased levels of entrepreneurial activity and managerial careers in the academic workplace (Deem, 2003: 241, 250).

With regards to work-life balance, much research has been done on women and mothers in this context, particularly in the US (e.g. Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Mayer and Tikka, 2004; and Wolfinger et al, 2008), but very few have considered men's careers and work-life balance in academia. Gender studies including both men and women show that the academic environment tends to reflect a view of the workplace which legitimises escape from household work and time schedules (Deem, 2003: 246) as research work in particular can often entail frequent travel to attend conferences and research meetings. Together with inequitable division of household responsibilities (Deem, 2003; Wolfinger et al, 2008) and the inherent belief that what it takes for academics to succeed is single-mindedness and selfishness (Deem, 2003: 250; Solomon, 2011: 336), it is clear that this context is not easily compatible with the notion of work-life balance.

Further conceptual incongruence is introduced by the fact that 'hard' science and technology domains, to which construction and related fields belong, tend to employ more men than women and are recognised as male-dominated environments (Deem, 2003: 242, 248). This entails that these fields may perceive themselves and be perceived as exempt from such female-oriented concerns as work-life balance. It may therefore be natural that academics in a construction-related environment would tend to navigate their career options in a 'post-corporate' or 'protean career' fashion, where the person (not the organisation) manages the process (Baruch, 2006). Success here is linked with feelings of self-actualization, self-fulfilment and satisfaction in relation to work (ibid: 129). In a changing academic world, the downside of such a mindset on an individual's performance is often stress (see Mullen et al, 2008). Highlighting the lived realities of the individuals, in our case academic men, is a critical step toward sustaining engagement and motivation in academia (Fleetwood, 2007), and contributes a redressing of the current privileging of women in the work-life balance literature by allowing men's voices to be heard.

Well-being

Research on well-being within psychology is extensive. Journals such as *Personality and Individual Differences* report on its connections with personality (Garcia, 2011), attachment (Karreman and Vingerhoets, 2012), connectedness to nature (Howell et al, 2011) and emotional intelligence (Extremera et al, 2011) among other interesting themes. Well-being is also one of the core concepts in sociology and public policy (Jordan, 2008).

Within business and management, and HRM specifically, it is a relatively new area of interest however. The 'business case' has tended to trump the ethical or moral argument about 'employee welfare' or 'employee focus' (Van Buren III et al, 2011). While some models of HRM, such as the Business Partnering approach (Ulrich, 1997) perhaps begun as an attempt to redress this imbalance, practice quickly revised the ideas and so Ulrich's complete model became the three legged stool (CIPD, 2013a), for example. Business focus overtook and pushed to one side well-being.

More contemporary developments in HRM literature have begun to engage more seriously with concepts like well-being. Justification or rationale for this interest may stem from practical concerns about absenteeism and presenteeism, and stress in particular (CIPD, 2013b), but also renewed importance of ethics (Losey et al, 2005: 332). The practitioner press is flush with reports and papers on stress as a key concern in the modern workplace, and well-being initiatives seem fit for addressing this issue (see for example the many CIPD resources, including reports and 'how to' guides on well-being at www.cipd.co.uk).

Conceptually we consider well-being along three dimensions: happiness, health and relationships (after Van de Voorde et al, 2012) as alluded to above. Link with HRM is assumed to be positive in that HR systems and practices are focused on building positive psychological contract, a two-way exchange of [organisational] support and [employee]

trust and commitment. This model produces mutual gains and thus generally fits the academic environment where professional workers gain satisfaction from work and exhibit high levels of intrinsic motivation to do well. However, an alternative, conflicting outcomes view on HRM and well-being acknowledges that the kinds of HR systems and practices that produce high performance (organisational focus) are probably different to those that enhance employee well-being. The recent wave of rationalization processes within academia may be introducing more pessimistic view of HRM and performance management practice in this context.

Data collection and research approach

Since the overall purpose of our research was to contribute empirical data to further our understanding of how men deal with their work-life arrangements on a daily basis and over time, a qualitative research approach based on narrative analysis was chosen. Data was collected using a loosely structured interview guide that encouraged the respondents to recount their life stories. In addition, a self-assessment tool commonly used in coaching interventions complemented and enabled triangulation of the data.

The interviews were carried out with 14 academic men (seven from Sweden and seven from the UK) from construction-related departments at universities in the two countries. The construction field was chosen since it is well known for its male-dominated environment. The respondents were selected to take part in the study via informal approaches to academics within our professional networks. Thus the sampling strategy was based on a purposive key informant approach. The three main criteria were to obtain comparable sample populations from the two countries, in which representatives of the principle positions at academic departments would be represented. We also wanted the samples to be representative and comparable in terms of age group and marital status (see table 1). Finally, all respondents identified with the notion of 'new man' and expressed an interest to share family care.

The academics interviewed were white British and Swedish men, aged between 36 and 62. Their positions at the university ranged from Assistant Professor (1) to Lecturer (4)/ Senior Lecturer (2) /Associate Professor (2) and Professor (5). Most of the respondents had full-time posts at their respective universities; three had part-time posts and one Swedish lecturer had been head-hunted from the university by industry. His ties to the university remained strong, however, since he regularly lectured as well as supervised a PhD student. This spread in positions and ages allowed us to capture perceived changes over time and generations in terms of trends in work-life balance as well as the respondents' perceptions of changes in academia over the last couple of decades. All the respondents had at some point in their career worked in industry, but most of their careers had been spent in academia. All the respondents were married or were living in a long-term relationship, and all but one had children aged 18 months to 32 years.

Table 1: Participant profile

Country	Job role	Age	Family	Contract of employment
UK	Lecturer	45-49	Wife 2 children (school age)	0.2
UK	Lecturer	50-54	Wife 1 child (pre-school)	0.6
UK	Lecturer	40-44	Wife 2 children (school age)	Full-time
UK	Senior Lecturer	40-44	Wife 2 children (pre-school)	Full-time
UK	Senior Lecturer	55-59	Wife 3 children (pre-school and teenage)	Full-time
UK	Professor	40-44	Partner	Full-time
UK	Professor	40-44	Partner 2 children (school age)	Full-time
Sweden	Lecturer	35-39	Wife 2 children (school age)	Full-time (outside of academia)
Sweden	Assistant Prof	35-39	Wife 2 children (pre-school)	Full time
Sweden	Associate Prof	50-54	Wife 3 children (grown up)	0.5
Sweden	Associate Prof	45-49	Wife 3 children (teenage and grown up)	Full-time
Sweden	Professor	50-54	Wife 2 children (teenage)	Full time
Sweden	Professor	50-54	Wife 3 children (grown up)	0.7
Sweden	Professor	60-64	Wife 1 child (grown up)	Full time

All the respondents contacted agreed to be interviewed and consented to the data being used for research and publication purposes. They were ensured anonymity in that all specificities enabling identification would be neutralised, and we offered the possibility of reading the transcripts should they wish. The respondents were also informed that the topics addressed in the interviews would be of a private nature concerning how they lived and managed their day-to-day work-life realities, and that the interviews would be informal, taking the form of a casual conversation. None of the respondents had issues with this description; some even thanked us after the interview for having provided them with a chance to 'really talk' about topics they usually kept bottled up.

The interviews lasted from one to one and a half hours each and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The location for the interviews was either a meeting venue or the interviewer's office; these premises were familiar to the respondents and their body language reflected no awkwardness or discomfort. A minimal interview guide was used to keep interviewer intervention at a minimum. The procedure was to first ask, before turning on the recorder, whether there were any questions or clarifications needed. The

respondents were then asked to provide the essential bio-data concerning current work and home situations.

After these preliminaries, the respondents were encouraged to tell their life stories. Rather than departing from a preconceived model, hypothesis or framework driving our questions, we wanted the data to 'speak to us' (Löwstedt and Räisänen, 2012). 'Free' storytelling has been suggested as an appropriate interview technique for this purpose, where interviewees' personal stories are allowed to evolve in which their underlying assumptions and beliefs guide the conversation (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The interviewer interrupted only when clarification or elaboration was needed, e.g. concerning decisions about parental leave, information on daily participation in home activities or workplace attitudes toward work-family facilitation.

Toward the end of the interviews, we asked the respondents to reflect for a few moments on their life situation as they perceived it at this moment in time. To help them we used a visualisation tool borrowed from coaching practice. This coaching tool is called the 'wheel of life', and consists of a circle drawn on an A4 sheet of paper which is divided into eight segments. Each radius represents one element of 'life': for example, health, finances, work. On the template, we marked five aspects: work situation, family, finances, health and personal development. Three of the segments were left empty for the respondents to fill in the aspects that were particularly relevant and important to them. The respondents were asked to assess how they felt about each of the life aspects. The centre of the circle represented zero (highly unsatisfactory) and the circumference represented ten (highly satisfactory). The outcome gave a visual image of the work-life balance situation. It should be noted that this tool was not used for any kind of numerical measurements of the data, but rather as a reflection and memory prompt for the respondents.

The individual wheels later enabled us to triangulate the narratives and the talk-aloud deliberations as the respondents were working with their wheel; they were asked to talk out loud as they were worked with the tool. This activity provided a certain overlap with the respondents' preceding narratives and enabled us to identify convergences as well as conflicts in their narratives. The joining of the plots provided a snapshot of a respondent's work-life reality that could then be triangulated with their narrative.

A narrative approach was used to analyse the transcripts of the interviews. Narratives have long been viewed as fundamental forms of human understanding and sensemaking, through which individuals structure and organise their experiences of the world (Ylijoki, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1995). In social-science research, narratives are increasingly being used as a method of inquiry as well as a way of presenting results (e.g. Gergen, 1994). Drawing on Polkinghorne (1995) and Lindebaum and Cassell (2012), narrative analysis was applied on the data in order to identify and code the various fragments that made up the narrative. These fragments were then sorted under storylines that linked to the overall common plot concerning how the narrators managed their work and life situations.

Narrative analysis is data-driven and time consuming, requiring several iterations and critical reflexive readings. We first worked separately, organising and reorganising the fragment to elicit coherent storylines. We then spent several consecutive days jointly working the data, challenging each other's interpretations. This resulted in agreement concerning identification and sorting of the fragments, which later revealed the storylines that collectively rendered coherent narratives of the men's experiences. As

we worked, we continually referred back to the full transcripts in the analysis, and related the specific storylines and fragments to the way the respondents portrayed their experiences as a whole, *gestalt* or life-world (after Aarseth, 2009: 428).

The obvious limitations of this study is the small sample which prohibits any kind of generalisation. However, the method enabled an in-depth analysis of the socio-cultural and psychological influences pertaining to work-life balance issues in practice, which is what we wanted to explore.

Results: work-life balance in Sweden and the UK

The iterative narrative analysis of the data highlighted three overriding storylines under which the various and circular fragments of accounts sorted: (i) partner/wife and family storyline; (ii) work as priority storyline; and (iii) desire to pursue personal projects storyline. As alluded to earlier, the media and literature on work-life balance tend to represent Sweden and the UK as manifestly different in terms of gender equity generally, and work-life balance specifically. Yet, we found more similarities than we did differences in the narrative storylines of the respondents. The differences pertained to a degree of perception or experience rather than different experiences per se. Overall the Swedish men were more likely to avail themselves of paternal leave, and for longer periods; they suffered from combination pressure to a larger extent; and, verbalised feelings of guilt regarding their wives'/partners' career sacrifices. In the following we discuss these differences in terms of the three storylines. Since our sample is small and statistically significant differences cannot be drawn, we focus on the qualitative insights offered by the respondents. We highlight those results that allow us to discuss well-being specifically (for full results on work-life balance, gender and comparison between Sweden and the UK, please see Raiden and Räisänen, 2013: 899-913).

Partner/wife and family storyline

Most of the men, in Sweden and the UK, associated the term 'family' foremost with their partners. All the Swedish partners/wives either worked part time, 60 to 80%, or full time. In the UK, five of the men had partners/wives who worked part-time (60%-80%) and two had a partner/wife at home (full-time housewife). Importantly, all the men mentioned how their careers had been, and often still were, enabled by understanding partners and wives. In all the narratives, the wife/partner was depicted as the one who, in one way or another, had to 'reshuffle', 'reduce' or 'give up' her work arrangements and plans due to the men's career moves or after the arrival of the first child.

Interestingly, the majority of the respondents also added that these changes were the partners' joint wish. Most of the British men tended to rationalise their partners' staying at home due to financial circumstances and the benefit for the children to have their mother at home. We did not see any self-reflection over what such sacrifices may have meant for their partners.

Although the Swedish academics in essence depicted the same division of labour as the British men did – that is, the men are associated with paid work whereas the women are associated with the caring work – we found an interesting difference in the voicing. The Swedish men were typically more inclusive and were verbally more empathetic to their partners' feelings and perspectives. Most of the Swedish men also mentioned that they 'felt guilty' about the sacrifices their partners had to make. Even though most of the men had availed themselves of paternity leave and child-illness-days off work, it was nevertheless their partners who had the principle responsibility for the family and home.

With regard to involvement with family in general, the men's accounts dealt mainly with the school run, specific activities like bath time, sports and holiday time. Men with older children talked about helping with homework and travel. (Only the Swedish men referred to parental leave.) This suggests a rather instrumental view of being part of a family.

There was only one respondent (from Sweden) among the 14 academics whose partner/wife and family storyline was one of shared caring and decision-making in the family unit. This indicates that for this population of academics, work took up most of their time and concern. While many of the men used the flexibility that academic work allowed to help with the school run and occasional events like appointments at the dentist, overall their involvement with the family seemed mostly about being physically present and not so much about being emotionally engaged.

Work as key priority storyline

The second narrative storyline that emerged as significant in our analysis focused on work as key priority. Two themes are central here: time management linked to flexibility and the nature of work.

Time management and flexibility

Many of the respondents (five from Sweden and three from the UK) talked of often having to take work home after office hours, and many (four from Sweden and four from the UK) also said to work very long hours. One Professor and one Senior Lecturer, both from the UK, estimated that an average working week consisted of 65-70 working hours and working 12-hour days were not infrequent. In Sweden, the estimated working hours per week were less, approximately 55 hours, but this too is 15 hours more than the government regulated 40-hour week.

One Swedish Associate Professor reflected on the consequences of taking work home:

"...every evening, or most evenings, I spend an hour or two working, and even if I only work for one hour in the evenings, between eight and nine say, that interferes with everyday life around me. Which means that I can't sit and work for three days at home for one hour, even if that's not much at home, and then the fourth day go away to play music; I have to be free at home." (Sweden)

This rather typical account in the data indicates that the Swedish men seem to suffer from combination pressure, which was not evidenced in the UK corpus. The Swedish

respondents also talked of work flexibility as providing them a means to maintain continued and active engagement with work while on 'family-time' such as paternal leave. Note here that even though men still do not avail themselves of all the paternal leave they are entitled to, most men in knowledge-based work do take leave over longer periods of time, from one to six months or more. However, some may choose to work limited hours during extended leave, for example one day a week as did one Swedish respondent. He justified this with the argument that five months fully away from work would have been too disruptive for his doctoral student. UK-based respondents also discussed flexibility in positive terms, referring to how it allows them to share in domestic chores.

One way that both Swedish and British men tried to ensure that time was spent with the family was to create boundaries between work and family time by designating specific periods as 'work free', mainly weekends and holidays. However, in spite of this strategy, many experienced 'creep'. Three respondents (one Swedish and two British) noted that having to pick up children from school and day-care helped manage 'creep' since it provided a justifiable reason for having to leave e.g. a meeting that risked creeping into non-work time. Yet another implicit manifestation of 'creep' can be linked to psychological presence versus physical presence. 'Creep' can impinge on the time actually spent with the partner or the children, and manifest in lack of mental or emotional engagement. This pseudo-presence is typically expressed in "uhm....uhm...." answers to a partners or a child's efforts to elicit attention and commitment to the here and now.

Nature of work

Without any probing most of the respondents raised issues concerning the changing and increasingly fragmented nature of academic work. This was a critical concern for them, both in terms of managing multiple and parallel commitments and as a consequence that negatively implicated their work-life balance.

As is becoming fairly usual nowadays at university, several of the respondents combined their work in academia with part-time, private practice/consultancy work. One respondent spoke of the benefits of a mixed-portfolio career approach, both for enriching educational provision and for knowledge transfer to industry. The respondents mostly addressed the nature of their work in academia, reflecting on the variety of roles and duties involved with such work. Some (two Swedish men and one British man) talked of variety in positive terms, but a larger group (four Swedish and four British men) were very negative to this phenomenon, which they associated with the new marketisation trend in higher education.

Those who viewed the variety of roles and duties in academia positively talked about interesting opportunities and diversity of research projects, noting that academia is perhaps the only workplace today where one can develop to become whatever one wants to be. One Swedish respondent noted that his work had become a 'hobby' as well as a job, and another man (also Swedish) said that:

"...the academic world is a great place for developing yourself, developing knowledge, and lots of intelligent and nice people to interact with, both colleagues and students, so I enjoy the environment." (Sweden)

Those who saw role and job variety negatively referred to work intensification and the overwhelming pressures that it generated. The key concern in terms of work intensification related to the respondents' manifest commitment to their profession and to the upholding of its standards of practice (both in academia and industry). The men were critical of, and frustrated by, the negative developments in academia, alluding to the acute escalation of work, the blurring of responsibilities and ineffective leadership of top management. All these factors resulted in a continuous 'changing of hats,' i.e. enacting different roles of a lecturer, supervisor, project manager, researcher and an administrator, often all within the same day.

Many of the respondents showed keen interest in continued professional development both personally (which we discuss in the following section) and more broadly in terms of developing the discipline. One UK-based Senior Lecturer aptly summarised this concern:

"... nature of the work is different. Some of that [teaching] was specialised because we were teaching on specialized courses, and now it's more general, low level, but it's still a lot of teaching. But if we kick up a fuss, because a lot of our work is practical, outside, we're always afraid that someone higher up will say 'well, chop out the practical, do it all in the classroom' and that would take away a lot of the employability of our students." (UK)

Desire to pursue 'personal projects' accounts

The third storyline focused on the men's desires for self-development in the pursuit of 'personal projects', namely old or new hobbies, socialising with friends and physical and/or intellectual development. Here all their individual narratives dwelt on an absence, a feeling of loss, which contrasted with the tone and language used when they addressed the two previous storylines. Three main themes, occurring in fragments throughout the narratives, sorted under this storyline: sports, hobbies and personal development.

Half of the respondents (three Swedish and five British men) talked about their desire to partake more in sports activities. Gym was a common theme among the respondents, but specific activities mentioned included sailing, fishing, running, biking and yoga. Some of the respondents had been active sportsmen in younger years, voicing nostalgia for a part of their lives that they have had to abandon due to lack of time.

However, some respondents used sports for example cycling to and from work both as a means of maintaining a healthy physical condition and as a de-stressor: cycling to work and from work provided a liminal, in-between space and time for thinking, or not thinking, as the situation may require. Other respondents, especially those with older children saw sports as an opportunity to connect with family and enjoy 'quality time', for example by running together, going for family hikes, or coaching the children's sports teams.

Some (two Swedish and two British men) desired more time for reading, playing a musical instrument and/or enjoying wine, beer and good food with partner and friends. All of these activities seemed to be common for both groups of men; where they differed was in their choices of hobbies. In such a small sample, this difference is far from generalisable, but it is an interesting cultural feature. For many of the Swedish men, building or renovating a summer house was a favourite and surprisingly frequent hobby. Although this may not seem such a strange pastime for men affiliated to the field of construction, none of the British men mentioned house building as a hobby. For the Swedish men, this hobby provided joy, pride and self-fulfilment. In one narrative, house building took up so much time and energy that it was impinging on both work and family.

Apart from hobbies, time with friends was especially important to many (five Swedish and four British men), but here too the talk evoked nostalgia for a passed time. No one found the time to spend with friends any longer. One respondent hesitated in trying to recall when he last went out with friends, and another man noted that *"...wife sends Christmas cards to my friends"* (UK). The latter is an interesting anecdotal illustration of a marked division of labour especially in the sample from the UK.

By far the most important personal-project feature for most respondents was personal-development either in terms of their leisure activities, e.g. playing a musical instrument or intellectual development. Time, again, was the major obstacle, but here the time thief was the intensification and fragmentation of work: increased administration and control tasks rather than research or teaching demands per se. One respondent from the UK felt somewhat disconnected from the field due to his current managerial position in the university:

"To give up a day [to attend a seminar for example] now is quite serious – I have to plan it well in advance, and I think that's a really negative and dangerous thing because that's where good ideas come from, that's where intellectual stimulation comes from." (UK)

Most of the respondents talked at great length about their increased administrative burdens and how these had a negative impact on their motivation and job satisfaction. Stress and anxiety were also mentioned as new phenomena that impacted health and well-being in negative ways. The Swedish men were outspoken about experiencing mental distress such as burn-out, bouts of anxiety and psychosomatic eczema caused by work-life imbalance. The British men, however, tended to contain their accounts to the practicalities involved in combining work, family and leisure activities, avoiding talk about affect and emotions. We develop this difference further in the following section.

Discussion and conclusion

Our results suggest that work-life balance encompassed much more for the respondents than balancing commitments at work and responsibilities outside of work. Based on iterative readings and interpretations of the narratives in the corpus, three storylines emerged: (i) family connected with partner/wife, (ii) work as key priority, and (iii)

desire to pursue 'personal projects'. Conceptually we therefore argue for a triadic rather than binary framework: work-family-life balance, to enable an inclusive perspective of all the dimensions that contribute to perceptions of well-being and satisfaction. Supporting this view is the relatively large space given to the 'life' dimension of the triad in the data as well as its physical and emotional repercussions for the two other dimensions. We feel that better understanding of the intersections between these dimensions and how they may influence each other would provide insight into individual differences, which are currently difficult to grasp.

The storyline 'desire to pursue personal projects' in most of the narratives formed a separate, albeit embedded, leitmotif in the work and the partner/family storylines and could often be interpreted as having causal links with feeling of satisfaction with either the work situation and/or the family situation. These findings support extant research on work-leisure and family-leisure research (see for example Jacobs and Gerson, 2001), particularly in terms of offering qualitative insights relevant for this particular segment of the working population. There is an opportunity to develop this avenue of research, for example by specific, in-depth investigations into 'intensification of work' and its relation to family-life conflict.

The respondents had difficulties balancing the family and life domains. Rather than talking about challenges in terms of a work-life dichotomy, they referred to a need to compromise between family and personal pursuits, which in turn impacted on work by generating feelings of insufficiency all around. However, none of the respondents mentioned that they should work less, which supports the argument that work is a key priority for these men; in turn this supports much of the literature on work family conflict (Daly et al, 2008) and work-life balance (e.g. Millikin and Dunn-Jensen, 2005). Having children had changed their lives in that they had to accommodate this new dimension of family by impinging on their 'personal project' dimension rather than on the work dimension. Although some of their personal projects were closely connected with family (like building a house), they were talked of as the men's personal projects and thus often experienced as conflicting with family-time rather than work-time.

Wives and partners were seen as the key agents for easing work-life pressures. The literature (see for example Deem, 2003: 246) reports the same kind of sacrifices our respondents reflected on: one of the participants in the ESRC new managerialism project said that *"The only reason that I could do what I did was that my wife gave up her career..."* Thus, similarly to our study, parenthood or more precisely fatherhood *per se* is not constraining in the same way that the literature reports motherhood to constrain women's career progress (Deem, 2003; Wolfinger et al, 2008). We alluded to research by Aarseth (2009: 425) earlier, which stated that despite recent cultural transformation (such as the emergence of the new man) *"men only appear to be more sensitive and care oriented but in fact do not meet the demand for emotional and practical participation in the domestic sphere."* It is evident that the respondents in our study take an instrumental view of 'contributing to family affairs', and as such they are contributing to the upholding of traditional gender roles even though they perceive their views as gender neutral. This is especially interesting with regards to the Swedish respondents, where we see a failure to realize the equality project (i.e. sharing care and housework equally between the couple) as illustrated by Aarseth's (2012: 429) example: *"she became the*

administrative and emotional centre of the family and he was increasingly involved in his work”.

The findings of this study may be profession-specific, providing support for the claim that academia enjoys elevated levels of interest and attention to work (after Enders and Kaulish, 2006) at the expense of family and/or ‘me’-time (Deem, 2003). This mind-set is quite common in professional occupations (Glavin and Schieman, 2012: 92) and indicative of affective commitment, the emotional bond that individuals develop towards their organisation or profession/job (Buonocore and Russo, 2012: 4, 13). We found no specific reference to construction as a field influencing the respondents’ work-life balance, but it would be useful to study a cross-sample of staff from different departments, schools and faculties in universities in order to better understand academia as a workplace.

One of the key pressures in work-life balance stems from the increasing flexibility of working hours related to both the rise of a 24/7 global economy and the proliferation of sophisticated communications technologies that allow work to be performed ‘anytime, anywhere’ (Glavin and Schieman, 2012: 73). Beyond the opportunities to fulfil work duties outside of the usual spatial and temporal domains of work, workers in professional occupations are often encouraged, or at least not dissuaded from, multi-tasking outside of their work time, for example answering e-mails or commenting student papers. This entails mental concentration on performing work roles while physically located in another domain, where a different role and responsibility is being enacted. This growing fragmentation can cause stress, as evidenced in the respondents narratives (see also Glavin and Schieman, 2012: 74). In line with Glavin and Schieman (2012: 91, 92) we find that *“jobs that offer freedom and control tend to come with the price tag of loftier work demands and responsibilities”*, and hence support the ‘greedy-role’ perspective. While flexible and permeable boundaries between work and family roles allow the respondents to participate in some caring activities, their affective commitment and engagement with the work role seem to demand disproportionate amounts of time thus setting work and life at imbalance, as also suggested by Glavin and Schieman (2012). Despite recent developments in education (as introduced earlier after Deem, 2003, and Solomon, 2011), which were said to hinder ‘good practice’, work is not viewed negatively; rather our respondents identify with the job as a key source of satisfaction (see Solomon, 2011). Our respondents also identified with the ‘protean career’ (Baruch, 2006).

The Swedish respondents were more inclusive and more reflective of their spouses’ situations. They were also the ones who talked about the effects of work intensifications on their health and well-being. We suggest that the media campaigns and enforced policies and laws over the last 40 years in Sweden have effected a change in attitudes concerning masculinity. As Hofstede et al (2010: 140-144) suggest, more feminine national culture prospers in Sweden; that is, a society where *“emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life”*. Compared with the UK, which is considered to be a masculine country (ibid), men in Sweden seem to be able to voice their feelings concerning their ‘life’ and are able comfortable in expressing their discontent with family roles.

However, the equality-project in Sweden has put pressure on men to actively share family responsibilities; not only to be seen to contribute, but actually *be* part of the family-unit. The men in our sample seem to have internalised these values, yet do not really enact them due to a number of institutionalised contextual forces, as discussed earlier after Deem (2003) and Solomon (2011). Similar pressures may be developing in the UK; Crush (2013: 22) reports that,

“childcare costs, and the squeezed working and financial situation many parents report, all cause a huge strain on the family dynamic, forcing men into a breadwinning role that society had been slowly easing them out of... putting parents at ‘loggerheads’.”

The implications of not managing the work-family-life triad, and specifically issues related to combination pressure, are likely to cause increased stress in all three domains (Edwards and Rothbard, 2005). Many of the respondents talked about sport and exercise as a way of managing stress, a way of relieving pressure; they also expressed wishes to engage in such activity more. This may present the ultimate coping mechanism for dealing with intensification of work (often a source of stress) and more satisfactory balancing of the work-family-life triad. Especially if workplaces are able to support their employees in taking the well-being agenda seriously, as a concern of all workers (Crush, 2013) we may find some family-life tension eased by way of active and holistic management of work-family-life (rather than work-family) balance.

Encouraging and supporting exercise does not solve the problem regarding ‘time with friends’. Here more innovative solutions may be needed, perhaps life coaching and counselling on well-being. For now, especially in the UK, enabling flexible working and explicit celebration of fatherhood in the workplace as a ‘normal’ state is important (Crush, 2013). In the longer-term, research must address this often overlooked area of work-family-life triad and examine the impact that absence of ‘time for personal projects’ may have on the overall well-being and satisfaction of individuals and families, together with consequences for organisational performance and society more broadly.

With regards to the three dimensions of well-being we thus conclude that (i) happiness tends to be related to our respondents’ accounts about success at work. Work is projected as a satisfying and rewarding activity and thus a key priority for the men in our sample. Most dissatisfaction (unhappiness) arises from lack of time for personal projects. (ii) This concern connects directly with ‘health’, the second element of well-being. Our interviewees have made considerable sacrifices in terms of time available for going to the gym for example. In combination with the negative effects of pressure at work and stress, this could have serious negative consequences for the workers’ well-being. Health clearly arises as a key concern from our data set. Finally, (iii) relationships were discussed within the interviews in terms of family relationships (e.g. between the men and their partners and children) and friendships. The former, family relationships, tend to quite uniformly operate on a one-way support basis where the emphasis is on the mother (and children) to allow for the men (fathers) to develop and maintain successful careers – often at the expense of family, or at least, partner’s/ wife’s well-being. In some cases the role of the partner/ wife was expressed in explicit terms to be that of a ‘carer’, one to support and enhance the well-being of the man. Friendships were a memory that our respondents longed for, another aspect of sacrifice (alongside health) with implications on personal well-being.

These findings implicate HRM in two ways: on the one hand the organisations, and wider field of work, had very effectively tapped into the workers affective commitment, and the workers had developed a strong intrinsic desire to do well. The academics enjoyed this environment, which reflects positively on their well-being, at least when they are working with what they want and what they see as their tasks (research and/or teaching). The specific areas that HRM can contribute with to maintain and promote effective commitment and intrinsic motivation are job design (the level of autonomy and responsibility workers have over their work) and performance management. Historically both job design and performance management within academia have been dealt with on an ad hoc basis and informally. The current and sometimes dramatic moves to formalise, rationalise and standardise processes and procedures as well as to increase transparency have however resulted in pressure and often contradictory changes in the nature of work. This, in turn, has resulted in stress and increasing numbers of burn-out in academia.

As Van de Voorde et al (2012) found, HRM can support the positive, mutual gains perspective on well-being – specifically in relation to happiness – by providing rewarding and engaging work. Yet it is an imperative that we remain mindful of the dangers highlighted by the conflicting outcomes view – specifically in relation to stress.

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