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**EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS
RESEARCH SERIES NO.32**

The evaluation of the Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund

ADRIAN NELSON et al.

THE TAVISTOCK INSTITUTE

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The evaluation of the Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund

ADRIAN NELSON, KATHRYN NEMEC, PERNILLE SOLVIK and CHRIS RAMSDEN

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Foreword

The Department of Trade and Industry's aim is to realise prosperity for all. We want a dynamic labour market that provides full employment, flexibility and choice. We want to create workplaces of high productivity and skill, where people can flourish and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

The Department has an ongoing research programme on employment relations and labour market issues, managed by the Employment Market Analysis and Research branch (EMAR). Details of our research programme appear regularly in the ONS journal *Labour Market Trends*, and can also be found on our website: http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/emar

DTI social researchers, economists, statisticians and policy advisors devise research projects to be conducted in-house or on our behalf by external researchers, chosen through competitive tender. Projects typically look at individual and collective employment rights, identify good practice, evaluate the impact of particular policies or regulations, or examine labour market trends and issues. We also regularly conduct large-scale UK social surveys, such as the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS).

We publicly disseminate results of this research through the DTI Employment Relations Research series and Occasional Paper series. All reports are available to download at http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/inform.htm

Anyone interested in receiving regular email updates on EMAR's research programme, new publications and forthcoming seminars should send their details to us at: emar@dti.gov.uk

The views expressed in these publications do not necessarily reflect those of the Department or the Government. We publish them as a contribution towards open debate about how best we can achieve our objectives.

Grant Fitzner
Director, Employment Market Analysis and Research

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Dr. Adrian Nelson
Kathryn Nemec
and Pernille Solvik

The Tavistock Institute

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Glossary of acronyms

DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
GHQ	General Health Questionnaire
HR	Human Resources
NHS	National Health Service
OCQ	Organisational Commitment Questionnaire
PI	Performance Indicator
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
SWOT Analysis	Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities and Threats
WLB-CF	Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund

Executive summary

The Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund (WLB-CF) provides financial aid to employers to help them develop work-life balance policies and practices. Evidence from a 20-month independent evaluation of the first three rounds of the WLB-CF indicates that the vast majority of employers have positively benefited from participation in the Fund. The findings indicate that the WLB-CF has enabled employers to introduce significant changes in their employment practices so as to create greater awareness of, and develop policies to support, work-life balance. However, it was difficult to measure bottom-line outcomes such as retention, employee absence and turnover, or to attribute any changes in these to the WLB-CF. Key success factors in implementation included the need for a participative approach, involving all employees, and the need for senior management commitment or 'buy-in'.

Aims and objectives of the evaluation

The main aims of the evaluation of the first three rounds of the WLB-CF were to examine the impact of the programme on both employers and employees and to assess the processes initiated to deliver the programme, both within the participating organisations and the WLB-CF itself. The evaluation took a multi-level approach to investigate the effectiveness and efficiency of the WLB-CF by utilising both qualitative (semi-structured interviews with key personnel) and quantitative (documentary analysis) approaches.

Background

The UK Government launched the Work-life Balance Campaign in March 2000. The Campaign aims to raise awareness of the benefits for employers in developing policies that would enable employees to effectively balance their work with their life outside of work. The WLB-CF is a key aspect of the Campaign. The aim of the WLB-CF is to help employers from the private, public and voluntary sectors realise the bottom-line benefits of adopting flexible working patterns and to help employees achieve a better balance between work and the rest of their lives. This was to be achieved by enabling employers to gain access to financial support to fund advice from specialist consultancy firms. These firms assisted employers in carrying out tailored projects to develop work-life balance policies and practices. At the time of writing the WLB-CF is in its fifth round and has helped over 400 employers develop greater flexibility in their working practices.

Reasons for employers applying to the WLB-CF

The main reason why employers applied to the Challenge Fund for funding was to address problems with the recruitment and retention of staff. Specifically, employers cited the need to attract potential employees in areas where there were skill shortages and to broaden their appeal as an employer by introducing more family-friendly policies and working arrangements. Other important reasons for applying included tackling absenteeism and what employers observed to be low morale within their workforce.

Achievements

Reports from both employers and employees show that the vast majority of Challenge Fund projects resulted in benefits for both the organisation and its employees. In only two cases have negative outcomes been reported. The WLB-CF has reached a wide variety of employers, from small family-run businesses to large multinational companies. It is noteworthy that the number of applications from some sectors, for example the construction sector, was very small, while the public and voluntary sectors were heavily represented.

Major discernible outcomes of the WLB-CF projects include:

- The introduction of a wide range of organisations to the concept of work-life balance and the development of a greater awareness of the benefits of work-life balance.
- The establishment of a wide variety of work-life balance initiatives within the participating organisations.
- The inculcation of a work-life balance culture, and the establishment of sound foundations for further developments and the sustainability of work-life balance practices.
- Spin-off effects in terms of sideline developments in systems and procedures, such as systematic records, childcare initiatives, and employee counselling to support permanence.

All of the organisations involved in the case study research benefited from participating and were satisfied that their WLB-CF projects had delivered the desired outcomes. In most cases, the instigation of the projects had facilitated the organisation to put work-life balance more firmly on the strategic agenda. Although some organisations stated that they would have developed some form of work-life balance initiative without the WLB-CF assistance, the majority of the organisations studied were emphatic that the Challenge Fund introduced them to work-life balance issues of which they otherwise would not have been aware. In addition it enabled them to engage in a process that they would not have been able to otherwise because of financial or resource constraints.

Implementing the projects

Employers on the whole valued the support from external consultants very highly and felt that the presence of the specialist consultants during the projects gave the project a credibility and kudos that facilitated implementation. However, some projects experienced difficulties in their early stages where the appointed consultant and employer failed to develop a good working relationship, resulting in delays to the project.

Both employers and the work-life balance consultants felt that that there was insufficient time allocated to certain stages of the Challenge Fund process. This included: the initial engagement with the Challenge Fund; the development of working relationships between employer and consultant. In addition it was felt that insufficient time was allocated to the implementation of the projects, and that there was often unrealistic expectations that the projects would fulfil their objectives within the 12 months allocated.

The need for management buy-in

A key determinant of the success of the projects was the extent to which both senior and middle managers supported the aims and implementation of the

projects. It was found that projects were more likely to stall if the commitment and involvement of senior management was lacking. Similarly, since middle managers are likely to be charged with operationalising work-life balance policies by determining the working hours of their staff, they are essentially the 'gatekeepers' to work-life balance within organisations. Therefore, some of the projects concentrated on developing management awareness and capability in dealing with staff requests for greater flexibility by including management training in work-life balance.

Communication

The team of consultants and managers considered it a major challenge to communicate the purpose of the Challenge Fund projects to their workforce so as to ensure their effective participation. A large number of project teams came up against initial scepticism from employees. It is clear that considerable effort needs to be applied to getting the message across, particularly in large, geographically dispersed organisations.

Measuring the outcomes of the projects

Concerns were raised by employers about the validity and relevance of measuring some of the bottom line outcome measures such as staff retention, sickness absence and cost reductions. There were also doubts about the extent to which changes in such measures could be ascribed solely to the outcomes of the WLB-CF projects. Employers felt that changes in organisational culture, which is an aim of the projects, could neither be achieved nor measured within the 12-month time frame of the projects.

About this evaluation

The evaluation of the first three rounds of the Challenge Fund was carried out as part of the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Employment Relations research programme. It was undertaken by Adrian Nelson, Kathryn Nemec and Pernille Solvik, with assistance from Chris Ramsden, from The Tavistock Institute.

The core of the evaluation involved case study research in 13 employer organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors involved in rounds one to three. The methods used included semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders such as managers and employees from the organisations, and a structured audit of work-life balance policy and practice development. Interviews were also undertaken with work-life balance consultants, with members of the DTI WLB-CF policy team, and with consultants from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) – who were contracted to manage the WLB-CF programme.

The project also involved the analysis of WLB-CF project documentation to gain a broad overview of the key processes and outcomes to emerge from the WLB-CF projects. The evaluation design enabled the team to monitor a selection of projects over time, from inception and implementation to completion.

1
Introduction

Background

Although it is not clear exactly when the concept of work-life balance first emerged, what is clear is that the concept has gained significant prominence both in recent employment practice and the UK Government's policies. Despite the growing interest from employers, policy makers, and the professional and popular press, no single definition for work-life balance exists. For the purposes of this report, the definition given by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) represents a suitably encompassing view of the main characteristics of the concept:

> *'Work-life balance is about adjusting working patterns. Regardless of age, race or gender, everyone can find a rhythm to help them combine work with their other responsibilities or aspirations.'*
> *(Source: The Department of Trade and Industry, 2002)*

One of the important elements of this definition is the recognition by the Government, that work-life balance should be available to all working people. Furthermore, that flexibility in working practices should be there not only to help employees cope with demands outside of work but also to assist employees who wish to fulfil personal ambitions outside of work, or just spend less time in work.

Evidence has been mounting that no significant link exists between the number of hours worked and levels of productivity. In fact, although the UK works the longest hours in Europe, and takes the lowest average levels of annual leave, the UK workforce is still performing at lower levels of productivity than many of our European neighbours (Hennessy, 2003). This paradox could be partly explained by the finding that there is a consistent relationship between prolonged work hours and both mental and physical health symptoms in employees (Sparks *et al,* 1997). By the late 1990s research was beginning to show that there were sound business reasons for enabling employees to have greater flexibility in their working arrangements (Creagh & Brewster, 1998). The development of what has been termed the 'business case' for work-life balance was based on the view that employers, as well as employees, could benefit from the introduction of greater flexibility and choice in their patterns of work. There were a number of reasons for this shift in outlook. Firstly, the return to high levels of employment in the UK has had the side effect of a shortage of qualified staff in many sectors and regions. The European Commission recently reported that there will be a shortfall of 1.7 million IT vacancies alone across the European Union in 2003. Many employers have come to recognise that in order to have access to the untapped potential of those people, who for reasons of demands outside the workplace, such as lone parents, are unable to engage in employment, they have to make their offer to

potential employees more attractive. Baines (1995) also attributes the increased interest in work-life balance to the rise in the number of women returning to work. Marchington and Wilkinson's (2002) account of the shift clearly defines its reason as the move from manufacturing to service industries in the UK. They observe that only 33% of the workforce were female in 1960; 45 per cent by 2001 and predict that the percentage could be equal by 2020. Thus, the demand for work-life balance seems to have emanated from two sources. One has been the change in the labour market conditions and the type of jobs on offer, and within this context, the second has been the changing requirements of the workforce itself. Therefore, employers have come under increasing pressure to help employees enjoy a healthy work-life balance.

By the end of the 1990s the advantages of moving to greater employment flexibility were also recognised by professional associations such as the Industrial Society (now the Work Foundation). In January 2000 they launched the 'Work-Life Manual': an information and self-assessment guide for employers to enable them to assess their work-life balance policies and practices and benchmark them against existing best practice. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD), the professional body representing human resource practitioners in the UK, has also shown its support by publishing its own 'Guide to Work-life Balance' (2002).

Recent research has begun to highlight the advantages and limitations associated with adopting work-life balance practices in the workplace. The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) commissioned a research survey, the Work-Life Balance Baseline Study. The study was carried out by the Institute for Employment Research and IFF Research and was published in 2000. It surveyed 2,500 workplaces and encompassed the views of 7,500 employees within those organisations. The aim of the study was to discover the extent of work-life balance practices within those organisations, to identify employees' needs and the degree to which these needs were currently being met. The study found that the majority of employers (72 per cent) reported positive effects of adopting work-life balance policies. These included: improved employee relations; greater motivation and commitment; more effective retention of female employees; and lower levels of staff turnover. However, 51 per cent of employers surveyed reported that managerial workloads had increased as a result of adopting work-life balance policies. Moreover, despite the prevalence of some form of work-life balance practices within the organisations surveyed, it was found that the majority of workplaces still had staff working above their standard hours of work. Those working the greater number of hours on average were those in professional and managerial occupations. The survey of employers revealed that apart from the provision of part-time working arrangements, the range of work-life balance options available to staff was small. Nevertheless, the survey discovered a considerable level of demand from employees for greater flexibility in the hours and the patterns they worked. The report also highlighted the finding that despite the moves made by employers to accommodate female workers' needs for greater flexibility, 14 per cent of fathers were working over 60 hours every week.

Government policy on work-life balance

It was clear from the findings of this and other studies at the time that the provision of greater opportunities for flexible working was proving beneficial to

both employers and employees. It also confirmed that Government intervention, in order to encourage wider adoption of work-life balance policies in the workplace, could have a substantial impact.

In March 2000, the Government outlined its plans for encouraging the growth of work-life balance within the UK in the discussion document 'Changing Patterns in a Changing World'. The document announced the launch of the Work-Life Balance Campaign. One aspect of this campaign was the setting up of an employer-led alliance: 'Employers for Work-Life Balance', with the aim of promoting the benefits of work-life balance to employers in the UK by demonstrating its success within their own organisations. Firms such as Lloyds TSB, HSBC and BT were among the first to sign up. In the discussion document the Government, in partnership with Employers for Work-Life Balance, drew up a six-point checklist outlining the key considerations for employers if they are committed to work-life balance. It states:

> *An organisation that is committed to work-life balance::*
> - *Recognises that effective practices to promote work-life balance will benefit the organisation and its employees.*
> - *Acknowledges that individuals at all stages of their lives work best when they are able to achieve an appropriate balance between work and all other aspects of their lives.*
> - *Highlights the employer's and employees' joint responsibility to discuss workable solutions and encourages a partnership between individuals and their line managers.*
> - *Develops appropriate policies and practical responses that meet the specific needs of the organisation and its employees, having regard to:*
>   - Fairness and consistency
>   - Valuing employees for their contribution to the business, not their working pattern
>   - Monitoring and evaluation
> - *Communicates its commitment to work-life strategies to its employees.*
> - *Demonstrates leadership from the top of the organisation and encourages managers to lead by example'.*
>
> *Source: Changing Patterns in a Changing World (March 2000) p. 4.*

The discussion document also announced a new Ministerial Advisory Committee on Work-Life Balance that was set up to advise ministers on ways to promote work-life balance in employment practices in the UK.

The Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund

In the same document the Government announced its intention to launch the Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund (WLB-CF). The aim of the WLB-CF was to help employers from the private, public and voluntary sectors realise the bottom-line benefits of flexible work patterns, and help employees achieve a better balance between work and the rest of their lives. This aim was to be achieved by enabling employers to gain access to financial support to pay for

the advice of specialist consultancy firms who would assist employers in carrying out tailored interventions to develop work-life balance policies and practices.

The WLB-CF was officially launched on 8 June 2000. It was open to all employers from the private, public and voluntary sectors in England and Scotland. Employers were invited to apply for funds to support the design and implementation of work-life balance projects, all of which would run for a 12-month duration. Successful Challenge Fund applicants would receive advice from specialist consultants to help them develop and implement work-life balance policies and practices through a targeted project. All projects were required to measure financial savings, reductions in absenteeism, staff retention levels and the take-up of work-life balance options by staff. The criteria on which employers' bids were judged were based on:

- The areas of business performance they were seeking to improve;
- How they would benefit from support from consultants to address work-life balance issues;
- The extent of top level commitment to improving work-life balance, demonstrated by the level of staff resource and time allocated to the project;
- Clear objectives for their work on the project; and
- Measurable benefits for the work-life balance project they wish to undertake.

Since its inception, five rounds of projects have been funded. In October 2000, 69 employers were selected for the first round of projects. The second round of successful employers was announced on 21 March 2001, with 19 employers in total. In the third round of funding 87 employer projects started in September 2001. The average funding per project in the first three rounds was £33,000. Applications for a fourth round were invited in March 2002. As well as the customised projects run in the previous rounds, this round included Specific Solutions – smaller projects aimed at addressing one aspect of work-life balance. 131 organisations were awarded a Specific Solution and 92 organisations were awarded the larger customised projects. Applications for Round Five, which consists entirely of Specific Solutions, closed on 31 July 2003. The total size of the fund to date is £11.3 million.

In July 2001 The Tavistock Institute was commissioned by the DfEE to carry out an independent evaluation of the WLB-CF. Since one of the aims of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the processes and outcomes of the Challenge Fund itself, the following section details the key processes which were instigated in order to deliver the WLB-CF.

Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund processes

The responsibility for the implementation of the WLB-CF was originally located within the former DfEE. It then passed to the DTI when the restructuring of the DfEE occurred at the beginning of 2001. During this period, the DfEE had entered into a framework contract with the consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) for the delivery of consultancy services. PwC were invited to submit a proposal under this framework contract for the management of the programme in July 2000. In the meantime, applications

from interested employer organisations for Round One of the WLB-CF closed in July 2000. PwC established a number of processes for managing the WLB-CF. These included:

- A procurement process to select consultancy firms to deliver work-life balance solutions for employer organisations successful in their applications to the WLB-CF.
- A procedure for assessing applications to the WLB-CF from employer organisations.
- Conducting scoping visits to all employer organisations that had passed the initial assessment criteria to assess their suitability for funding.
- Production of a Project Manager's Manual to describe the operation of the WLB-CF, which was to be used by WLB-CF project teams.
- Creating a method of matching employers with consultancy firms.
- The establishment of workable operational processes.
- The establishment of an evaluation framework.
- Maintaining ongoing support and advice to projects.

Although variations and refinements occurred between Rounds One and Round Three of the WLB-CF, the processes that relate to the operation of the WLB-CF were reasonably consistent across the three rounds of the WLB-CF encompassed by this evaluation. The WLB-CF is a competitive application process. Employers interested in applying for support from the WLB-CF to introduce some form of WLB initiative within their organisations applied through submitting an application form to the DTI. A panel made up of DTI and PwC staff and independent members then assessed these application forms. The application and selection process followed this general pattern:

The assessment and selection process

1. Employers were invited to apply to the WLB-CF. Deadlines for submission of completed applications were given.

2. Applications were received from employers and a panel of assessors then scored all applications. From this the highest scoring applications from employers were then short-listed to go through to the next round of assessment.

3. Scoping visits to all the short-listed employers were made by PwC consultants to assess the eligibility of those organisations to receive funding. Key stakeholders, including a cross-section of employees within each organisation, were interviewed and a scoping report produced. The reports commented on the extent to which the issues identified in the application were supported by evidence obtained during the visit. The reports suggested the level of resources necessary to carry out the intervention required and the means by which progress and success could be measured.

4. On the basis of the analysis of the scoping report findings, PwC made recommendations to the independent assessment panel regarding which employers should go through to be funded by the WLB-CF. The panel made the final decisions about which employers would be selected. Successful applicants were then notified.

5. The scoping process also assessed which of the HR consultancies would be best suited to working with the employers, based on the issues identified during the visits. A shortlist of HR consultancy firms was drawn up with which each employer might work.

6. A WLB-CF Fair was held for successful applicants at a venue in London. The Fair was designed to provide information to employers about the WLB-CF and enable representatives from the successful employers to meet those work-life balance consultants that had been short-listed to work with them. Employers could also meet with other consultants if they wished.

7. After the Fair, the applicants were asked to make their final selection of the consultancy firms with whom they wished to work.

Project activities and reporting structures

The duration of every WLB-CF project was for a maximum of 12 months. Since its inception in June 2000, the WLB-CF has initiated two rounds of projects per year; one in the spring and one in the autumn. This section briefly outlines the key activities and milestones for the WLB-CF projects from their start-up point:

Month 1   The work-life balance consultants and the employers draw up Terms of Engagement and the Target Setting Guide covering the DTI criteria. The Terms of Engagement represent a contract between the consultants, the employer and the DTI to carry out an agreed set of activities that are planned over the 12-month period in which the project will run. The Target Setting Guide enables the project team (the consultant and the employer) to agree and set measurable targets in terms of what the project plans to achieve.

Measures such as the reduction of staff absence and staff retention and the reduction of costs (such as reduced recruitment, overtime, and recruitment agency costs) were set as the standard indicators. Another measure of importance to the effectiveness of the intervention was the extent to which employees took up various types of work-life balance options. Other measures, such as 'staff morale' have also often been used to assess the effectiveness of the changes introduced during the work-life balance interventions.

On the basis of a joint agreement, set out in the terms of engagement, on the design and plan of the proposed intervention, the WLB-CF projects commence.

Although there were no standard templates for the design of the WLB-CF interventions, they were required to demonstrate how the intervention would address issues associated with work-life balance rather than more indefinite issues facing the client organisation. For example, an organisation may be facing difficulties in recruiting staff because of reasons outside the scope of work-life balance practices, such as poor pay rates. This would

be viewed as extraneous to the aim of the WLB-CF. From the analysis carried out on the project final reports, it was clear that the majority of the WLB-CF projects were designed to support the implementation of flexible working practices and/or increase awareness of work-life balance within the organisation.

Month 6   Six months after commencement of the projects, the employer and consultants were required to produce an interim report to be submitted to the DTI. The purpose of the reports was to outline the progress and achievements made on the project to date. There were four main sections to the reports:

   i. An overview of the project design and objectives.
   ii. Key activities or outputs. The reports required an assessment of four key activities in terms of the purpose of the activity and the extent of their success.
   iii. Benefits and outcomes to date, including unexpected or unplanned outcomes. This includes the indicators outlined in the Target Setting Guide such as financial savings, improved staff retention and absenteeism.
   iv. Lessons for future projects. Aspects of the project which worked well, and things that could have worked better.

Month 12   At the point of completion of the project, a final report was produced by the employer and the consultant. The aim of the report was to outline the achievement of outcomes and business benefits to emerge from the process of carrying out the project.

A detailed description of the project activities was required including the changes implemented as a result of the project. The reports also required an account of the benefits of the project in terms of its impact on retention, absence and associated cost savings. These measures were quantified in terms of previous or 'baseline' and current figures, thus highlighting potential improvements over the lifetime of the project. The final reports also asked for details of any reasons why such outcomes might not be attributable to the WLB-CF project and whether there were any unexpected outcomes to emerge from the implementation of the projects.

Both the DfEE and now the DTI have placed great importance on the dissemination of good practice and harvesting the lessons learned from the WLB-CF projects. With this in mind, some employers were asked to participate in the development of case studies, based on their participation in the WLB-CF. To date, 47 case studies describing the outcomes and benefits of work-life balance have been published on the DTI website and a booklet of 50 cases from a variety of industry sectors was published (DTI, 2003).

Project activities and outcomes

From the first three rounds of the WLB-CF, it was possible to identify some general trends in both the aims and objectives of the WLB-CF projects and the types of intervention that were carried out in the participating organisations:

- The most frequently reported reason for organisations to approach the WLB-CF was because of difficulties recruiting and retaining employees. The other two most highly reported reasons were to address issues associated with low staff morale and high levels of absenteeism.

- It is unsurprising that the most common aim of the WLB-CF projects centred on addressing and improving the recruitment and retention of staff. A significant number of the projects also had the broader aim of developing flexible working arrangements, or to formalise, or develop further, their current work-life balance policies.

- Of the types of projects that were implemented during the three rounds of the WLB-CF, those aimed directly at introducing a wider range of flexible working opportunities made up of the vast majority of the projects in Rounds One, Two and Three. Coupled with the implementation of actual changes in practice, many of the projects combined this with awareness raising on work-life balance issues within the organisations.

- On completion of the projects, reports regarding the impact of the WLB-CF suggest that the major benefit to come out of the projects had been the implementation or further development of flexible working policies and practices. The participating organisations also frequently observed that staff job satisfaction and morale had improved and this was attributed to the introduction of the work-life balance policies themselves.

Aims and objectives of this evaluation

The primary aim of the evaluation study described in this report was to assess whether the WLB-CF programme achieves its aims and objectives. The original DfEE project specification called for an assessment of *'the extent to which outputs and outcomes are in practice delivered'*. The requirement was to focus on both activities at the programme level and at the level of individual WLB-CF projects. The project specification also noted that potentially extraneous factors might impact on both the outputs, for example the changes to occur within projects, and outcomes, i.e. the effects of those outputs.

It was clear to the evaluation team that such multi-level requirements would require a multi-methodological evaluation, encompassing both an assessment of the programme itself, in terms of the effectiveness of the processes and delivery of the programme and an assessment of the impact of the programme, based on the experiences of both employers and employees. Since the evaluation would necessarily be operating within a limited timescale, it focused on investigating Rounds One, Two and Three of the WLB-CF. The evaluation adopted a methodology that included the following:

- A quantitative analysis of project results based on the interim and final reports of 105 projects from Rounds One, Two and Three of the WLB-CF.
- In-depth case studies of WLB-CF projects, based on interviews with employers, staff and work-life balance consultants and members of the WLB-CF team at PwC.

Table One provides details of the organisations that participated in the case study evaluation and outlines their key demographic characteristics.

Structure of the report

In this report, each chapter outlines findings from different aspects of the evaluation carried out between September 2001 and May 2003.

Chapter Two takes a quantitative view of the programme in providing an analysis of the findings gathered from the project final reports. This analysis encompasses the vast majority of the data supplied by the project participants through the means of the final reports submitted to the DTI as the projects drew to a close.

Chapter Three takes an in-depth view of the experiences of both employers, employees and work-life balance consultants who were engaged in the implementation of 13 WLB-CF projects. It highlights the stakeholders' experiences of carrying out the projects, the obstacles encountered, the factors associated with successful implementation and the impact of the projects on the organisation and its employees.

Chapter Four highlights the key conclusions to emerge from the evaluation and discusses some of the implications of these for the further development of work-life balance for policy and employers.

1. Organisations participating in the case study evaluation

Rounds	Sector	Region	Size
Round 1			
Wirthlin Europe	Finance and business services	North West	Small 1-49
Merton Borough Council	Public sector administration	London	Large 250+
Yorkshire Building Society	Finance and business services	Yorkshire and Humberside	Large 250+
Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)	Education, health and other services	London and East	Large 250+
J. Rothwell and Son	Agriculture, mining, manufacturing and utilities	North West	Medium 50-249
Round 2			
Gatwick Express Ltd.	Transport, storage and communications	London	Large 250+
Durham County Cricket Club	Retail, wholesale and hospitality	North East	Medium 50-249
Round 3			
Brocklewood Primary School	Education, health and other services	East Midlands	Small 1-49
Cambridgeshire County Council	Public sector administration	East	Large 250+
Cleveland Police	Public sector administration	North East	Large 250+
Unison	Public, other	London and regional	Large 250+
The Countess of Chester Hospital Trust	Education, health and other services	North West	Large 250+
Perfecta Ltd.	Other (private)	South West	Small 1-49

2
Analysis of final reports

Introduction

This chapter describes the activities and outcomes of 105 WLB-CF projects participating in the first three rounds of the Challenge Fund. The findings presented are from the analysis undertaken on the data from the final reports of the WLB-CF projects. After each funding round of the WLB-CF, when the funded organisations had completed their work-life balance projects, they were obliged to write a final report in conjunction with the work-life balance consultant they had worked with. The DTI and PwC provided a template for these reports, so that they all contained the same type of information under the same headings. This consistently structured format made the reports well suited for quantitative analysis. Although most of the findings in this chapter are based on quantitative data, they have been supplemented with quotes from the final reports. To confirm the findings of the data presented in the final reports, some sections have been cross-checked with data from the application forms and the projects' interim reports.

This chapter starts with giving a brief introduction to the methodology utilised in the analysis of the reports. A more extensive account of the methodology used is presented in Appendix B. To give an impression of the final sample of organisations included in this analysis, the projects are presented in terms of their demographic characteristics such as the organisation's size, industry sector and location.

The structure of the analysis generally follows the structure of the final reports i.e. the sub-headings within the analysis section are the same as those in the final reports. These are:

- Context and aims of the projects
- External and internal research
- Work-life balance initiative implementations
- Time commitment made by the fund organisation
- Examples of impact
- Further interventions for work-life balance

There is a section dedicated to the overall impression of the WLB-CF project and general comments on the process. The final section relates to whether the Challenge Fund projects really made a difference to the organisations in terms of work-life balance. The chapter ends with a conclusion summarising the main findings in the chapter.

Although the writing of the final reports was meant to be a collaborative task, some reports appear to have been written mainly by the consultants (using 'they' and 'them' when describing the interventions) and others are written

largely by the funded organisations. The quotes used in this chapter are taken from the final reports and, since it is not made clear in the report who has written the different sections, it is not possible to supplement the quotes with the job titles of the writers. To secure the confidentiality of the writers' comments, the work-sector categories developed by PwC to structure the applications received were used. Some of the sections are illustrated using extracts from the final reports as vignettes. These extracts have been highlighted in boxes throughout the chapter.

Methodology

In order to analyse the data from the WLB-CF final reports, a database was designed using Microsoft Access. The total number of reports received at the point of analysis was 109, 105 of which were included in the analysis. The analysis is based on final reports from Rounds One, Two and Three. Due to the different size and time frames of the project rounds it was not possible to gather all final reports from the three rounds. The final numbers of reports included in this analysis are 49 reports from Round One organisations, 15 reports from Round Two organisations and 45 reports from Round Three organisations. All the final reports from Round One and Two organisations are included in this analysis but some final reports from Round Three organisations are missing.

Each section of the 105 final reports was coded into the database. The database was created originally by PwC but as new reports were added its structure was modified. Due to some inconsistency in the format of the final reports some of the sections have been amalgamated and analysed together.

Demographic characteristics of the WLB-CF projects

Organisation size

Fourteen final reports described projects carried out in small organisations (between 1-49 employees), 19 were from medium organisations (between 50–249 employees) and 70 from large organisations (more than 250 employees). Two did not give the size of the participating organisation or any other description. Adding the data from the application forms to the analysis, a complete list of the projects participating in the programme is shown in Table 2.

2. Size of organisations

	Large (250+)	Medium (50–249)	Small (1–49)	Not given	Total
Accepted applications	129	36	24	7	196
Final reports	70	19	14	2	105

A number of the work-life balance consultants emphasised that the WLB-CF gave them an opportunity to work with smaller organisations. They mentioned that the programme had given them new insight in to how smaller organisations work and how the implementation of work-life balance initiatives differs with organisational size.

Industry Sector

A wide range of industry sectors were selected for the WLB-CF programme. The largest group represented were commercial or private sector organisations, at 34 per cent, followed by public sector bodies and councils at 23 per cent (Table 3).

3. Industry sector

	Number of projects
Commercial/private sector	36
Councils and local authorities	24
Charities	16
School/university/research	10
Hospitals	8
Services	4
Police	2
Housing associations	2
Financial	1
Fire	1
Prisons	1
Total	105

Location

The vast majority of the organisations selected were sole site, or termed 'local'. 62 per cent of the projects selected represent local industries. This is more than twice that of national industries, at 29 per cent (Table 4).

4. Location grouped

	Number of projects
Local	65
National	30
International	10
Total	105

It is interesting to note that some of the projects (9.5 per cent) were carried out in international organisations. Indeed parts of the work-life balance initiatives in these organisations were actually carried out abroad. For example a major charitable organisation organised two days training in work-life balance issues in the River-Basin area of Calcutta. A number of staff interview statistics includes employees in Bangkok and Nairobi.

Analysis of the final reports

Context and aims of the projects

Although there were a large variety of sectors participating in the WLB-CF programme, some of the staff issues presented in the reports were strikingly similar (Table 5).

5. Staff issues presented in the final reports

	Number of projects
Difficulties in recruitment and retention	51
Low morale	38
High absenteeism and/or sickness leave	35
High turnover of staff	12
Geographical dispersal of staff	11
Competitive labour market	11
Alternative to salary incentives	10
Need to attract women/ethnic minorities	8

The most frequently occurring of the staff issues presented were; 'difficulties in recruitment and retention' (51 projects), 'low morale' (38 projects) and 'high absenteeism' (35 projects).

Interestingly, the most frequently occurring staff issue was 'difficulties in recruitment and retention'. Almost every other report mentions this (51 out of 105). In terms of the aims of the project, the wish to become an 'employer of choice' appears several times in the reports:

*'To attract potential employees in skill shortage areas.'
(Commercial sector, Round One)*

*'Not regarded as an employer of choice.' (Public sector, Round
One)*

*'Worry that women in particular are being discouraged from
more senior roles because of long-hours culture.' (Public sector,
Round One)*

As mentioned in the methodology section, the contexts and aims of the reports
were coded and analysed together. The coding resulted in a total of 287
counted aims and contexts cited, with an average answer of 2.7 aims per
funded organisation. The ten most frequently occurring issues are presented in
Table 6.

6. Project aims

	Times mentioned
Improve recruitment and retention	41
Develop flexible working solutions within business context	38
Formalise and promote existing WLB policies	27
Reduce absenteeism	24
To be an employer of choice / attractive employer / meet IWL standard / WLB standard	24
Improve morale	23
Opportunity for review	22
Change organisational culture	19
Change long hours culture	16
Develop first WLB policy	15

Tables 5 and 6 are consistent in that the staff issues presented are aligned to
the aims of the projects described. As with staff issues, 'recruitment and
retention' scores highest in the projects' aims (Table 6). It may be worth noting
that both project contexts and aims are described retrospectively in the final
reports, and might differ from those expressed in the applications.

Other issues that came up in the context and aims section included: to improve
the internal and external perception of the organisation; to improve staff
relations; to attract a broader staff base (in particular women); and to be able to
exploit new technologies within the projects.

External and internal research

The majority of the funded work-life balance projects carried out extensive
research prior to WLB-CF implementation. Research was mainly used to
diagnose the organisations' needs. In terms of internal research, 26 of the
projects described how they had analysed existing documents. Eighteen of
them reviewed existing employment policies and procedures and eight looked
at workforce data already reviewed by the organisation. Although some of the

information already existed, the majority of the consultants spent time gathering their own data about the funded organisations. Analysing the methods used provides a clear picture of the extensive amount of both time and resources that was invested in the diagnosis phase (Table 7).

7. Research methods used

	Times used
Staff survey	41
Focus group	35
Interviews	19
Workshops	15
Literature review	3
Away day	2
Phone interviews	2
Walkabouts	2
Total	119

There is reason to believe that the above total of 119 should actually be higher, since not all reports contained information about how the funded organisation gathered information internally or externally.

External research was conducted in 16 organisations. A keyword used in seven organisations was 'benchmarking'. Other organisations describe benchmarking activities in terms of external research to identify best practice in other organisations.

Work-life balance initiative implementations

In some cases the WLB-CF projects did not result in the implementation of any changes. Rather, the final outcome took the form of recommendations based on the research carried out. Nevertheless, the majority of projects did result in the implementation of work-life balance initiatives. The main activities described in the final reports were: changes in working practices; policy development and implementation; and communication of work-life balance issues (Table 8).

8. Activities implemented in the projects selected for the WLB-CF

	Times mentioned
Flexible working hours/practices	55
- Remote/homeworking	20
- Part-time working	6
- Job sharing	4
Total	**85**
Increased work-life balance awareness	28
- WLB information packs or toolkits designed	19
- Communication/staff involvement improved	26
- Health awareness for staff	7
Total	**80**
WLB policies implemented	39
- Leave policies	12
- Family-friendly policies	7
- Absence management policies	6
- Career break/secondment policies	4
Total	**68**
Management development	17
Staff development/performance appraisal/reward system	13
Better use of technology	11
Improved recruitment/retention procedures	10
Improvements in work environment	7
Changes in pay settlements	4

The most frequent change implemented was the introduction or expansion of flexible working arrangements within the funded projects. The number of initiatives in this category that were described in the final reports was 85 among 105 completed projects. The second most reported change was improved communication on work-life balance issues. Many of the consultancies spent a significant amount of time informing both managers and staff about work-life balance issues. More than half of the organisations (68 of 105) implemented their first, or improved current work-life balance policies.

The fourth most frequently implemented type of intervention was to carry out some form of management development. This often took the form of development programmes directly related to work-life balance issues i.e. supporting managers in dealing with requests for flexible working and understanding employees' needs. There are also examples of where both communication and management development had a much more general use in aiding business development rather than just work-life balance.

It is interesting to note that the most commonly occurring factor in the context of the project descriptions and aims – recruitment and retention – had only been addressed in ten organisations. Although it appeared to be important in describing the issues facing the selected organisations, it was not prioritised in

describing the projects' outcomes. A reason for this might be that the project did not focus on recruitment and retention or that the writing of the report came before any new recruitment and retention systems had been implemented.

Time commitment made by the fund organisation

The level of time spent on a project was presented very differently in the reports. Many organisations said it was difficult to quantify. The reports documented considerable variation in the time spent on the projects. One organisation said that their commitment of three hours per week was more than they had originally anticipated, while another spent half of each week on the project without commenting that it was taking too much time. The following comments illustrate this:

> *'In total, the time commitment is estimated at 336 hours, approximately half of which was spent by the district in planning, and in the officers receiving the training.' (Public sector, Round Three)*

> *'The Trust committed at least one day per week to project management time, either in terms of project management or project management support.' (Public sector, Round Three)*

> *'Estimated input is 50 per cent of one senior officer's time.' (Public sector, Round One)*

> *'Significantly more time than originally anticipated — at least three hours per week.' (Voluntary sector, Round Three)*

As Table 9 shows, there was a tendency for organisations and consultancies to spend more time than anticipated on the projects. Linked to this fact, many of the reports said that they would have preferred to spend even more time on the projects.

Since it was usually the HR manager within the organisation who was identified as the product champion for the project, it is unsurprising that the analysis found that HR personnel had spent the most time on the projects (Table 9). Some organisations had appointed their own 'action team' or 'project team' for the work-life balance initiative and, in those cases, they seem to have spent the most time on it. A significant amount of project time was spent with senior staff. One reason was that they needed training for the project, and another was that some projects met resistance at senior level and so there was a need to actively involve these managers to instil a sense of commitment (management 'buy in').

9. Time commitment

	Codes	Times mentioned
Estimated time taken	< 30 days	21
	> 60 days	14
	30–60 days	14
	Less than required	10
	More than anticipated	4
	Appropriate	9
	Significant	18
	Difficult to quantify	4
Time commitment by whom	Human resources personnel	22
	Senior management	13
	Project team	7
	Health and safety	3
	IT	2
	Teaching staff	2
	Training department	2
	Cross-department	1

Examples of impact

Not every organisation filled in this section and some reports included examples of impact in other sections. For that reason, Table 10 is analysed from two sections: 'interventions made' and 'examples of impact'.

10. Top ten examples of impact

	Number of projects
Take-up of flexible working hours	27
Positive staff feedback/improved morale/staff satisfaction	22
Reduction in absence/sickness levels	21
Job-sharing/career break/part-time working/compressed working week/homeworking	14
Awareness	14
Reduction in staff turnover	12
Improved productivity/service delivery	11
Staffing levels increased to reduce overtime/long hours	10
More efficient/effective working	10
Improved working environment	9

There were a total of 207 examples of impact reported by the project teams giving a mean of two examples of impact per organisation. This presents a biased picture since the number of examples per project varies between none and five.

Further interventions for work-life balance

Some of the consultancies developed close working relationships with the funded organisations and there are examples where this has continued beyond the lifecycle of the WLB-CF supported projects.

> *'In order to provide continuity and support once this project has ended, the operations manager has arranged to have monthly management coaching sessions with one of the consultants'. (Public sector, Round One)*

A commercial organisation in Round Three reports on the project experience in the following way: The senior management team are fully committed to taking things forward themselves and in the next year will be reviewing and implementing the following:

- The development of a vision, values and strategy for the long term
- More management development — all managers need support to develop their people skills. They hope to continue to use the consultant to support us here, especially on their open programmes
- Improvement of communication — suggestion schemes, employee improvement teams, focus groups etc
- Development of the work-life balance and long term involvement in the business for the senior team
- Review additional means of getting extra funding to support ongoing needs
- Roll out work-life initiatives for employees

Quotes from other final reports also reflect on the maintenance of momentum beyond the formal project end.

> *'The association intends to continue looking at flexible working practices and a further implementation of the toolkit provided by the consultancy.' (Commercial sector, Round Three)*

> *'It is intended to continue to develop work-life balance initiatives and implement them across the company to include Scotland and Wales.' (Commercial sector, Round Three)*

> *'We will continue to foster a culture of work-life balance within the organisation. We expect to see a greater commitment to excellence in retailing emerge from the operational framework that has been put in place during the project, especially from the development and performance-review process.' (Commercial sector, Round Three)*

> *'Intend to set up monitoring system in longer-term. (Funding is required to do this).' (Public sector, Round Two)*

Other final reports stated that due to the Challenge Fund the organisations were motivated to further develop work-life balance initiatives. Some also reported they would not be able to do that without further funding:

> *'The concept of work life balance is a new one for the organisation and the project has been an invaluable introduction and, hopefully, a springboard to new projects.'* (Public sector, Round One)

Overall impressions of the WLB-CF programme

The 'overall impressions' section of the final reports contained a rating scale ranged from 'not helpful', 'ambivalent', 'positive' and 'extremely positive'. In Table 11, 92 out of 100 organisations report that they were either 'positive' or 'extremely positive' towards the projects. Just one final report concluded that the project was 'not helpful', while seven were 'ambivalent'.

11. Overall impressions of the WLB-CF programme

	Number of projects
Extremely positive	35
Positive	57
Ambivalent	7
Not helpful	1
Total	100

Success factors

It was requested that every final report include three factors that contributed to the success of the project and three barriers to success. Most organisations filled in this section and the total number of success factors mentioned was 298. If every organisation had listed three success factors it would have led to a total of 315. The top ten success factors are presented in Table 12.

12. Frequency of success factors

Success factors cited	Number of projects
Senior management buy-in	63
Quality of consultancy relationship	59
General staff involvement	36
HR commitment	20
Staff commitment	17
Recognition of the need to change/build on existing initiatives	17
Internal project management	16
Piloting	14
Good initial project design	11
Focus groups	8

The five most frequently occurring success factors all centred on people 'buying-in' to or being committed to the project. Other factors such as the research being carried out (mentioned five times), good resourcing (mentioned twice) and utilisation thereof (mentioned twice), were at the bottom of the list, and not mentioned in this table, which includes only the top 10 success factors.

Barriers to progress

In contrast to the success factors, only the third most frequently occurring barrier to progress relates to staff involvement in a project. A new factor not mentioned in the success factors is organisational culture. This suggests that it is another way of describing how people in the organisation may have represented barriers to progress (Table 13).

13. Frequency of barriers to progress

Barriers cited	Number of projects
Competition from operational factors	35
Existing organisational culture	34
Scepticism from senior staff	23
Time pressures	22
Competing initiatives	19
Co-ordinating the initiative across large/diverse organisation	18
Financial restraints	18
Organisational situation at time of initiative	16
Resources	16
Unrealistic timescales	14

The other barriers to progress are linked to lack of resources and time available to devote to the WLB-CF projects. Many staff members were busy with their operational tasks and found it difficult to give sufficient time to the work-life balance project. Some organisations mentioned the same factor as both a success and a barrier to progress. Here are two examples:

A large private sector organisation in the IT industry in Round One listed these factors to success and barriers to progress:

Successes	*Barriers*
Senior management buy-in	Financial restraints
Consultancy relationship	Existing organisational culture
Recognition of the need to change	Lack of management take-up

A large public organisation in the educational sector in Round One reported:

Successes	*Barriers*
Consultancy relationship	Organisational situation at time
Senior management buy-in	Staff not leading by example
General staff involvement	Lack of available staff

General comments on the process

The extent of responses in this section varied considerably. Some organisations were generally pleased with the process and wanted to express this to people at either the DTI or PwC. Naming people involved was common, but personal details have been omitted here.

Comments on the roles of DTI and PwC

In terms of what had been managed well, approximately 41 per cent of the organisations expressed positive comments on the support received by the DTI and PwC. The content of the comments focused mainly on the flexibility given to complete the projects funded:

> *'Given the difficulties encountered in relation to the timings, the flexibility which has been shown is both encouraging and appreciated.' (Public sector, Round One)*

> *'After the project started, they left us alone to get on with it, very good.' (Public sector; Round Three)*

14. What was managed well

Theme	Sub Category	Times mentioned
Support	Support from DTI/PwC	27
	Flexibility in meeting deadlines	7
	Flexibility in payment	2
	Guidance in report writing	4
	Interest shown in the project	2
	Freedom to carry out work independently	1
	Total	**43**
Organisation	Clear role of DTI and PwC	2
	Smooth process	6
	Simple application process	5
	PwC consultancy writing initial scoping report	5
	Freedom to select the consultant	1
	Good reporting style	1
	Realistic time frame	1
	Total	**21**
Communication	Clear documentation	8
	Using different contact methods	1
	Direct contact with PwC	4
	Good working relationship with PwC	5
	Total	**18**

Table 14 shows that there is an overall satisfaction with the communication received and that the documentation was clear and inspiring. The following quotes support this statement:

> *'The consultants have received appropriate information and support from both parties as and when requested.' (Voluntary sector, Round Three)*

> *'From the consultants' point of view, DTI and PwC guidance and support has been clear and helpful.' (Public sector, Round One)*

> *'The project was well run and it was very easy to communicate with PwC. The initial assessment before being awarded the*

> funding was very intense, but this made us value the award more, knowing we had worked hard for it.' (Public sector; Round One)

Some organisations, and mainly the consultants taking part in the projects, developed a close relationship with PwC during the WLB-CF programme. Aside from the positive feedback on the roles of the DTI and PwC, the final reports also focused on what did not work well and what could have been managed better (Table 15).

As shown in Table 15, the time frame seems to be the main issue that could have been managed better in the programme. Some organisations claimed that there was not enough time for the projects and others focused on the timing of the projects in relation to the seasons of the industry and the cycle of the financial year.

> 'Expectation of results in short period of time felt ambitious. It is entirely understandable to want to see some quick results, but where the changes implemented are expected to result in changes of management awareness and understanding and bottom-line financial results, the timescale was too short.' (Public sector, Round One)

> 'The timing of this project has been particularly difficult for a company in the retail sector. Not only has the main bulk of work been during the busiest time but this final report also comes just as the Christmas season starts.' (Commercial sector, Round Three)

> 'We would question the use of setting targets halfway through and doing an interim report. Because mentoring projects need a longer lead time, it's only at the end of the project that targets are even set, so there seems little sense in looking at figures in the interim.' (Public sector, Round One)

These comments are not reflected in Table 9 where the organisations are asked to estimate the time used for the Challenge Fund project. Ten organisations mentioned that they had less time than required for the projects and four commented that they spent more time than anticipated, while a total of 33 comments were made about time in Table 15. The main reason why the two tables do not correlate is because the data came from two different sections in the final reports. The writers of the final reports were first asked to give the estimated time used (Table 9) and towards the end of the report they were asked to comment on what could have been managed better (Table 15).

15. What could have been managed better

Theme	Sub Category	Times mentioned
Time	Unrealistic time frame	19
	Bad timing in financial year	1
	Lack of time for:	
	Initial target setting and report	5
	Evaluation	4
	The WLB-CF Fair	2
	Selection of consultancies	2
	Total	**33**
Reporting	Evaluation indicators not suitable	20
	Lengthy reports	2
	Too much reporting	2
	Report format not user friendly	5
	Total	**29**
Organisation	Guidance for writing of reports not good enough	4
	Project life-cycle too short	3
	Lack of competence in scoping consultant from PwC	1
	Projects too rigid	1
	Overly bureaucratic	2
	Bad matching of consultants	7
	Complicated arrangements for payments	1
	Marketing of the programme not good enough	2
	Total	**21**
Communication	Lack of communication between projects	6
	Little direct contact with DTI/PwC	4
	Late information about time frame and required reports	3
	Not clear about DTI and PwC's role	1
	Total	**14**

Another issue cited for potential improvement has been the reporting process itself. Five organisations did not find the reporting format 'user friendly'; whilst others mentioned that there were too many reports or too lengthy reports required:

> 'The format for these reports is not user friendly and does not provide scope to allow the project's benefits to shine.' (Public sector; Round Three)

In breaking down the comments, those concerning the format of the final reports, target setting, and the recording of indicators and outcomes, provoked more comments than any other:

> 'While we understand the need to set quantifiable targets to measure the success of the project, the target-setting process

> *was very complex and we feel that too many targets were involved. More flexibility is needed on performance indicators, e.g. figures were wanted for the end of September and we don't necessarily compute to those dates. It created extra bureaucracy and in any case performance indicators are not the whole picture, as it is not just the Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund which causes figures to change, so this is a slightly distorted view and too simplistic.' (Commercial sector, Round One)*

> *'It has been difficult to set realistic evaluation criteria for the project since the measures developed by the DTI / PwC are more relevant to large commercial organisations. Financial measures in particular are difficult to apply in an organisation such as this.' (Voluntary sector, Round One)*

> *'…thought that the timescales were perhaps too ambitious and more time to reflect on each of the stages of the project would have been beneficial. The focus on hard measures was not felt to be totally appropriate to the project, as many of the issues addressed were of a "softer" nature, for example cultural factors such as morale within the council.' (Public sector; Round One)*

The evaluation criteria provoked a lot of reactions, but they did not focus only on the format of the report.

> *'The Work-Life Balance Project has not only assisted the association in the areas identified in the terms of reference (i.e. recruitment and retention, sickness absence, customer satisfaction) but has also allowed the organisation to become more focused in dealing with future requests for work-life balance.' (Voluntary sector, Round Three)*

> *'The process of application and the implementation of the project have worked well. However, the target setting and evaluation measures could have been more flexible to allow greater tailoring of the individual circumstances of companies – ensuring that they are relevant and realistic.' (Voluntary sector, Round One)*

Did it make a difference?

The work-life balance initiatives described in the final reports reflect the wide variations in work-life balance awareness among different organisations. Some of the organisations had started raising work-life balance issues prior to the implementation of the projects, which meant they were able to use the time with the consultant to actually carry out changes in the organisation. Other organisations were introduced to work-life balance issues for the first time, and some of the issues presented in the applications confirm this.

Nineteen of the 105 organisations said they that had already started working on work-life balance issues prior to the projects. This raises the question of whether they would have carried out the work done in the projects anyway. Only two final reports stated that they had no flexible working arrangements in place prior to the projects. This raises the question of Additionality i.e. did the programme add something to the organisations that they otherwise would not

have had? Some quotes show that the funding received has been crucial for the organisations' development in work-life balance issues:

> 'We would not have done it had it not been for the funding...' (Voluntary sector, Round Three)

> 'Before the Challenge Fund Project we were already aware that getting work-life balance right was a key imperative for us to aid recruitment and retention of staff. The project has enabled the trust to focus on how to get ownership of staff and managers in implementing a work-life balance policy – a lesson we will learn from in rolling out our future work-life-balance policies' (Deputy Director of Human Resources. public sector, Round Three)

> 'The WLB-CF funding has enabled us to bring in expertise that we could not have afforded from our own resources. As a charity it is important to us to ensure we provide a good working environment and we have been pleased to have the opportunity to improve our work-life balance measures.' (Director, voluntary sector, Round Three)

These quotes suggest that further developments of work-life balance would not have happened without the funding provided by the WLB-CF and that the funded organisations aimed to further develop work-life balance initiatives after the end of the funded projects. Another important consideration is the sustainability of the work-life balance practices within these organisations. One section in the final reports relates to plans for further interventions. The data from the majority of the projects suggests that a large number of the organisations see the time invested so far as being just the beginning of long-term changes:

> 'The issue of work-life balance is crucial to all teachers, and the government is at last beginning to take the issue seriously. This project has given us the opportunity to understand the issue as it relates to our own staff and to be in a strong position to introduce practical and effective measures when the funding at last becomes available.' (Public sector; Round Three)

> 'We recognise that work-life balance issues are becoming more important to our staff and felt that we need to prepare for legislation on this issue and consider how increased flexibility and awareness of work-life balance issues could help us improve business results. Many of the issues link well with the outcomes and projects flowing from the work we are doing on our vision.' (HR Director. commercial sector, Round Three)

Quotes from people taking up flexible working arrangements show that there was a great interest in work-life balance and there is reason to believe that the project initiatives will develop further:

> 'Since starting the Work-Life Balance Scheme I have found it immensely valuable to myself and my family as I am able to tailor my working week to meet the needs of my wife's work without the need for expensive childcare. I would recommend the scheme to anyone to try and sincerely hope that it continues long into the future.' (Officer. public sector, Round Three)

Conclusion

The WLB-CF has enabled employers to introduce significant changes in their employment practices to create greater awareness and develop policies to support work-life balance.

Based on this analysis of the WLB-CF final reports, the majority of the organisations were 'positive' or 'extremely positive' towards the WLB-CF programme. It confirmed the importance perceived by the organisations of continuing to work on work-life balance issues raised during the projects.

As well as the positive feedback in the final reports, there seems to be recognition that the WLB-CF projects carried out are just the beginning of a long process in setting work-life balance on the agenda for the organisations:

> *'Due to the amount of time and funding used for the feasibility study, it is fair to reflect that we have only scratched the surface with internal work-life balance.'* (Work-life balance consultant, Round Three)

Key findings

- One of the most frequently stated reasons for organisations to apply for funding was to improve recruitment and retention.
- Of the 105 projects, 17 decided to undertake general management development as part of the work-life balance initiative.
- There was a tendency for both organisational staff and consultants to spend more time than planned on the project. Further, there was a general consensus that more time was needed to complete the projects.
- A few consultancies have carried on working with the funded organisation.
- 92 per cent of the staff expressed either 'positive' or 'extremely positive' impressions of the projects. Only one organisation said the project had not been helpful.
- Senior management 'buy-in' has been listed as both a success factor if present and a barrier if absent during the WLB-CF projects. Thus the strengths and weaknesses of the project can often hinge on the presence or absence of this critical factor.
- The support and guidance given by DTI and PwC has generally been well received and found to be very effective from the evidence gained from the final reports.
- Consultancies invested much of the time carrying out internal research and in some cases external research. The external research was mainly benchmarking activities with similar organisations. Staff surveys, focus groups, interviews and workshops appear to be the most frequently used data gathering methods.
- The programme has increased work-life balance awareness in the funded organisations and the majority have since altered their flexible working practices.
- Organisations and consultants would have liked to have known about other projects and perhaps had the chance to collaborate with them. One of the reports suggested there should have been a forum or a resource centre where the different organisations could have shared their experiences.
- A number of organisations said that it was too early to evaluate the projects in terms of financial savings, retention, absence and recruitment.

Major discernible outcomes of the WLB-CF projects include:

- The introduction, of a wide range of organisations to the concept of work-life balance and the development of a greater awareness of the benefits of work-life balance.
- The establishment of a wide variety of work-life balance initiatives within the participating organisations.
- The inculcation of a work-life balance culture, and the establishment of sound foundations for further developments and the sustainability of work-life balance practices.
- Spin-off effects in terms of sideline developments in systems and procedures, such as systematic records, childcare initiatives, and employee counselling to support permanence.

In the next chapter findings from case studies of 13 WLB-CF projects are outlined in more detail. This in-depth analysis outlines the experiences of the stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of the projects.

3

Experiences from the WLB-CF: case study findings

Introduction

This chapter describes the experiences of employers, employees, and work-life balance consultants engaged in the implementation of WLB-CF projects from Rounds One, Two and Three. The accounts of these participants are augmented by findings from interviews with the PwC and DTI Challenge Fund teams. A central objective of this evaluation was to describe and assess the effectiveness of the actual processes involved in the WLB-CF and to gain the perspectives of the various stakeholders in terms of their participation and involvement with the WLB-CF. This chapter gives a detailed account of these participants' views and experiences of being part of the WLB-CF.

The main stakeholders in the WLB-CF projects were: the project champions; the employees; the work-life balance consultants; and the DTI and PwC. 'Project champion' refers to the person responsible for the project in the participating organisation and was normally either a senior or middle manager. 'Employees' refers to either the entire workforce in an organisation or the parts of the workforce that was engaged in the project (e.g. some projects were piloted in specific units or departments within organisations). The 'work-life balance consultants' refers to the independent consultants that were assigned by the DTI to facilitate the implementation of work-life balance initiatives within the funded projects.

Aims and methodology

The main objective of the case study research was to give a detailed account of how a selection of the WLB-CF projects were initiated, planned and implemented, and to understand the impact of those projects on both the organisations and their employees.

The findings outlined in this chapter are based mainly on the accounts of managers and staff from the 13 case study organisations from Round One, Two and Three of the Challenge Fund who were interviewed by The Tavistock Institute evaluation team. In the case of Round One and Two employers, exploratory interviews were carried out in October and November 2001, near the completion of those projects. The case study design also incorporated a longitudinal perspective. The data gathered from the Round Three projects was captured up to three times both during the projects' implementation and then after the projects had been completed. Following these five Round Three

projects through the projects' lifecycle, enabled the evaluators to monitor the various stages of implementation as they unfolded. In additions interviews were conducted with the external consultants who were assigned to the Challenge Fund projects, and with members of the DTI and PwC Challenge Fund teams. In total, this represents the accounts of 28 individuals, who were involved in the first three rounds of the Challenge Fund. A detailed outline of the case study organisations can be found in Appendix A and a description of the research methods is given in Appendix B.

Given the limited number of data-points, it was unfeasible to forward definitive and quantifiable statements. For that reason the analysis makes reference to 'few' regarding two to four projects, 'some' for five to seven projects, 'many' for seven to ten projects and 'most' for more then ten projects. It is not, therefore, the aim of this chapter to attempt to generalise the findings from these case-study projects to the rest of the Challenge Fund. The aim is to give a detailed account of the various stages of the Challenge Fund from the perspectives of the key stakeholders involved in the process over the first three funding rounds.

Structure

The structure of this chapter follows the WLB-CF project lifecycle. The sections of this chapter are therefore ordered in the following way:

- *Initial stages of the WLB-CF*

  This includes the reasons the organisations applied for support from the WLB-CF and the issues they wished to address through carrying out the project. It also covers their experiences of the application process, the subsequent scoping process and the WLB-CF Fair.

- *Implementation*

  The second section looks at the stakeholders' experiences of implementing the WLB-CF projects and outlines the key considerations, which emerged from those experiences. Issues include: the working relationships between the various stakeholders, such as the project teams, work-life balance consultants and the DTI and PwC; the success factors and barriers encountered; descriptions of the processes and activities which were undertaken.

- *Outcomes and impacts*

  The third section focuses on the actual outcomes to the work-life balance projects. This section details the completion of projects, their feedback towards the reporting structure and their overall feedback on the WLB-CF programme and the projects carried out in retrospect.

Conclusions

The conclusion of the chapter then summarises the main findings and lessons learnt and gives a presentation of the key findings.

Experiences from the initial phases of the WLB-CF

The findings outlined in this section pertain to the processes relating to the initial stages of engagement with the WLB-CF. This includes: the processes through which employers first applied to the Challenge Fund; the scoping process, wherein an initial assessment of the employer's eligibility to join the fund is carried out by PwC consultants; and the WLB-CF Fair. The Fair is a large meeting event, which brings together external consultants and employers. The aim of the event is to match employers to the short-listed work-life balance consultants. At the fair the employers used meetings with the consultants to decide which one they would prefer to work with.

Introduction to the WLB-CF

The participating organisations first heard about the WLB-CF from a variety of different sources. For example, RNIB (Round One) first read about the Challenge Fund in an article in the magazine 'Personnel Today'. Merton Borough Council (Round One) and Unison (Round Three) were introduced to the Challenge Fund via a formal presentation at a conference. The project champion within Gatwick Express (Round Two) was introduced to the Fund by word-of-mouth from a colleague in the transport industry.

Some of the managers interviewed commented that it was difficult to find out more about the Challenge Fund and that it could have been better marketed. For example, the project champion from Yorkshire Building Society commented that when they go to other building societies to talk about what they have done through the Work-life Balance Challenge Fund people tended to react by first asking what the Challenge Fund actually is!

Reasons for applying

Employers listed a variety of reasons for applying for the WLB-CF. Some organisations commented that the main motivation for applying was related to recruitment difficulties in their organisation. This was the case with Gatwick Express where the project champion explained how they wanted to attract a wider cross-section of employees so as to better reflect the demographics of society as a whole. In particular, a more mature workforce and more women employees were identified as a target group for their work-life balance project.

The Board of Wirthlin Europe Ltd was keen to move forward with the WLB-CF because they aimed to grow from a small to a medium-sized organisation and needed to increase staff levels. In order to achieve this Wirthlin Europe Ltd stated that they had to look differently at the way they did things, especially at the way they attracted people to work for them. It was felt by the Board that expansion would require 'getting the right people' to join the organisation and they saw the WLB-CF as a springboard to start this process.

Other case study organisations cited recruitment as the key issue they wished to address through the Challenge Fund. Both Perfecta and J. Rothwell and Son wished to stimulate recruitment, but for different reasons. Perfecta was based in an area of the South West of England characterised by relative prosperity

and a low regional population. It was finding it difficult to attract employees on the wages they were offering. Their rationale was that if they could offer more flexible terms to potential recruits, they would be able to attract people who might not otherwise have contemplated working, such as mothers with dependent children. J. Rothwell and Son were having as many problems retaining existing staff as they were with recruitment. Due to the strenuous nature of the work (picking mushrooms) many employees only lasted for a few months at a time, leading to an almost constant need to recruit. As with Perfecta, the rationale for approaching the WLB-CF was to widen the range of potential recruits.

Organisations such as Unison and Cleveland Police placed a stronger emphasis on changing their organisational culture. Unison was interested in applying to the challenge Fund because they had already worked to develop family-friendly policies including parental leave and childcare. Despite the good work they have done in this area, Unison were frustrated that it had not changed the organisational culture. They wanted to develop further work-life balance strategies to help achieve some of the wider business goals of organising new members and building branch organisations.

Cleveland Police, on the other hand, stated that they needed to change the culture of the Force so as to increase understanding of what work-life balance means. Employees were aware that as a police force there were inevitable constraints on flexibility. Nevertheless, the scope for innovative changes did exist. The project champion for Cleveland Police expressed the concern that '*some of the older supervisors are mostly disciplinarian, dyed in the wool*', and that before any policy changes occurred, there was a need to change the attitudes of these people and that 'sensitivity training' of management was required.

> '*The chances are that such a supervisor, if a member of staff asked for time off because their dog was sick would say 'no we're too busy' with the upshot being that that person will take sick-leave.' (Senior officer, police constabulary, Round Three)*

Some organisations were building on previous flexible working policies while others were very much starting from scratch. Four organisations mentioned that the degree of previous knowledge of work-life balance issues within their organisations varied a great deal. However, in many public sector organisations, schemes such as flexi-time have been in operation for many years.

The application process

The application process for employers

Employers interested in receiving funding from the WLB-CF applied to the relevant Government department (initially the DfEE and then later the DTI) by completing a standard application form, available upon request. The experience of making the application to the Fund varied between the 13 case studies. Many of the employers interviewed considered the application process overly detailed and time consuming. As one Human Resources (HR) manager commented:

> *'Quite daunting, I have to say. It took a long time to fill in, I mean there were a couple of times when I kept thinking, is this really going to be worth it, filling this in, maybe I shouldn't bother. But once it had happened, as I can remember, everything happened really quite quickly.' (Project champion, commercial sector, Round One)*

Another HR manager, this time from the voluntary sector, was in accord, however, it was felt that the application process galvanised and raised awareness within the organisation about the potential impact of the Challenge Fund.

> *'Very detailed application process. However, the process did enable weight to be put behind the issue and prompt the organisation to consider work-life balance seriously – it gave the process credibility. Forced us to consider the amount of time it would take to set up the project' (HR manager, voluntary sector, Round Two).*

The HR manager noted that activities conducted internally as part of the application process were particularly beneficial for 'selling' the project within the organisation. The HR manager in question felt that the scoping visit by PwC as part of the application process, designed to determine the extent to which the organisation was ready for the initiative, led to them carrying out their own 'readiness review' on the same basis. The assessment carried out during the scoping visit identified that staff were very interested in work-life balance and these findings were used to gain support for Challenge Fund project with other managers in the organisation. By contrast other organisations found the application process a 'little too easy':

> *'The impression was that the thing was to say 'Yes' wherever they wanted you to say 'Yes'. We didn't spend a lot of time filling in the application form – can't have taken more than half an hour to do.' (Deputy HR director. public sector, Round Three)*

Similarly, the Cleveland Police testified that they found the application the application process quite straightforward:

> *'The application process was simple, and to the point. The things they asked for were reasonable, they obviously wanted some baseline data, which was measurable, but it was easily found from the office next door.' (Senior officer, police constabulary, Round Three)*

Wirthlin Europe Ltd reported that once the application was sent, the process was very quick. The manager mentioned that she received a phone call from PwC requesting an appointment with her before she had received any paperwork from them. The process therefore appeared to have been rushed by the organisers.

The application process for work-life balance consultants

No serious issues were identified in terms of the application by consultants. The tendering process for consultants to apply to the WLB-CF was carried out by advertising the opportunity through the Official Journal of the European

Communities, or OJEC[1]. Consultants were required to submit applications via the Internet (web-based applications), outlining their areas of expertise, staffing levels and resources. Expressions of interest were received from 70 work-life balance consultants. From these 25 were eventually chosen as approved consultants.

The scoping process

After applications from interested employer organisations had been assessed, PwC consultants visited the short-listed employers to gain a more detailed assessment of their eligibility for funding. The scoping process involved interviewing some of the key stakeholders within each organisation to assess the organisation's need for greater work-life balance development and whether the mechanisms were in place to carry out the intervention. This process resulted in the production of a 'scoping report'. One HR manager felt that the scoping process was beneficial in terms of engaging a range of employees in dialogue around work-life balance issues and fostering interest in the subject:

> *'I appreciated the visit from PwC who interviewed a range of people from the Chief Executive down to really test out whether this was an organisation that could benefit' (Deputy HR Director, public sector, Round Three).*

Conversely, three of the work-life balance consultants commented that generally the scoping report did not provide sufficient information and did not fully prepare them for entry to the project organisation. It was considered superficial by some, and when they entered the organisation and actually started to carry out their own diagnosis, many more issues emerged. This was not a universal view and other external consultants appreciated the prior diagnosis of the organisation's issues as being 'better than going in cold':

> *'We were lucky with Merton (Borough Council) that we did have a PwC scoping exercise... I've only ever seen pretty good ones but I understand that some are less useful than others. Obviously you do quite a bit of background research yourself on the organisation and where it's placed, what its reputation is, ... but it was useful having that kind of scope from PwC.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round One)*

It is unclear why the external consultants' views were so mixed about the usefulness of the scoping process. One reason may be that the initial diagnosis, carried out by PwC and outlined in the scoping reports, was not originally designed to be used by the external consultants. The scoping process was developed to gain a fuller picture of the eligibility of the employer for funding. The reason that the reports were shared with the external consultants after they had been matched to the employer was to engender a basic understanding of the key issues, rather than take the place of an initial diagnosis by the work-life balance consultants themselves. One of the work-life balance consultants felt that the scoping process proved valuable in preparing them for the intervention, but felt that the client also benefited from the process:

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[1] The Official Journal of the European Communities or OJEC is an online service for purchasers within the European Communities to advertise tenders for work.

> *'In 100 per cent of the cases our clients have found that the PwC consultants were excellent, and they have used that word "excellent". When they come in they do a scoping exercise and they try to establish what is going on within the company, they really enjoy that exercise, and 100 per cent of our cases said that. But overall the scoping reports are fine; they give us a good baseline, or a platform, but when we go in to do the terms of engagement that is when we really can get the essence.'*
> *(Work-life balance consultant, Round Three)*

PwC highlighted the fact that the scoping visit and subsequent scoping report are undertaken prior to the employer's acceptance on to the WLB-CF. Employers know that not all the organisations selected for scoping will be funded, thereby creating an atmosphere in which employers may be keen to present themselves at their best (or worst) in order to attract funding:

> *'The employer is usually very keen to highlight particular issues related to WLB, but despite questioning, is not always prepared to provide information on the more general issues facing the company' (PwC consultant, 2003).*

Although there was no suggestion from either PwC, or any of the consultants, that employers deliberately concealed or elevated issues, given the context in which the scoping visits are undertaken, it is not surprising that once the organisation has been allocated funding and the consultants are able to conduct more detailed diagnostic activities other issues surface.

The scoping reports were prepared primarily for the DTI panel, not for the consulting firms, so may not be the most effective means of informing the consultant of the issues. The general finding to emerge from the majority of the work-life balance consultants has been that the scoping reports do not necessarily reflect the extent or complexity of the issues facing the client organisation. At least five of the consultants felt that a fuller diagnosis of the issues was required, before they could effectively move forward in planning the intervention with the client.

The WLB-CF Fair

Once employers had been accepted into the Challenge Fund, the next step was to attend the WLB-CF Fair which was held in London prior to the start of each new round. This was an important part of the initial process, during which employers were matched with the short-listed work-life balance consultants and a series of meetings were arranged to enable them to decide which consultancy practice they would work with.

Both employers and consultants involved in Round One of the WLB-CF were critical of the Fair and perceived that it had scope for improvement. While the Fair seems to have worked for the majority of organisations, several organisations indicated that there were elements of this process that did not work so well.

Uncertainty about its purpose

Most of the managers interviewed (ten out of 13) from the Challenge Fund employers reported that they were unclear about what the Fair was going to

involve and so felt unprepared for it. Round One employers were only informed about the time and date of the Fair two days in advance, which made it difficult to organise the attendance for the key contact person. Some consultants said they would have liked more information on their clients and more time to talk with them prior to the Fair itself, where the final decision on which consultant would work with which employer was to be made. In addition, some of the consultants felt that the Fair was not the most effective way to form initial relationships with clients:

> '*It goes against the normal process of engagement to spend such a short time with a client you will be working with for a year.*' *(Work-life balance consultant, Round One)*

A contributory factor to the success of interventions such as those funded by the WLB-CF is the development of a shared understanding between client and consultant as to the best way forward. In the absence of a space in which to develop such an agreement, it was felt misunderstandings could occur at a later stage. To avoid this, a clear understanding needs to be reached at the initial stages of the engagement with the client:

> '*Companies need to be engaged with the consultant at a much earlier phase than what they currently are, so that they can work out mutually acceptable working arrangements.*' *(Work-life balance consultant, Round Two)*

The location of the Fair

While the WLB-CF extends across England and Scotland, the Fair itself was held in London. Travelling to the Fair for those employers based in the North of England and in Scotland was a seen as a source of some inconvenience. Committing a whole day to attending the Fair may have prevented some senior managers and directors from attending; this may have been particularly true for small businesses:

> '*It was a long way to travel and, once there, it was difficult to get a sense of who could do what for us – since we were only there for a short amount of time.*' *(Senior manager, commercial sector (North of England), Round Two)*

Seven of the managers from the employer organisations (all of whom were located north of Birmingham) suggested that they would have been more likely to make the most out of the Fair if it could have been arranged at a local level. This would reduce the cost, in terms of time as well as money, to the employer, effectively reduce the relative size of the event, and, therefore, enable more time for discussion between employer and consultant.

Too little time

The general experience, from both employers and consultants, was that the Fair was too rushed. Time slots at the Fair for meetings with consultancy representatives were very short (20 minutes) and these conflicted with seminars about the Challenge Fund, which were also being conducted during the Fair. This left many employers with what they felt was insufficient time to talk to a reasonable range of consultants or to consider the merits of the consultants they had been matched with:

> *'There was insufficient time to talk with the consultants, and (we) had the feeling that the decision about who we wanted to work with had to be made too quickly. We needed more guidance from the DTI about how to choose the consultant and how to know if they were going to be the best ones for us to work with.' (Managing director, Commercial sector, Round One)*

> *'It was a bit of a dance, no sooner had you got talking properly than they blew the whistle again and we had to change over. Even in Round Three we were rushed. There was no way we could attend 10 interviews in the day.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round One and Round Three)*

The decision by the employer concerning which consultant to commission was, therefore, based on little more than a brief conversation consisting of introductions and a brief summary of the consultants' experience. The Fair, by the nature of the time constraints, would never enable employers to engage in dialogue with a wider range of consultancy firms. Moreover, employers reported feeling under pressure to make a decision there and then.

The expectation was that by the end of the Fair employers would have been in a position to select the consultancy firm they were going to collaborate with over the next 12 months:

> *'What was worse, at the end of the day you had to send in your paper to say which one you were going to choose. We hadn't even discussed it between the pair of us. So we said we couldn't do that and so we took it back on the train and then faxed it back when we had discussed it. It was very disorganised. A "shotgun marriage".' (HR manager, commercial sector, Round One)*

The DTI WLB-CF team acknowledged that in Round One, because the process was rushed, there was not enough time for employers to meet a sufficiently wide range of consultants at the Fair. In subsequent rounds of the DTI have ensured that information on both employer and consultants was sent to the respective party in plenty of time before the date of the Fair.

The need for more advice on selecting consultants

A managing director highlighted another problem which may not have been accounted for in the original design of Round One – that of employers' lack of experience of working with consultants. It was also noted by the DTI WLB-CF team, via feedback from employers, that more guidance on negotiation and contracting with consultants would have been useful:

> *'Consultants were not something that many employers were used to dealing with and perhaps they needed more hand-holding in terms of how they used the consultant...Also problems in terms of the expectations of what the consultants would do from the employers. The Terms of Engagement were supposed to clarify what was to be done and the different phases of implementation. Looking back there could have been more for employers in terms of informing them of the process and how to work with consultants.' (DTI WLB-CF team member)*

Some employers mentioned that they would have liked more advice and counselling prior to the WLB-CF Fair. At the Fair employers received some information through an information pack and some presentations but, according to the project champion from Wirthlin Europe Ltd, employers were then left to find themselves the right consultancy firm. The same project champion would have appreciated more information on how much freedom employers had in selecting the consultants and the teams who work with consultants. The process by which consultants were teamed up or short-listed to employers was not perceived as open and, to some employers, the process felt rushed.

> *'I mean to make a decision on spending certainly an awful lot of money for a small business on a couple of hours or them putting forewords in without really knowing the business, I would have liked a bit more time, maybe to have seen some other consultants as well.' (Project champion, commercial sector,, Round One)*

RNIB gave a similar view. They would have preferred to receive more guidance from the DTI about how to choose the consultant.

> *'How were we to know if they were the best ones for us to work with....don't know if we made the decision for the right reasons. In the end we chose them because they had the most experience with charities.' (Project champion, voluntary sector, Round One)*

Consultants also 'going into the unknown'

During the initial stages of engagement, and prior to the WLB-CF Fair, the work-life balance consultants expressed a concern that they were 'going into the unknown'. It was only when they started to carry out their own diagnosis and action plan with an organisation, that they realised the real requirements in the organisations. As one consultant noted, the problem is presented as a work-life balance problem but once the diagnosis started it can soon be discovered that the issue is much wider.

> *'It is an illusion. Clients say they want help with work-life balance and think it's a cure for all ills, but it's only one element of the relationship an employer has with an employee. There are other elements at play and you can't look at them or work-life balance in isolation.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round One)*

If the consultant did not carry out an effective diagnosis of the underlying cause of the problem presented by the client this problem may not be resolved, even though the intervention may be effective in addressing work-life balance issues. In other cases, once the diagnostic process was under way, new issues were raised such as health and safety aspects of home-based working, recruitment as well as retention, or organisational culture.

> *'There is a danger of purely looking at the symptoms rather than the causes.' (Work-life balance consultant, voluntary sector, Round One)*

Matching employer and consultant

In general, the process of matching organisations with consultants in the early stages of the WLB-CF was viewed by both employers and consultants as

somewhat arbitrary. Furthermore, matching has sometimes turned out to be inappropriate. One consultancy firm specialising in implementing flexible working in the commercial sector was matched with a school and a care home, while a large financial services employer, looking to introduce a whole raft of 'family-friendly' employment policies, were initially matched with an IT consultancy.

PwC have acknowledged the matching model was too restrictive, particularly in Round One where employers had to choose one of the two consulting firms recommended by PwC. By Round Two, the matching process had evolved so that employers were still recommended two consulting firms, but were free to choose any of the consulting firms who were present at the Fair.

Another innovation developed by PwC included the preparation of an anonymised list of successful employers. The list detailed the sector, region, size and issues facing the employer. Each consultancy firm was then asked to rank their top 15 preferences. Responses were used to assist with the matching process.

'Poaching' clients

PwC noted that the 'market model' for the Challenge Fund Fair was extended further in Round Three but was subsequently misused by one or two consulting firms who, having made contact with employers at the Fair, followed this up with an aggressive post-Fair marketing campaign. In some cases these campaigns were successful – but at the expense of other consulting firms who felt that some firms had not 'played by the rules'. This point was also made by one of the consultants interviewed who was at the Fair for Round Three:

> *'All the DTI rules about consultancies not contacting the clients outside of the Fair were completely broken. Not by us; we lost one major client we had in the bag because another consultancy pestered them outside of the Fair – and to my absolute irritation the client went along with them. Otherwise they would have used us.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round Three)*

Their objection was that there was no policing of the WLB-CF Fair and no penalties to deter consultancy firms from contracting with clients outside of the Fair. Another consultancy firm that had been involved with three rounds of the Challenge Fund also reported that some of the employers that had already entered into agreements with them had been 'harassed' by other consultancy firms after the Fair

The consultant cited above also expressed some dismay that the Fair was becoming more of a 'fairground' where large consultancy firms were able to put on expensive eye-catching stalls with videos, jugglers and free gifts. This could have disadvantaged smaller niche consultancy firms who were unable to compete with such resources:

> *'The last [Challenge Fund Fair] was just awful – like attending a toy exhibition before Christmas. People juggling, it's become a sales exhibition, not an opportunity for professionals to meet with potential clients.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round Three)*

This experience was coupled with that of having clients who had already entered into an agreement effectively being 'poached' by other consultancy firms. In the light of these experiences, the Fair and matching process was modified again following Round Three. This involved PwC developing, and making explicit, rules on good practice when contracting with successful employers. PwC reported that this code of conduct was adhered to in subsequent rounds of the WLB-CF, and has reportedly been positively received by consultants.

Implementation of the WLB-CF projects

Commitment to work-life balance

Any new intervention requires commitment and support from all stakeholders identified. In terms of employee commitment some case studies were engendered through participation of employees in the design phase. A high level of staff involvement throughout the implementation phase was found to enhance implementation and the potential sustainability of interventions. The benefits of this approach have been borne out within organisations who, with their consultants, have designed interventions with employees rather than for employees. For example, a large hospital involved ward staff in devising their own working arrangements, and a large county council identified six different teams (including a junior school, the HR team, and school planning services) to work with the consultant in order to identify their own plans for flexible working.

> *'The consultant met with staff groups and it was staff that came up with the proposals on how WLB should operate. They have a sense of ownership; they were coming up with proposals of what they would like. And it empowered them really. They just feel they have the ability to organise their working day and balance it with their home life.' (Special projects manager, public sector, Round One)*

The commitment to participate in the intervention involved additional work for people within the funded organisation, on top of existing workloads. This placed particular pressure on some staff. Careful project planning and linking implementation to other initiatives were some of the strategies identified for managing the workload.

Another factor influencing the level of commitment to the intervention and subsequent changes, that the employer was only required to commit time to the project, since the projects were fully funded. As one consultant noted:

> *'When an organisation pays for consultancy there is a greater commitment at a senior management level. There would be a high-level board discussion about committing this money to a consultant and a high expectation that there would be measurable outcomes. In the Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund, there is not necessarily high level board commitment and the urgency to achieve is lower.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round Two)*

The need for a participative approach

A more engaged approach allowed for work-life balance and flexible working arrangements to be discussed within the context of the particular issues facing each group. Indeed, the work-life balance consultants interviewed had all engaged in a range of activities as part of designing the intervention and processes for the work-life balance initiatives. They appeared to do this in consultation with employers. Their activities included:

- The joint design of a work plan for the intervention,
- Conducting focus groups and surveys with staff in order to obtain views and attitudes towards work-life balance,
- Facilitating workshops with the project team or management teams.

The topics covered in workshops varied from project to project and included team development and cohesiveness exercises; running effective meetings; goal setting and effective decision making; improving communications, assessing their own work-life balance and use of technology.

The level of commitment to the project from the stakeholders was found to be linked to the degree of commitment to work-life balance prior to involvement in the Challenge Fund. Some employers already had work-life balance on the agenda, and the Challenge Fund merely supported the organisation in achieving its already defined goals. This was the case with Yorkshire Building Society:

> 'Without the WLB-CF, other business issues would have come first, and seen to have greater priority across the business. Looking into flexible working was in our annual plan. That was something that was on our annual plan last year which was carried over. So you see it didn't get done.' (Project champion, commercial sector, Round One)

In some cases, the diagnostic data gathering exercise identified a tension between the need to implement the work-life balance initiatives and wider concerns surrounding the competing business needs of an organisation, which in one case was considered primary to the work-life balance initiative.

> 'The difficulty for us is that the business case takes priority. We simply don't have the time or resources to carry out the initiative as effectively as we would like – since we are always trying to make the business profitable. All the resources in this department are in use – it's a case of "deal with improvements in morale" later on.' (Director of operations, commercial sector, Round Three)

Encountering resistance

Some employers reported that the resistance to work-life balance initiatives was minimal:

> 'Ninety per cent of people have been very open to the idea of change. The organisation is used to change and so the

> *workforce is used to change. It has generally been seen as a win-win situation.' (Project champion. public sector, Round Three)*

Other organisations reported that the resistance was not towards the work-life balance initiative in itself, but towards the increased workload that the projects resulted in. For example, it was found that the demand on resources when enabling employees to work remotely was a source of tension within one of the organisations:

> *'Resistance from the IT support staff who said they couldn't cope with the extra workload of setting people up at home.' (Project champion, voluntary sector, Round One)*

In order to avoid resistance at management level some projects used the consultancy support to deal with management 'buy in'. The views of front-line managers were clearly one issue that work-life balance projects needed to address more rigorously. Tacit resistance was apparent from some managers, voiced in terms of feelings of a loss of control over staff who were not at their desks. Such sentiments were typified by the axiom 'Can't see them, can't manage them'. This was coupled with the view that if staff are not at work they will find lots of ways not to work. In some cases, the staff interviewed considered that there was an underlying conservatism towards work-life balance within the organisation, as manifested in the attitudes held by managers. One comment made about managers' attitudes was:

> *'Some of them (managers) are sceptical. They think that work-life balance is only about working part-time and that in general part-time workers are less reliable. It's what you do and achieve rather than how many hours in the office. Work is what you do, not where you go.' (HR Manager, Service sector, Round Two)*

In one organisation with a head office/branch office structure, there were disparities in both the views and practices of those managers working at the centre and those working within the branch 'network'. Despite the inculcation of work-life balance initiatives within the head office of one of the case study organisations, a great deal of scepticism was shown by one of their branch managers as to whether they could extend work-life balance policies to a busy understaffed branch.

In this context there was also a danger that work-life balance would operate on a 'first come, first served' basis. The first few staff through the door would in effect close it for the rest of the staff. In effect there was apparently only so much flexibility that a small site could absorb.

Lack of 'buy-in' can have serious consequences, especially amongst line managers. One consultant described a case of outright opposition to the intervention, despite undertaking a significant amount of work towards implementing the intervention. It appears that middle management were often the 'gatekeepers' to employees accessing flexible working options:

> *'Really, if we were to do it again, we would put far more effort on interventions at line manager level, far more reference guides and tools and support mechanisms for them. We concentrated on getting general management and senior management on board and perhaps did less with line management– ...And that is the key to introducing flexible working practices'. (HR Manager. commercial sector, Round One)*

One of the work-life balance initiatives specifically targeted managers as a strategy for overcoming resistance. Coaching was provided to help managers cope with changes in working practices. Without such measures it is likely that, in some cases at least, the 'message' in terms of changes in culture or management practices would not have permeated the day-to-day operational practices of the organisation.

Although senior management may support the principles of developing work-life balance within the organisation, evidence from one of the Round One organisations indicates that resistance can come much later in the project's lifecycle, at the point where concrete changes were to be made. It seems that the senior management team grew more apprehensive when the implications, in terms of the degree of change required, were realised:

> *'Initially had meeting with senior managers to see what they thought and assess their response to the idea of work-life balance policies. General enthusiasm for it – but also had concerns such as it would raise expectations amongst staff that couldn't be met, about who was going to do the work that needs to be done if they were all on flexible hours and no one was around.' (HR manager, voluntary sector, Round One)*

It has generally been found that the involvement of first line managers in the formation of work-life balance policies is likely to be crucial in terms of how well work-life balance policies and practices are embedded within the organisations' operations. As one Human Resource manager stated:

> *'There was a certain amount of scepticism from other management staff early on in the roll-out of the initiative. However, in rolling out the initiative we wanted to engage managers first. There was not enough to cover all the staff – the focus was on winning over managers to implement the initiative to the staff in their departments. We wanted to be consistent from the start'. (Senior executive, commercial sector, Round Two)*

Communication in the projects

The projects used much the same channels of communication for informing their employees about work-life balance. Unison, RNIB and Gatwick Express used a combination of internal magazines, newsletters, and intranet to spread the word of the projects. There seemed to be less use of meetings to introduce the projects. Gatwick Express provides a fairly typical example of how the project was communicated to staff. Firstly, articles about the project, its aims and parameters, was published in the company newspaper. Secondly, a memo

was circulated to staff and team members taking part in the pilot were briefed. The staff involved were also sent a questionnaire about what work arrangements they would prefer.

The effectiveness of how the work-life balance project is communicated internally to staff and managers was found to have a significant impact on the level of knowledge and understanding about the project. The work-life balance projects themselves appear to have been communicated with varying degrees of success. In organisations where the initiative was being piloted with a discrete group, staff reported that it had been communicated well, with direct verbal and written communication from their line manager. However, where there had been widespread dissemination of the initiative via the intranet or newsletter, staff were less likely to know about it. In one case, staff across the organisation had been asked to volunteer to be part of the pilot. One employee noted they had found out about the project quite by accident:

> '....I had a conversation with someone and I told them I was interested in working at home and they said I should put my name forward for the pilot. So, notification was last minute. There was no gathering together of the other people taking part in the pilot for a meeting to discuss, in a mutually supportive way, the impact of taking part in the pilot. That would have been useful.' (Training and development manager, voluntary sector, Round One)

RNIB, for one, reported that the communication of the WLB-CF project could have been improved:

> 'In retrospect, our messages about work-life balance to staff should have been clearer – the briefing material was too broad and talked about it in too much of a policy sense rather than explaining it in terms of what it means to an individual – A question and answer process would have been good to include.' (Project champion, voluntary sector, Round One)

The need for role models

Another way of communicating the work-life balance project internally was through role models at senior level. In issues related to work-life balance there has recently been emphasis on the importance of management taking the lead in demonstrating the principles of work-life balance through their own actions. ('*Work Life Manual*', Industrial Society, 2000).   Senior managers can demonstrate to other managers how work-life balance works in practice, particularly in organisations that have a long-hours culture. In addition, it can show employees that alternative working arrangements are acceptable practice within the organisation:

> 'They need to demonstrate by example that it is possible. Show that if you don't work long hours it doesn't mean that you're not committed or no good and you won't be side-lined and not get career opportunities.' (Officer, public sector, Round Three)

It was also acknowledged, however, that a long-hours culture at work can be very difficult to address. While senior management may be supportive of the

principle of work-life balance for their staff, they are also likely to think it is for other people in the organisation, not for them:

> *'They think it doesn't matter what hours they work because others can go home at four. Actually it does matter because staff don't want to put their coat on while others are starting a meeting. That doesn't make them feel good – even if they are lower in the organisation – they feel like they ought to stay – that is what happens'. (Work-life balance consultant, Round Three)*

A manager from Durham Cricket County Club reported that they found it difficult to communicate the Challenge Fund project across the organisation. In exploring reasons for this they commented that there might be a culture of 'them and us' – between the executive/management and the contract staff within the organisation. People in catering/cleaning tended to have different and more issues than those in marketing or management.

Working with work-life balance consultants

For some employers, the WLB-CF was the first time they had worked with HR consultants. The general value of working with external specialists from the consultancy organisations was rated highly. Specific benefits were cited, including the view that the consultants gave the work-life balance initiative a greater 'cachet' and importance than if the project was purely devised and organised from within the organisation. The view that 'If they've brought in these £1000 a day guys, the thing must be important'. Another positive aspect was the value attributed to an external, objective viewpoint of the consultant who was, not bound up in the culture and politics of the organisation, thus enabling them to view the issues more rationally and, therefore, more effectively. In addition, the consultants 'shared' responsibility with the employers to meet the objectives of the projects and ensure deadlines were met, providing further impetus and motivation to 'keep the project going'.

Many organisations were pleased with the consultancy support and a number of comments were made towards their motivation in the projects.

> *'I think the consultant had a belief that this was a product/a process – not just another task. So when it came to writing the Tool Kit it is very much a pro-active involvement rather than any old other task. There was a genuine desire there – a belief in it. It was not just another soft touch for consultancy – with due respect!' (Project champion, public sector, Round One)*

However, some concerns were raised on more than one occasion regarding what were viewed as the inflated fees charged by the consultancy organisations for their services.

> *'I know it's not my money, however, indirectly it is. It is in terms of the fact that I and my business pay taxes to support such schemes and it is in terms of the value for money and the amount of work that gets done for that money. You don't have to be a mathematician to work out that if they were paid £500 per day instead of £1000, I and my firm would have got twice as much work carried out by them'. (Business owner, commercial sector, Round One).*

Another concern cited by one other case concerned the fact that they had to manage the consultants:

> 'We have had to chase them up and manage them on certain issues [...] they did not understand the short time windows that we had to do these workshop activities [...] he was working to his own time frame rather than ours'. (Senior executive, commercial sector, Round Two)

In some cases, the relationship between the client organisation and the consultants deteriorated almost to the point of termination.

One employer recounts the impact which an ill-conceived weekend workshop, set up by one of the consultancy firms, had on the credibility of the project and staff morale:

> 'It was clear that they were just churning stuff out, they hadn't thought it through. They were talking about SMART targets and we'd being doing them for years. We were looking for them to help us with strategies but it was dire. By Sunday we thought let's wrap it up we've had enough.' (Manager, public sector, Round Three)

The HR manager of Wirthlin Europe Ltd also expressed concern about the quality of data reported back from the staff questionnaire administered by the consultants. In addition, the organisation did not have a clear action plan to follow after the intervention with the consultants.

Consultants, on the other hand, commented on their role in keeping the employer on track and on task with the intervention. In some cases, keeping things moving was at times frustrating. For one employer, the level of time spent by the consultants was not what was expected. Although acknowledging the need for the organisation to own the project, they felt that more time spent with the consultant would have been beneficial.

In some cases the consultants were concerned that they were opening a 'Pandora's box' of issues that were often not directly related to work-life balance. In these cases, work-life balance may have been regarded as a 'catch all' which could solve a symptom rather than the problem, and lead to wider organisational changes.

In one case this hampered action beyond the diagnostic stage, which was carried out solely by the consultants. Trying to get the management team to 'buy into' a wider, management-led change can be very difficult if the organisation needs to change in other ways too.

> 'They were great with the planning stuff, thinking excitedly about where we could be, and data gathering, information OK. But when it got to doing anything that was going to start making things difficult then there was resistance.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round One)

The experience of Wirthlin Europe Ltd demonstrates how consultants were selected based on an individual basis rather than on an organisational match:

'At the beginning I had a very clear idea of the way the project was going to run because I had sat down with a consultant, whom I was very impressed with, who was the Project Manager, and she'd met our Board Director [...] there was a change of Project Manager [and] because there wasn't the same level of understanding about the business or the issues or what has been agreed [...] so much time was spent at the front end going over the same ground, that we ran out of days for the deliverables at the end of it.' (Project champion, commercial sector, Round One)

Working with WLB-CF and the DTI

The case studies suggest that work-life balance consultants and the client organisation cannot work in isolation. Since the client was not only the employer, but also the DTI and or PwC, they need a source of guidance to help steer the process. In some instances, guidance was provided by the DTI Work-life Balance team. The day-to-day operational support was viewed as excellent. Specifically, project teams felt that PwC knew the business in which the consultants were operating and the information and advice was always there. Of the consultants interviewed the majority felt that the team at PwC were very supportive, always there for advice and able to tell them what they needed to know straight away.

'Really easy to forge a relationship with, approachable and down to earth support.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round One)

Outcomes of the projects

Completion of projects

The type and scope of projects that had been completed within the WLB-CF varied significantly between organisations. Several had taken a 'pilot' approach, testing a new work-life balance initiative within a section of the organisation, rather than attempting to encompass the whole organisation. One reason for this seemed to be the wish to minimise disruption to the organisation and to start with a more controllable and manageable project, which if successful, could be rolled out to a wider section of the organisation at a later date. Other reasons included the desire to build up pockets of expertise within the organisation, and to potentially use managers and team members as 'product champions', to promote the pilot project within the organisation and to 'sell' the project to more sceptical managers. It was argued that with a pilot, managers could see how work-life balance can work in practice. In one case, there was no intervention with non-managerial staff at all – it was purely a management intervention and involved workshops with the management team. The objective was to build better interdepartmental teams:

'If management are working better as a team and were more integrated this would lead to a better working environment for all.' (Director, commercial sector, Round Three)

Consideration needs to be given to the impact that a work-life balance project will have on general business practices of the organisation. For example, investment in new technology to support the desired changes requires capital agreement and additional budgetary allocation. It is also clear that demands on

personnel resources and commercial pressures are likely to influence the successful outcome of projects.

Some of the organisations were still in the process of implementing their work-life balance projects even after the 12-month period for the project had elapsed. Interviews with the project lead and their consultants confirmed that they had encountered a variety of unanticipated obstacles to the successful completion of their projects.

In some organisations, the WLB-CF project had been implemented in the context of a larger organisational development and change project. In one case this included a change in head office accommodation. It was apparent that when projects were embedded within a larger change process there was the potential for the aims of the Challenge Fund project to be subsumed or sidelined by the wider issues. In fact, one of the stakeholder organisations which was still in the early implementation phase, reflected that 'so much had been going on within the organisation with so many changes'.

Other instances where the work-life balance project was delayed by wider relevant organisational issues were also found. In one case, the trade union had requested that management establish a working party to consider work-life balance issues within the organisation. This happened prior to and independently of the instigation of the Challenge Fund project. This resulted in the project team being diverted temporarily in order to address these more pressing concerns.

One consultancy firm observed that, from their experience, delays to project objectives were often a function of the sector they were operating in. In smaller, 'flatter' organisations, it was much easier to get the go-ahead and make progress. Whereas, in larger public sector organisations such as a higher education establishment, the decisions required to move forward could take months. Another factor identified in one organisation was that management did not sign off the project until after it was due to start, which immediately impacted on the time available for the project.

Reporting and targets

Work-life balance project teams are required to submit two reports which chart progress during the life-cycle of their Challenge Fund projects. One, an interim report, is due after the sixth month of the project, the other, a final report, is due soon after the formal completion of the project (12 months). Part of the evaluation process involved gaining feedback from consultants and employers on the target setting and reporting process. This section outlines the main feedback about the reporting procedures from the various case projects.

In general, the amount of documentation required for the evaluation and reporting was viewed as onerous by many of the employers and consultants alike. It was generally agreed that the processes needed streamlining. Consultants have cited the fact that they were often left with the task because the employer couldn't manage the process.

Much of the information required for the final reports was information that had already been provided in the six-month progress report, thus requiring a high level of repetition of basic information. As one consultant stated:

> *'...it would be helpful if they put in the targets that have been identified in previous reports. Then we wouldn't have to go all the way back to previous reports.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round One)*

This issue led to the development of an interactive 'online' reporting procedure, whereby all information in the progress reports relevant to the final reports is stored and retrievable. This can then be integrated into the data for the final report, thus eliminating the need to repeat much of the basic information.

Most consultants found the reporting requirements of the six-month progress reports overly cumbersome and the client didn't have or was unable to provide the information.

> *'The progress reports are very large and detailed and are asking things which could not possibly have come to fruition in the six months in which they are required.' (Director, Commercial sector, Round One)*

Each work-life balance project was different, which meant that each had different timescales and objectives. Some employers felt that the requirement to complete a six-month progress report was untimely, since some of the main activities had not yet started. To quote one Managing Director:

> *'What changes in outcomes can you realistically expect in six months?'...'It's not quite finger in the air but it's a question of what do we put in there? What on earth can we achieve in six months?' (Managing director, commercial sector, Round One)*

Many of the key managers within the employer organisations stated that benefits could not be achieved or demonstrated within the six-month time frame and therefore could not be reported in the progress reports. For example, getting the initiative started involved implementing new ways of working, getting managers and members of the wider workforce on board and ready to take ownership of the project, as well as a restructuring the organisation, all at the same time. It was noted that given these issues, it was unrealistic to look for outcomes in the short-term. The time frame for delivery of the six-month progress reports was viewed as inconsistent with the range of issues that needed to be addressed when implementing a work-life balance initiative.

There were concerns raised during the interviews about the reporting process, with some respondents feeling very uncertain about the validity and relevance of some of the more hard-line measures of outcomes and performance of the projects. The inclusion of more descriptive, qualitative information within the progress reports may have been more realistic at this stage.

> *'Without question, the biggest problem we've had is completing the document we were required to complete about measures and outcomes, and the targets we were asked to put on....All we are saying is, sickness levels for this intervention we hope to reduce by one per cent. We could have as easily put in two or five per cent. We really struggled with this. What could we possibly hope to achieve? Particularly since it's only linked to*

the pilots. It's an unknown equation, what could we possibly expect and therefore estimate which would have any real meaning.' (Assistant director, public sector, Round Three)

In addition, there were doubts about the extent to which changes in absenteeism, sickness absence and retention could be ascribed to the outcomes of any work-life balance project or to other organisational (absence monitoring) or personal influences (office colds). Such measures need to be sensitive to the effects of confounding variables such as these. For example, the influence of even one or two employees' long term (valid) sickness absence on the figures cited within the progress reports could create a false negative impression of the impact of the work-life balance projects.

The wider trends within certain sectors are also likely to have an effect on sickness absence patterns. For example, the average levels of sickness absence within hospital trusts have been on the increase, however, the Countess of Chester Trust have maintained their levels at approximately 4.5 per cent since the work-life balance projects were instigated. This is in contrast to 5.5 per cent beforehand. They report, however, that their target of 3.8 per cent has been difficult to attain.

It was felt by some of the project champions that there was a need for the reports to be more sensitive to the organisational climate. Crude outcome performance figures relating to retention do not take into account of the fact that organisations are complex systems with a variety of competing demands. For example, two organisations were at the time downsizing, and another was attempting to increase staff turnover.

Furthermore, it was clear that many organisations just did not have the systems in place to readily produce such data. Not all organisations possessed databases from which data could be extracted for the performance measures and in some cases those that did have databases doubted its validity.

A consistently held view was that the target setting process was overly complex with too many targets involved. There needed to be greater emphasis on tailoring target-setting and evaluation measures to each organisation to ensure they were relevant to the particular project and therefore the needs and situation of the organisation. The reporting requirements seemed to expect a wide range of outcome measures to be part of the target setting, which suggested that organisations were asked to identify only two to three key measures from the long list provided and work to effect changes in these.

The focus on 'hard' numeric or financial measures means that other key issues, such as employee morale, are not measured. In one case, a line manager acknowledged that changes in absenteeism, staff turnover and sickness levels were only one way of measuring impact. The manager was also interested in level of motivation and changes in work practices. They planned to monitor these through 'informal discussions, chit chat amongst staff, and improvement in assessment scores that are done as part of the appraisal system'. It was felt that changes in culture, which is what several projects are aiming to achieve, could not be achieved within the time frames set for the Challenge Fund.

From discussions with the DTI Work-life Balance team, Work-life Balance consultants and employers, it was proposed that, in order to capture some of these longer-term objectives, the evaluation process should be extended by between 18 and 24 months.

> *'The target setting guide is not very valuable. The final report that we are currently writing would show we've not been successful. The measures that you've asked for in the guide are numeric and not easily measurable in what is effectively a cultural change programme. They need to accept that the benefits of flexible working take years, not 12 months, and changes in organisational style cannot necessarily be quantified. So for (client name supplied) with a staff number of several thousands, to actually see a noticeable difference in turnover is going to take 4-5 years.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round Three)*

Benefits

In this final section, the perceived benefits for employers and consultants of engaging with the WLB-CF are outlined. The evaluation incorporated both the experiences of employees who were able to benefit from taking up some of the work-life balance options available within their organisation and the benefits to the wider organisation. In terms of sustainability of the development of work-life balance policies within the organisations, it was clear that for the majority, there was 'no going back':

> *'A sea change in the staff and management culture of the organisation in terms of understanding, embracing and recognising work-life balance. The organisation has also been effective in challenging some archaic attitudes amongst some supervisory staff towards flexible working and policing'. 'Work-life balance is now a central and embedded part of the 'fabric' (policies and operations) of the organisation. In particular, senior supervisory staff and sergeants are enrolled into an 18 module supervisory skills course which includes work-life balance training'. (Head of Diversity & Recruitment, Public Sector, Round Three)*

> *'We have been holding a two day middle managers' development course and we have called it 'Flexibility is Here to Stay'. We will be offering all new recruits, those with childcare commitments, new ways of working. That has been a hard and slow process'. (Assistant Director of Human Resources, Public Sector, Round Three)*

The majority of employers interviewed felt that the Challenge Fund had moved them on from their previous position on work-life balance. The sample of case study organisations ranged from large sophisticated organisations to small family businesses. This suggests that the Fund has something to offer for any type of organisation, independent of where they are starting from.

In some cases, the continued drive for work-life balance development was to be maintained with initiatives being carried through into other development programmes within the organisations. For example, a wider drive within the

National Health Service (NHS), entitled 'Improving Working Lives', provides an accreditation system which individual NHS trusts can apply for.

> *'The Improving Working Lives Standard makes it clear that every member of staff in the NHS is entitled to work in an organisation which can prove that it is investing in more flexible, supportive and family-friendly working arrangements that will improve diversity, tackle discrimination and harassment, and develop the skills of all its staff to improve patient services.' (Improving Working Lives, NHS)*

The Countess of Chester NHS Trust has already attained this accreditation, thus the principles of the Challenge Fund, at least in the context of the NHS, are being maintained through this scheme.

It was found to be important that the participating organisation was left with the tools to carry forward the initiative after the work-life balance intervention had taken place. Some of the consultants, in partnership with the organisations, developed training materials and manuals so those managers could 'take up the baton' and maintain the ethos of the intervention within their organisation.

> *'We developed a work-life balance tool kit for them. Managers have got this to help them, they have got the other managers to help them as well and a fairly good liaison between new managers wanting to take it on and old managers who have done it. Those are certainly the two key things.' (Work-life balance consultant, Round Three)*

It is also clear from the employees interviewed that they had also benefited greatly. Setting up the project had clearly had a significant positive impact on some staff, even in an indirect way. For example, one employee commented that:

> *'This is the first time in seven years (since I started) that there has been any talk about work-life balance. Up until now, the message has been if you don't like it or can't cope then you can leave the organisation.' (Clerk, service sector, Round Two)*

In the project with Cambridgeshire County Council, it was ensured that systems were in place to support further development of work-life balance practices, such as: developing their intranet as a communication channel for work-life balance; instilling work-life balance into general people management practice; creating leaflets to accompany recruitment packs; and management training. Although it has been difficult to assess the benefits in terms of some of the key outcome measures, there is no doubt that as an exercise in organisational development, the vast majority of organisations would view the Challenge Fund as providing important benefits.

> *'...The whole process itself was extremely beneficial in terms of the thought process and the questions that it posed and the way it made us look at our own issues from a different angle. The process itself helped us to understand our problems far better*

and in the long term gave us the insight and tools to think how to go about things now.' (Director, commercial sector, Round One)

In many cases, the Challenge Fund appears to have met the two most popular objectives: aiding the recruitment and retention of employees; and the organisation being seen as an 'employer of choice':

'I need to fit work in around school, and to take my children to and from school. It was part of what attracted me to the job in the first place. It was not actually advertised as being flexible working arrangements but it was discussed in the interview and it was what attracted me to the job in the first place.' (Administrator, commercial sector, Round Three)

Arguably, one of the wider benefits of the WLB-CF is the promotion of the principles of work-life balance to a wider audience within society, the business community. The publication of Challenge Fund case studies, and the proliferation of Challenge Fund employers appearing in the press and telling their own stories, should ensure that it will remain a topical issue in the future. Particularly in the light of the publication of the 2002 Employment Act which enables employees to extend parental leave and make it the employee's right to request flexible hours.

'To date it has encouraged more openness. When I first arrived at Gatwick I thought it was a closed culture. Different to at Victoria where there are more train drivers and if staff are unhappy they are far more likely to speak out and they also have stronger unions. At Gatwick the whole process has helped me establish a closer rapport with staff and overcome some of the closed ness of the place. The staff have realised that I'm here to support them. Would have taken me a lot longer to develop rapport without this project.' (Manager, commercial sector, Round Two)

Conclusions

This chapter detailed the experiences of a variety of stakeholders engaged in the WLB-CF during its first three rounds. In general, all of the organisations involved in the case study research benefited from participating and were satisfied that their Challenge Fund projects had delivered the desired outcomes. In most cases, the instigation of the projects had facilitated the organisation to put work-life balance more firmly on the strategic agenda. Although some organisations commented that they would have developed some form of work-life balance initiative without the Fund's assistance, the majority of the organisations studied emphasised that the Challenge Fund introduced them to work-life balance issues that they otherwise would not have been aware of. In addition it enabled them to engage in a process that they would otherwise not have been able to because of financial or resource constraints.

Key findings

- Stakeholders found out about the WLB-CF from a variety of sources. Some organisations commented that the marketing of the Challenge Fund could have been improved in terms of its profile and the range of outlets for promotion.

- The reasons for organisations applying to the Fund varied. Wider concepts such as the need to change the organisational culture were frequently cited. On a more practical level issues related to recruitment and retention were one of the most frequently expressed reasons for applying to the Challenge Fund.

- The overall impression from both consultants and employers was that the Challenge Fund Fair, particularly in Round One was poorly designed. This resulted in a rushed process where employers were given insufficient time neither to meet with the consultants nor were they able to meet a wide enough range of consultants to make an effective choice.

- The matching of employers and consultants was perceived by both parties as being too restrictive in the early rounds of the WLB-CF, and some cases as being quite inappropriate.

- Most funded organisations found the scoping process very useful in terms of gaining objective feedback on the issues facing them. Some work-life balance consultants were concerned about setting the agenda for the whole intervention on the basis of the scoping report. The main criticism levelled at the scoping reports was that they simply mirrored the image the organisations wanted to portray, and that this did not always reflect the organisations' underlying issues that only came to light after the consultants had entered the project.

- A number of the project champions reported the value of involving employees from all sections of the organisation in the design phase of the projects. It was felt that this engendered a sense of commitment in the workforce to work-life balance that was sustained throughout the course of the project. The drawback of this approach was that in some cases involvement in the project came in addition to their normal workload, so may have put extra demands on the key people.

- Similarly, the resistance to implementing work-life balance in the organisation was more likely to stem from the day-to-day practicalities of implementing the project and the increased workload required, rather than from the logic and the principles behind work-life balance per se.

- The experience of working with work-life balance consultants varied, but except for a few, most of the projects valued the experience and expressed the view that the projects benefited greatly from the consultants' contribution.

- The feedback given about the role of DTI and PwC was also positive. A few organisations commented that they would have wanted more formal information from DTI and PwC about the various stages of the Challenge Fund. However the informal advice was considered effective and the level of autonomy afforded to project teams was appreciated.

- Both employers and consultants made a number of criticisms of the reporting requirements. The requirement to submit interim reports six months into the projects was felt to be too soon to enable significant changes to be achieved and reported on. Most of the concerns were in relation to the final reports, particularly about the outcome measures such as sickness absence and retention. It was argued that after only 12 months it was too early for such measures to take effect and that they did not give a full and accurate description of the achievements in the projects.

- Most of the stakeholders noted stated that the Challenge Fund had created a change in the attitudes of the workforce that meant that there was a cultural

shift in the expectations of many employees towards viewing work-life balance as a entitlement.

- All of the case study projects were likely to be sustainable in the sense that further work-life balance issues had been identified and planned for. However a number of managers claimed that although the intentions were to carry on with work-life balance, further funding would be required to do so.

The final chapter reviews the main findings of the evaluation and discusses the implications of these for both the further development of policy in the area and for the implementation of prospective work-life balance interventions in the workplace.

4
Conclusions

The evaluation described in this report focused on a range of issues concerned with the processes, activities and outcomes of the WLB-CF. The evaluation has identified some of the key issues and considerations both for the future development of the Challenge Fund and for the implementation of the WLB-CF projects themselves. On the basis of the findings from this evaluation, there is little doubt that the WLB-CF has been widely welcomed by the vast majority of stakeholders. There is evidence that there have been concrete benefits in terms of the development of policies and practices and a greater awareness of work-life balance within the participating organisations. Where more problematic issues have emerged they centre less on the concept and the benefits and more on the processes and the procedures developed to manage the WLB-CF.

The impact of the WLB-CF

The impacts of the WLB-CF have been extensive and varied. One of the major transformations within the participating organisations has been not only a change in terms of the introduction of completely new or enhanced work-life balance policies and practices, but in many organisations it has also created a change in thinking. Specifically, the evidence indicates that there has been, as one previously cited manager said,

> 'A sea change in the staff and management culture of the organisation in terms of understanding, embracing and recognising work-life balance.' (Head of Diversity & Recruitment. public sector, Round Three)

This indicates that work-life balance thinking has also permeated the cultural and structural levels of those organisations. The evidence from this evaluation also suggests that the WLB-CF has acted as a catalyst for wider development initiatives within those organisations. Because of the requirement for organisations to think more seriously about the business case, and therefore start to consider measurement of some of the key indicators, this has involved the development of new systems such as absence management, the calculation of recruitment costs, and employee support mechanisms to name but a few.

WLB-CF processes

Reports from the majority of stakeholders suggested that, especially in Round One, the stages of the WLB-CF were run on a very tight timescale. The duration between the employers' applications to the WLB-CF in July to the commencement of the projects in November occurred in a four-month timescale. In that time applications were assessed, scoping visits carried out and the WLB-CF Fair took place. This had knock-on effects for some the processes. In particular, the WLB-CF Fair was viewed by employers and consultants as 'rushed' and confusing, with limited time for any effective dialogue. There was also the strong impression that it was not the most effective means of building a working relationship, which would last for up to

12 months. Both employers and consultants said they required more information on each other beforehand and the opportunity to talk informally about the relevant issues.

Reporting structures

Both work-life balance consultants and employers complained about the detailed and 'cumbersome' reporting requirements associated with participation in the project. These included a 'target setting guide', an interim report after six months into the project and a final report after the projects were completed. It was mainly the size of the reports and the requisite detail, which caused the most concern. Much of the information required for all three reports was the same and although there were instructions within the body of the reports to suggest that text should be transferred from one to the other, it still added to the burden of the projects. In interviews with consultants and the DTI WLB-CF team, the idea of an online form, linked to a project database was discussed. The entry of data would then be an iterative process of simply adding the next set of data to the last.

Measuring bottom-line outcomes

The development of the notion of the 'business case' for work-life balance was predicated on the notion that work-life balance was not just a win for the employee, but also for the employer. The key indicators devised to demonstrate the business case were measures such as sickness absence, staff retention and recruitment costs. These indicators formed the basis upon which the success of Challenge Fund projects was to be assessed. In some cases, this has proved effective in charting the gains made by the introduction of work-life balance initiatives.

Evidence from final reports and the case study data suggests that these measures were not effective indicators of success for some of the projects. For example, where projects were specifically designed to address problems of staff morale or the need for culture change, the primary aims of the project were not aligned with these outcome measures. As a result, although such a project may result in positive gains, because the key variables were not measured on paper (the final reports) the project would appear not to have succeeded. The data suggests that guidance, to projects, on how to measure 'softer' outcomes, more appropriate to their specific goals, such as the alteration of staff morale or employee stress may reveal the true successes of a wider range of projects.

The usefulness of the indicators was also thrown into doubt by the reality of the influence of extraneous factors. For example at least four of the projects in particular faced demands from external pressures which may have influenced these indices. Gatwick Express, for example, was forced to change their priorities after September 11 2001 and the downturn in the passenger trade for the airlines. This had led to the 'shelving' of the project, redundancies and therefore a substantial rise in staff turnover.

To summarise, effective indicators need to give due consideration to the structures, culture and climate of the organisation and to its operational environment.

Promoting commitment and 'buy-in'

Ensuring commitment and support from all relevant stakeholders for the WLB-CF projects enhanced the effectiveness of their implementation. In particular, support from unions and senior management were considered especially important.   The level of involvement of the various stakeholders varied between projects. In some cases, involvement meant participation in some form of employee consultation exercise at the outset of the projects to aid diagnosis. In others, the level of involvement was greater where project teams were set up to enable representatives from staff management and unions to jointly manage the project. In cases which this occurred, it was viewed as being effective in engendering a shared / organisation-wide ownership of the project and a greater investment in seeing the project succeed.

From both the case study analysis and the project final reports, one of the key findings across these two sources of data was the importance of management 'buy-in' to the effective implementation of work-life balance projects. Rather than to simply denigrate managers as being resistant to change, it is more worthwhile to try to understand the reasons for resistance. The evidence from the case study findings highlights the value of engaging all levels of the workforce in the intervention, including middle management.   This is particularly important since managers at middle and supervisory levels are the people who will eventually be charged with implementing changes in policy regarding work-life balance. A considerable number of projects incorporated an element of support and development for managers to coach them in how to deal with employees' requests for changes in working arrangements.   The evidence indicates that this approach was effective from the viewpoint of including middle managers in the process, and providing the support to enable them to convert policy into practice.

Sustainability

Evidence from the evaluation suggests that the ethos of work-life balance would be sustained within the participating organisations. For a significant number of employers, participation in the WLB-CF was just the start of a wider process of development in the employee relations domain.   The findings suggest that sustainability is more likely if the work-life balance initiative is integrated into a wider well-established organisational development programme, rather than seen by the organisation as a 'stand-alone' initiative. Examples included the Improving Working Lives standard, which is a nation-wide programme within the NHS designed to foster employee support and well-being. The embedding and continuity of the principles of work-life balance could, therefore depend on the wider policy developments within those organisations.

Another influence on sustainability may lie in the nature of the intervention itself. In some cases, for example Merton Borough Council, the consultants and employer jointly developed a work-life balance 'toolkit' which was a source of guidance to assist managers in implementing the new working arrangements and dealing with staff requests for changes in their working arrangements. The indication is that the organisations were more likely to maintain momentum if some form of support was available after the project was completed.

Communication

There was evidence to suggest that one aspect of the implementation of WLB-CF projects which can make or break the process is the presence or absence of effective internal communication systems within the project organisations. As one manager stated:

> *'Consult with staff, continual communication about what you are doing, even when the project has finished. Don't stop the drip of information.'*

A substantial number of project teams came up against initial scepticism from employees. It is clear that considerable effort needs to be applied to getting the message across to middle managers and employees, particularly in large, geographically dispersed organisations in which communication is less direct.

Additionality

The degree to which the WLB-CF was the crucial determinant in the introduction of work-life balance policies for employers depended to some extent on whether organisations were either starting from scratch, or were building on already established flexible working practices. Particularly for the large, public sector organisations, the Challenge Fund enabled them to further develop and refine their flexible working policies. In many cases it is likely that these organisations would have made the changes independent of the Challenge Fund, although not perhaps in the same time frame. It was mainly in the small- to medium-sized organisations, with limited previous experience of work-life balance, where the Fund was likely to be the catalyst for them to introduce new policies. A frequently cited reason was that in the small- and medium-sized enterprises, with limited resources, both in terms of time and money, the Challenge Fund provided the resources necessary to make the first step towards greater flexibility.

Support for WLB-CF projects

One of the responsibilities of both the DTI WLB-CF team and PwC was the provision of support and advice to the employers and consultants carrying out the projects. The findings presented in both Chapters Two and Three indicate that project teams greatly appreciated the largely ad-hoc advice given by both parties. In the final reports the most frequently cited factor in terms of what worked well during the projects was the support of PwC and the DTI. However evidence suggests that there may be a need for other support mechanisms. In the interim periods, between the visits by the work-life balance consultants, some employers reported feel isolated from such support. A number of employers cited the value in setting up some form of regional work-life balance forum, similar to the Partnership Fund 'Winners' Clubs'. It was apparent from comments made on the final reports that the opportunity to talk with other organisations taking part in the Challenge Fund would be particularly valued.

Working relationships

One of the crucial factors, which determined the success of the WLB-CF projects, was the quality of working relationships between the management of the participating organisations and the work-life balance consultants. In the majority of cases, they built effective working relationships. However, in a few cases, these relationships ran into difficulties. Instances exist where the original

working relationship between the lead consultant and the project champion ended because one or both of them left the project. This led to the new incumbents having to forge new relationships and develop an understanding of the aims and direction of the project. This often led to delays in the project's implementation. Although infrequent, reports of some work-life balance consultants taking a too prescriptive approach in terms of the direction of the project sometimes led to conflict between consultant and employer.

Limitations of the evaluation

The aims of the evaluation were to provide an assessment of the processes, outcomes and benefits of the WLB-CF. In defining these aims, it is clear that this also highlights limitations in terms of what the evaluation did not achieve. In some cases the design of the evaluation precluded the ability to make definitive statements regarding some issues of importance to the development of future rounds of the Challenge Fund. This included the issue of assessing the value for money of the consultants' services and the issue of quantifying benefits for employees.

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Appendix A: Case study organisations

Cambridgeshire County Council

Work-life balance as part of a wider modernisation agenda

Industry area: public services

Background and context

Typical of a large council organisation, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) provides a range of services to the public and business, including education, social services, transport, environment, waste management, libraries and heritage services, and trading standards. The organisation has 6,294 personnel, differentiated into 2,508 full-time and 3,786 part-time staff and differentiated by gender into 1,268 male and 5,026 female staff (PwC, 2001).

Cambridgeshire is a particularly prosperous county with almost zero unemployment levels coupled with high housing and property costs. The local labour market is very competitive and, as a public sector organisation, CCC has not been able to offer the same level of financial reward or benefits to staff as other local commercial organisations. With increasingly high prices for local property, together with inner city traffic congestion, the geographical location of the Council's main site within the city centre of Cambridge highlights this competitive edge. Whilst the organisation may not be able to compete with commercial organisations on salary levels, CCC views the work-life balance initiative as a 'trump card' in its competitive efforts to attract, recruit and retain its personnel. In addition, as with many other county councils, CCC faces ongoing resource streamlining and financial constraints, as well as a requirement to implement a range of government initiatives aimed at increasing accessibility, accountability, equity and value for money of its services. Across both the short- and longer-term, the organisation is in the process of modernisation and wider structural change.

At CCC, work-life balance was viewed as integral to coping with and managing the process of change, both within the organisation and in supporting the roll-out of Council strategy. Commenting on the longer-term strategy for the modernisation of CCC and e-government access, the Director of Resources stated:

> 'We will transform this Council into a customer focused, flexible and accessible organisation. This is the aspiration of our Information Age Government Vision, written in July 2001. Our Modernisation agenda is now well on the way towards

achieving this vision and Cambridgeshire is offering its citizens ever-more flexible and accessible services. But, meeting ever-increasing customer expectations – extended service hours, faster responses, and more integrated services – could result in increased workload pressure on staff and risk their well-being. For this reason, we commend the work-life balance initiative and fully support its promotion among our people, enabling us to truly become an 'employer of choice' – able to recruit and retain the people who are so essential to the delivery of quality public services to our citizens.'

(WLB-CF Final Report, October 2002; Appendix A)

Previous organisational experience of work-life balance

In their scoping report, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2001) identified that prior to the WLB-CF project, CCC had already been pro-active in identifying the needs and attitudes of the workforce in relation to work-life balance issues. Policy information on flexible working was available on the Council intranet, and as part of both routine appraisal processes and new recruitment, staffs were asked to discuss their specific work-life balance needs. Flexible working was already in place in parts of the organisation. However, data indicated that whilst there was considerable policy information on flexible working, actual practices had tended to be informally set up and dependent on particular line managers. Furthermore, the flexibility to work from home, for example, using remote IT systems may have been tied to both particular staff job remits and limited to the nature of the work which could be feasibly carried out from home.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (2001) reported that CCC managers were committed to 'establishing workable WLB solutions' (p.4: 2001). However, the fund organisation recognised that it needed external consultancy support in order to: (i) improve take-up of flexible work options already available; and (ii) develop, embed and formalise work-life balance policies across the organisation.

Diagnostics and organisational issues

Additionally, the PricewaterhouseCoopers scoping report (2001) identified three main sources of diagnostic evidence that highlighted the challenges the organisation faced:

- High staff turnover statistics, especially in first year of employment.

- The actual number of applicants for jobs at CCC was very low (the organisation was also concerned that women were not applying for senior management positions).

- High stress levels and absenteeism engendered by a long hours culture and a tendency among staff to 'pick-up outstanding responsibilities'.

The external consultants (Round Three Final Report, October 2002) identified the following key organisational issues to be addressed as part of the CCC's modernisation and work-life balance strategy:

- Women in senior management and the provision of services (including domestic) that enable women to take up such posts.

- Recruitment and retention.

- Becoming an 'Employer of Choice'.

- Staff absences.

- Long hours culture.

- Flexible working agenda with a move towards longer service access hours and the use of IT and ICT to reduce travel requirements/the need for travel to work.

Initially, whilst the consultants reported that organisational problems were ostensibly related to work-life balance only, upon project start-up it became apparent that the organisation also faced wider challenges. These included a bureaucratic culture, on-going resource constraints, work overload and changes in overall focus due to the political climate.

Description and scope of project activities

A small, commercial niche consultancy – Balance at Work – worked with CCC on the project. The consultancy consisted of a number of specialist personnel from different backgrounds including occupational psychology and human resources. It was a commercial offshoot of the charity Parents at Work and had been involved with WLB-CF since Round One.

The roll-out of the Challenge Fund project began in 2001 and the project was steered by a small internal team which included the Product Champion and the external consultants.

Following agreement between the external consultants and the organisation, the original brief and aims of the project (see Round Three Final Report, October 2002) were clearly defined as falling into the following categories of activity: research and review, and action-based development.

(i)   Research and Reports (Round Three Final Report, October 2002)

1. Explore and scope the need for provision of adult dependent care (by end March 2002).
2. Explore and scope the need for information provision for employees in relation to seeking domestic service providers (by end March 2002).
3. Support HR managers in monitoring change in employee attitude to more flexible contracts, and setting targets for 2002-2005, by comparing with other public sector launches (by end December 2001).
4. Review of current HR policy on flexible working and contract terms to ensure best practice (by end December 2001).
5. Advise on the content of current work-life balance training package and recommend enhancements (early November 2001).

(ii) Mentoring and Coaching of Service Providers (Round Three, Final Report, October 2002).

In order to promote flexible working practices throughout the organisation, the Council planned to select five key service providers (managers) for personal coaching and mentoring for both themselves and their teams, working on shared issues and making flexible working a reality. Two external consultants delivered a consistent approach to the following sub-activities:

Each manager will receive five days of personal coaching, as defined below.

1. CCC to select candidates.
2. The consultant would meet with service provider for initial discussion, understanding of issues and concerns and preparing for focus group with team members (end September 2001).
3. The consultant would conduct focus group of service provider's team to identify issues and raise awareness (end October 2001).
4. The consultant would have four 2-hour sessions over two to three months dealing with attitudes, individual issues and recommending practical solutions (by February/March 2002).
5. The distribution of a follow-up questionnaire and report to all team members to evaluate progress made as a result of the mentoring work (by end March 2002).
6. Non-attributable report on mentoring sessions will be presented to project leader (by end April 2002).

Tackling problems: action and intervention

The following six activities formed the basis of the external consultant's actions and interventions within the organisation (Round Three Final Report, October 2002):

Activity 1

Reporting on best practice and recommending initial steps in provision of adult dependent care.

Activity 2

Reporting on best practice and recommending first steps in information provision for employees in relation to seeking domestic service providers.

Activity 3

Advising on how other HR teams monitor change in employee attitude to more flexible contracts, and in setting targets for 2002-2005, by comparing with other public sector launches.

Activity 4

Carrying out a review of the current HR policy on flexible working and contract terms by comparison with best practice organisations.

Activity 5

Advise on the content of current work-life balance training package and recommend enhancements.

Activity 6

Personal coaching and mentoring for five service providers (managers) and their teams, enabling them to make flexible working a reality. Presentation of consultants' findings to Senior Management Team (SMT), July 2002. Mentoring projects were undertaken with managers from a diverse range of Council sectors including School Planning, Human Resources, Trading Standards and the Child Protection and Review Team.

Changes implemented and outcomes of interventions

The project utilised a relatively small consultancy time-period and concentrated on producing outcomes at the level of local, specific management team mentoring, coupled with a wider policy development and review element. The following changes were implemented and outcomes produced (Round 3 Final Report, October 2002):

- Within each of the mentoring projects, specific individual changes have been made to working hours and working practices (e.g. development of personal action plans, formalisation of flexible and home working, effective workload management, review of work processes, awareness raising of whole WLB and organisational development agenda).

- A childcare focus group was set up (the first one with staff on work-life balance issues) and a workshop conducted, and the results fed back to the work-life balance project team.

- A management college event took place where the consultants fed back their reports, conclusions and recommendations.

- At the time of the final report training courses on work-life balance for managers were taking place and one for employees was under consideration.

- Signposting for Dependant Care is now on the Council intranet.

- The presence of the consultants around the Council offices raised the profile of work-life balance in general.

Moreover, the final report also indicated that as a result of the work-life balance project the CCC had increased its commitment to work-life balance, shown stronger steering in terms of Human Resources and aligned its strategic priorities in relation to the initiative.

Evaluating the benefit and impact of work-life balance interventions

Whilst the consultancy and the organisation reported the consultancy work had been 'wholly beneficial' and 'highly valued', there was a scepticism concerning the usefulness of including numerical targets and performance indicators in a 12-month report. Indeed, the consultants pointed out that:

> *'The final report that [we are] currently writing would show that we've not been successful..[and]...the targets we had to set and the resultant figures don't accurately reflect the impact of our Work-Life balance initiatives ...'*
> (WLB-CF Final Report, October 2002; Appendix B)

Echoing a theme apparent in other case studies, the consultants proposed that cultural and organisational change took a considerable period of time to manifest and be measurable. For example, in a large organisation with several thousand staff, a significant statistical downturn in staff turnover may take four or five years to measure. The consultants reported that, at the end of each of the coaching and mentoring projects, managers submitted a report to them on their main learning outcomes. The consultants stated that this (qualitative data) was more meaningful to the client than the numerical data. Furthermore, the consultants pointed to the fact that performance indicators may have been

affected by organisational processes and events which were systemically unrelated to work-life balance issues or interventions.

Lessons learned from the work-life balance initiative

The consultants and the organisation

Initially, the organisation may have thought the coaching and mentoring work would result in a common outcome that could be replicated elsewhere in the County Council. However, despite a range of beneficial outcomes for the specific management teams, coupled with a broad agreement on principles, there was not a single working model or a transferable 'organisational template' for the work-life balance initiative. The organisation reported that:

> *'We have learned that there is no real substitute in having one-to-one advice and coaching for managers who are considering flexible working for their staff and support for the staff who want to do it.'*

Furthermore, whilst the organisation may have expected that there would be a unilateral or single solution to the work-life balance issue, the actual implementation was different for separate teams/departments. It was for managers to 'work out what kind of flexibility within a given department they can tolerate that does not compromise their service level.' Overall, this strand of organisational development promoted strong organisational learning.

Success factors

The consultants and the organisation reported the following factors as contributing most to the success of the work-life balance initiative:

- The team-focussed approach taken to the coaching and mentoring.

- The selection of consultants who had effective all-round knowledge of best practice and experience of working in the area of work-life balance was central for project outcomes.

- The decision not to limit the manner in which the mentoring and coaching was used by team managers led to different outcomes relevant and specific to a particular team.

Unexpected benefits and spin-offs of work-life balance

The organisation

The organisation cited three main unexpected benefits and spin-offs of the work-life balance initiative:

- As a result of observing and working with the consultants, the organisation considered that it was more empowered to coach and facilitate staff and management groups in work-life balance issues.

- As well as addressing the long hours culture, the consultant's work highlighted the importance of revisiting fundamentals, especially work organisation and time management. These particular types of issues needed to be addressed in order to realise the full potential of work-life balance.

- A product of the project was a flexible working guide. As a result the organisation had been able to develop its own work-life balance toolkit for dissemination on the Council intranet.

Barriers to implementation and widespread adoption of work-life balance

Whilst the consultancy interventions had a positive impact at specific management team sector levels, the consultants reported that there could have been more senior management buy-in towards the end of the project. The case study data indicated that, whilst the organisation was committed in attitude, there may have been some resistance at the level of practical action and implementation. In particular, the consultants reported that senior managers may not have been highly motivated to change their work hours or patterns. Furthermore, the consultants reported that they did not, as part of the project remit, have the opportunity to work with staff at Director level. Top-down support was considered to be important to the organisation-wide roll-out and sustainable adoption of flexible working practices.

From interviews with staff members, a stakeholder suggested that whilst management policy was generally forward-thinking about flexible working, there may have been an underlying conservatism in the organisation, reflected in the view that you 'need to be at work at your desk from nine until five', rather than exploring alternative ways of working. This latter issue emerged as a recurrent theme in the staff interviews. This was characterised by the view that 'if you were at your desk you must be doing a good job.' One interviewee also unnderlined the need for managers to be effective work-life balance role models themselves in order to be seen as champions of the initiative and in an effort to promote employee take-up.

General comments on project processes and the Challenge Fund Fair

Whilst the external consultants considered that Fairs in early rounds were conducted in an equitable manner, the external consultants noted a number of concerns about the WLB-CF Round 3 start-up Fair:

- Larger consultancies at the Fair were able to set up impressive 'services exhibitions'. Smaller niche consultancies, such as themselves, could feel overwhelmed by these tactics, especially as they could not compete with the sheer scale of resources that larger consultancies were able to offer potential clients. The consultants considered that there was no monitoring of the early start-up process or its consequences. Furthermore, the consultants suggested that other consultancies 'must stick to the rules (in subsequent rounds), otherwise small niche players like us are completely overwhelmed'.

Key products of the project, which could be used for case study material

The organisation and the consultants state in the Final Report (2002) that:

- 'The consultant's reports would be of interest to another organisation starting out on these issues, in particular looking at Adult Dependent Care and Concierge Services and comparisons with other authorities.'

- 'The output from the Mentoring Projects would be of use as would the Flexible Working Guide.'

Wirthlin Europe

Work-life balance as a way to attract new employees

Industry area: finance and business services

Background and context

Wirthlin Europe (WE) is a specialist agency offering market research consultancy. The nature of their work means that the business is highly reliant on the skills and motivation of its employees.

WE, formally Business and Market Research Ltd. (B&MR), was established in 1972. In February 2002, during the work-life balance project, B&MR were acquired by Wirthlin Worldwide and took on the name Wirthlin Europe. Located in Stockport, Cheshire, the location of WE is a challenge since the hub of market research is in and around London. This makes WE one of the few research companies of its size in the North West. The company has around 120 salaried employees, of which 50 are executive research staff. WE has a heavy percentage of female staff.

There were several factors that prompted WE to apply for the Work-life Balance Challenge Fund. Firstly, the company already had a positive approach to flexible working and senior management were aware of its potential benefits to the company. Secondly, WE were looking to improve the long hours culture and introduce more consistency from departmental managers through the use of flexible working. Thirdly, as a regionally-based expanding company, WE were looking for ways to compete for the best talent with other companies in the sector. Fourthly, with the increased use of remote working, they were also looking to reduce office space and, consequently, overheads.

Diagnostics and organisational problems

The initial report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (Heaney, 2000) identified three main work-life balance issues facing the company:

- Low employee retention/high turnover.

- Recruitment difficulties.

- Not regarded as employer of choice.

Through the development of the project, new information emerged and a consultant from Deloitte and Touche identified other organisational issues to those listed in the initial scoping report. One of the main findings from the diagnostic phase was the difficulty in separating work-life balance issues from other organisational issues in the consultancy process. More general issues concerning organisational culture and organisational change were identified in this phase. Although there was clear support among management for the concept of flexible working, the need for further management training was apparent, specifically in dealing with manager attitudes and behaviours towards work-life balance initiatives. The consultant recognised that WE needed advice and consultancy on how to manage change and communications within the organisation. Organisational change and

transforming organisational culture was not directly part of the Challenge Fund project, but it was perceived as necessary for the success of the work-life balance initiative.

Another challenge that was identified by the consultant was the culture around long working hours at WE. This finding was confirmed by some of the feedback reported by employees from evaluation survey:

> *'The hours I work are sometimes far too many and I often feel so exhausted when I go home that I do not feel up to doing much. I try to limit my hours and leave the office at a reasonable time but I feel it is sometimes frowned upon by others – either by team members or senior staff.'*

> *'Apart from that it would be nice to perhaps sometimes start earlier and therefore finish earlier too, for example eight to four or so. It would give me more time for Doctors' appointments and I would not have to feel guilty for taking more time off.'*

> *'I feel that although my employer was open to discussion regarding reduced hours after me returning from maternity leave, little was done in order to help manage my workload. I often feel guilty that I am leaving colleagues with work to do when I am not around. I feel guilty for leaving at 5.00 p.m. even though I start at 8.30 a.m. and work through lunch.'*

Tackling problems: action and intervention

The actions suggested in the initial report by Claire Heaney of PricewaterhouseCoopers were threefold:

- To identify different and flexible ways of working.

- To document the new policies.

- To address the cultural issues around implementing changes to traditional ways of working.

These were secured through four activities:

- A one-day discussion workshop with the senior management team.

- Creation of a core project team. The team included members form different parts of the business so that they would work as champions and inform their departments about the project.

- A questionnaire sent out to 110 employees.

- Telephone interviews with six nominated employees within different functions at WE who are working flexibly.

The internal staff attitude surveys indicated a positive response to the concept of flexible working. Deloitte & Touche designed a detailed questionnaire to identify those flexible working initiatives that were most appropriate for the different types of staff within the company – directors, corporate support, research and operations. There was a response rate of 78 per cent to the survey.

Other issues that were not directly linked to the work-life balance project emerged and needed to be tackled. In discussing the option of remote working,

a concern raised was the expenditure on the technology involved. Deloitte and Touche provided the IT support team with the equipment to see whether the server supported remote working. This was not originally part of the project specification, but was necessary in order to facilitate remote working at WE.

Communication and publicity

The HR manager noted that the company could have focused more on publicising the work-life balance project externally. Nevertheless, together with the consultants at Deloitte and Touche, WE had press coverage in two journals:

- 'Family-friendly working pays off handsomely', in *Company Leader – small business resources for UK entrepreneurs* (5th October 2003)*.*
- 'Flexible designs domestic harmony', in *Enterprise*.

Implementation of the work-life balance initiative

A key barrier to the implementation of the initiative was the communication between the consultant and the client. During the project lifecycle, Deloitte and Touche had three different project managers working on the project which complicated the implementation. One reason for this was that the different consultants had different views on the project:

> *'The person who took over wasn't properly briefed and I found that was then the problem the rest of the way through, we were trying to catch up all the time, because there wasn't the same level of understanding about the business or the issues or what has been agreed and this is what I'm saying, that so much time was spent at the front end going over the same ground, that we ran out of days for the deliverables at the end of it.' (HR manager at WE)*

This is linked to another challenge faced on the project, which was that of time commitment. There was a great deal of time commitment by both the consultant and the client. One reason for this might have been the change in project personnel on both the client and consultant side. One of the main champions of the project in the workplace, as well as one of the consultants, left on maternity leave during the project lifecycle, which may have had an impact on project implementation.

Most of the barriers reported were between the consultant and the project team, and none of the sources used focused on internal barriers towards the project. Only the consultant mentioned that there was some resistance to change and that there was a need to focus on behaviour change in management.

Outcomes, impacts and benefits

WE finalised a policy document which they called '*Our Approach to Working Time'.* Deloitte and Touche worked closely with the HR Manager to draft and launch a working time policy that was both legally watertight and worded in a way that staff would find acceptable. The launch of the policy was supported by a training course for managers. Deloitte & Touche drafted the training course, but the WE Directors and HR Manager delivered it. The organisation had already developed some flexible working practices prior to the project, but the consultancy facilitated further work in this area through:

- Introducing the idea of consistency within the business.

- Giving a framework in which to work.

- Focusing the work.

- Highlighting that work-life balance was already being practiced.

The benefits of the work-life balance project to WE have been identified by the consultants as:

- The co-ordination of policy in relation to flexible working – establishing a clear mandate via the survey for supporting certain flexible working initiatives and not supporting others.

- The development of a holistic working time policy.

- Training for managers in managing relevant staff situations, and a generally enhanced awareness and understanding among managers of the importance of flexible working – why it is important and supported by the company.

- Establishing a clear rationale, by means of the feasibility study, for remote working.

In the wake of the project, Deloitte and Touche reported that a number of managers had been more flexible in their approach to recruitment. Although it might have been too early to measure the impacts of the project, the final report listed some of the expected outcomes:

- In June 2000, the reduced staff turnover was seven per cent; in September 2001 it was just three per cent.

- Before the project started, six employees worked on a part-time basis; by the end of the project a further four members of staff had started working part-time.

- The number of people doing partial remote working doubled during the project lifecycle, from two to four.

- Two people were working flexible hours prior to the project, whereas three people worked flexible hours at the end of the project.

Sustainability and progress

As stated previously, in February 2002 Wirthlin Worldwide acquired B&MR with a view to it becoming the hub of its European activity. The organisational changes that are likely to follow as a result mean that flexible and remote working practices should increase in the future.

The managing director of WE reported that the company was more flexible than before, but that there were still further areas to tackle (an example of which was that of home working). Indeed, the work-life balance project was considered to be the start of a longer process in the development of WE as a family-friendly working place.

Both the consultant and the HR manager commented that there was a lack of synthesis or collaboration in the area of work-life balance, suggesting that data

– in terms of the lessons learned from other projects – should be made available so that future work-life balance initiatives could gain leverage from previous experience.

Cleveland Police

Piloting shift self-rostering and increasing knowledge of work-life balance throughout the organization

Industry area: public services

Background and context

Cleveland Police provide a public service to four geographical areas: Middlesbrough, Stockton, Hartlepool and Langbaurgh. A Chief Superintendent heads each district service, which has a financially devolved budget. At the time of the PwC scoping report (2001), there were 2,072 employees in the service, 1,353 of which were male and 719 female. The vast majority of female workers were part-time and there were 638 civilian employees.

This public service organisation faces multi-faceted challenges, particularly with regard to: an embedded culture amongst some senior managers; stress levels; absenteeism; increasing staff workloads; resource allocation limitations; employment legislation; service demands and public expectations. The service also faces top-down government pressure to meet operational and service delivery performance targets and the reform agenda around 'visible policing'. A key informant highlighted the scale of the challenge faced by Cleveland Police in effectively implementing work-life balance:

> *'The demands and the stresses of work have dramatically increased over the last few years – everyone has more work to do. The Police Federation has actually provided statistics with a rise of several hundred per cent over the last ten years. So everyone is working longer and harder. It's much busier and more violent outside so with all of this they have a hard job balancing these things with their home life. The pressures are on us to make sure that people can get that true balance. It is harder to get time off and so people tend to use informal means such as sick leave. So there is real need for this so that the support networks are there so they don't go sick and they have a different culture to work (in).'*

Diagnostics and organisational issues

At the time of the scoping report, PwC identified the following main organisational and work-life balance issues:

- Morale was perceived to be at 'an all time low'.

- The results of a recent audit indicated that there was 'a lack of knowledge' and awareness of WLB issues across the organisation.

- There had been a steady increase in staff-workloads without additional staff resourcing, and this was especially acute in certain service districts.

- The number of female officers was increasing slowly but they were not going into senior posts.

- High levels of sickness, absenteeism and staff not available for operational duties. In 2002, it was reported that around ten per cent of the workforce were not available for frontline duties at any one time.

Figures indicated that between 1st January 2000 and 31st December 2001 there were 800 absences, equivalent to 19,000 work-days.

The following work-life balance issues were also identified by PwC (2001) in an employee focus-group:

I.   Flexibility

- Although there was flexibility to go part-time, individuals tended not to because of the impact on pensions. Also, there was a feeling that if you did go part-time you were not really committed to the organisation.

- A feeling that women didn't go into more senior posts because of the inflexibility of the current hours/shift/culture.

II.   Organisational Communications

- Poor levels of vertical communication. (Further analysis confirmed that the majority of the focus group felt that their voice was not heard up the organisation).

- Communications were variable across the organisation depending on the particular supervisor/line-manager. However, at the time of the PwC report, there was also an external review of corporate communications taking place.

- Interestingly, no male officers attended the focus group – this was seen as further evidence of an underlying 'macho' culture in which male officers did not want to admit to stress or problems in coping.

III.   Stress

- Workload increases.

- Inconsistent application of policies by supervisor levels.

- Strict sick leave policy makes people put in annual leave instead of sick leave.

Moreover, with regards to sickness absence, PwC (p. 5, 2001) reported that:

> 'There is tight absence management. Staff are interviewed following every absence and fill in a form (part is anonymous which goes back to HR). If absent for 3+ days in one year they are interviewed. If they have more than 15 days off in three years they will be passed over for promotion. Officers off sick are required to come back before they are ready to go back on the street to do 'restrictive recuperative duties' in an office.'

In addition to these factors, it was reported that the employee status of police officers as 'servants of the crown' posed additional constraints on flexibility and the regulation of working practices in comparison to the large proportion of civilian employees within the service.

Previous organisational experience of work-life balance and existing work-life balance policies

Through WLB-CF Round One funding to Stockton Borough Council, the force gained some early work-life balance consultancy advice in 2001. This took the form of: (i) small-scale awareness training; (ii) work-life orientation sessions for senior managers; and (iii) the development of a 'user group' which also considered childcare options.

Early audit interviews indicated that whilst there was some locally negotiated flexibility in working practice amongst support staff and some police officers, there was not a consistency of practice, agreed work-life balance policies or significant implementation of work-life balance practices across the organisation as a whole. For example, annualised hours were not allowed, homeworking was very difficult for police officers and job-share was not widely used. In early 2002, only two employees in the whole force had job-share – the personnel advisors who were interviewed as part of the WLB audit.

There was a strong executive buy-in for the work-life balance initiative both across and from the top of the organisation. Clearly, WLB-CF was catalytic in the development and implementation of a more comprehensive work-life balance strategy. The Equal Opportunities and Diversities Officer was one of the key figures in championing and implementing Cleveland's work-life balance strategy:

> *'If we hadn't had the funding it would have been far harder to deliver. We needed to change the culture of the Force to get people to understand what work-life balance was all about. We had to be aware that this is a police service with the inevitable constraints. Some of the older supervisors are mostly disciplinarian, dyed in the wool – we had to change the attitudes of these people. The chances are that such a supervisor, if a member of staff asked for time off ... (they) would say 'no we're too busy', with the upshot being that that person will take sick-leave. So we needed more awareness training.'*

Tackling problems: action and intervention

Having secured funding and engaged two different consultancies in 2001, Cleveland Police managed the work-life balance project through a steering and internal strategy group. This group included the personnel manager, the equal opportunities officer, service unit managers, the Police Federation and the union (UNISON). The group met once a month and the consultant provided regular update reports. Initially, in order to address the organisational and cultural issues the service faced, two main strands of consultancy were developed with two separate consultancy organisations.

Disseminating knowledge and changing attitudes

Continuing earlier work undertaken in 2001 with Stockton Borough Council, awareness raising and work-life balance training was delivered by The Worklife Company (CTC Ltd) and aimed at operational managers who had direct line-management responsibilities for staff. The purpose of the training was to foster change in management attitudes and style, to improve knowledge of work-life balance issues and advise on how to implement work-life balance principles in practice.

CTC (WLB-CF Final Report, 31st October 2002) constructed the following interventions:

- Development of a one-day awareness programme aimed at line managers to run concurrently during January, February and March.

- Delivery of training to 20+ line managers per programme.

- Evaluation of training in line with objectives.

Piloting shift self-rostering

In August 2001, working with the consultants Barony, the organisation developed two pilot projects in sectors where the need for change and improved work-life balance was seen to be greatest. The pilots were aimed at reducing sickness absence and addressing severe staffing difficulties. It was also envisaged that the pilots might provide information on best practice principles that could then be implemented across the organisation as a whole.

Initially, Barony surveyed the shift patterns at an operational district division of Cleveland Police and identified that there were problems in morale, stress, burn-out, absenteeism and shift-working patterns. The consultants also involved the staff in asking what sorts of flexible work options they would find desirable, with shift identity featuring strongly – people wanted to work with their shift colleagues. Most staff wanted to change their shift patterns since for many it was 'crucifying them', sometimes working late followed by early starts. Staff also wanted longer shifts, which would mean that they would have more time off (i.e. compressed hours working). However, staff wanted to maintain their shift identities and plan their own self-rostering. Following meetings with senior managers, personnel managers and the Police Federation, it was decided that self-rostering of shifts was the solution.

At the second pilot site – the Communications Unit – there were four shifts with 30 staff in each team, which covered 999 calls 24 hours a day. Teams were separated into 'calls' (front line call takers) and 'dispatchers'. Call takers would take the calls and then pass them on to 'dispatchers', who then passed (and prioritised) calls to the appropriate police action units. Within this unit there was a mix of civilians and uniformed officers. As the external consultants reported:

> *'This brought its own problems – personnel had different conditions and terms of employment, and there were problems in the way the service was managed. Furthermore, the service was incurring huge overtime payments. This was coupled with a high staff sickness, low morale, concerns over the implementation of new technology. Additionally, at this site there was somewhat a clash of cultures between the police officers and the civilians. '*

Again, the key issue for the majority of staff was choice in their working hours and the option to work compressed hours. After initial meetings with the project steering group the solution arrived at was self-rostering. A paper proposal solution was offered to staff, and a survey undertaken to gather feedback on the proposed initiative. This led to a very positive response, with some staff providing self-rostering plans for up to two years in advance.

Work-life balance toolkit

Independent of the WLB-CF, the organisation's personnel officers also developed a comprehensive work-life balance toolkit. At the time of the second round interviews in December 2002, this was about to go into print for staff, managers and supervisors. The manual details a whole range of flexible work options that the organisation would be willing to consider, including:

- All posts being open to part-time working.

- Short-term flexible working (e.g. elderly relatives to care for).

- Reduction in work hours in the short-term.

- Career breaks (for educational or family reasons).

- Job-sharing.

- Working from home.

- Annualised hours.

- Unpaid leave (e.g. to deal with crises).

- Parental leave (for parents with children under 18).

The service was keen to implement new government employment legislation due to come into force in April 2003, which stated that an organisation must have flexible work options for employees with children under the age of six. As the personnel advisor reported:

> *'What we have done at Cleveland is effectively take that legislation and open-up flexible practices for everyone in the organisation. We are not obliged to do this – it is something we can offer all our staff.'*

Organisational support and communication of the work-life balance initiative

The project team communicated and publicised the work-life balance initiative effectively to staff across the organisation via the following mechanisms:

- Formal communications to staff were made through the Core Brief, a message letter produced on a monthly basis by the Chief- and Assistant-Chief Constable. The brief was cascaded down the management structure and had been important in communicating work-life balance issues.

- A weekly bulletin newsletter distributed to all staff.

- Structured meeting systems and various user groups which facilitate communication of work-life balance issues.

- The work-life balance toolkit disseminated to staff via print circulation and on the force's electronic intranet.

Evaluating the impact of work-life balance interventions

CTC's final report (October 2002, p.8) detailed the following early impact measures which relate to a reduction in absenteeism (due to sickness), as well as a reduction in attrition for police and support staff:

A1. Absence Figures: Absences reduced (working days lost due to sickness)				
Absences				
1.1.01 to 31.12.01	Police	1,8670	Support staff	9,623
1.1.02 to 11.11.02	Police	1,4136	Support staff	7,283
	@ £500k saving on sickness absence in police officers		@ £155k saving in support staff absence	
Attrition (leavers)				
1.1.01 to 31.12.01	Police	75	Support Staff	41
1.1.02 to 11.11.02	Police	62	Support Staff	38

Without further data collection and analysis, it is difficult to speculate on the relative contribution of the specific types of consultant-led work-life balance interventions to this outcome data, as there was also a move within the organisation towards more proactive healthcare throughout this period. Although a key informant reported that 'there had been no real ongoing monitoring of the initiative across the organisation', they also stated that the work-life balance project had been instrumental in reducing sickness absenteeism:

> 'Certainly a combination of both work-life balance has been effective in reducing sickness. In Hartlepool (one of the self-rostering pilot areas for the WLB-CF project) we saved the equivalent of three police officers' salaries, because we have been able to reduce sickness/sick leave.'

The roll-out of the work-life balance initiative was met head-on by a major restructuring and organisational change programme that was being undertaken across the whole organisation (Response or Two-Tier Policing). At the time of the second round interviews, the local pilot self-rostering projects had been put on hold owing to plans to change the manner in which these particular operational units were going to be run as a result of the programme change (rather than the work-life balance project).

Other organisational impacts and benefits of work-life balance

The Equal Opportunities and Diversities Officer reported that the most significant impacts of the work-life balance project across the organisation were in terms of an increase in organisational learning capacity, strong cultural shifts and policy change:

> 'There has been massive organisational learning as a result of the work-life balance project which has provided an impetus to the way in which the organisation thinks about the delivery of services.'

> 'Work-life balance must now be considered as part of the whole (organisational) change program. The change program can only be implemented with consideration for the work-life balance issues which have already been made force policy.'

'The most significant changes have been at cultural level throughout the organisation. We have increased awareness of flexible options and staff are more prepared to negotiate flexible arrangements with their supervisors. There have been tangible changes. The whole work-life balance agenda within the force is too big now for it not to be sustainable.'

'Work-life balance is now a question on all promotion interviews: this is a major cultural change. Furthermore, work-life balance has been regularly included in the chief constable's Core Brief – which is cascaded down to all staff. The message from the top reinforces the impact that work-life balance is having across the organisation.'

'Even though I am now off post I still get calls from both individuals and other forces, and I offer help and advice where I can. I have done a few seminars nationally as a speaker on work-life balance. There is a real interest from other forces – because of the good work done here. But, I think that we need someone to coordinate work-life balance – especially to promote it nationally.'

'There has definitely been a change in the culture of the organisation at more senior levels. For example, we get male police officers saying that they will be leaving a formal meeting because they have to go and pick their child up from the nursery. Previously, that sort of thing would have been unheard of in the organisation.'

Whilst the impact of work-life balance on the organisation cannot be understated, it was also clear that certain flexible work options were a possibility whereas others were simply not operationally feasible within the context of a police force. As a member of the personnel management team stated, 'Whilst the work-life balance initiative can increase the options and opportunities for staff, it may be important to consider the balance.' As a respondent stated, 'in the end work-life balance is about what the person wants and what the organisation can accommodate. It is not just a question of staff getting what they want automatically – it needs to be considered and negotiated with managers and personnel.'

Lessons learnt and issues raised

The organisation

The organisation was positive about its relationship with the two consultancy organisations and the outcomes of the interventions provided. The service reported that it had learnt two main lessons from the work-life balance project:

- Though awareness training was initially pitched at senior managers, it was quickly realised that the service needed to work with and inform the front-line sergeants, as they were the first point of contact for police constables.

- There may have been some early mistakes in the way in which the consultants were initially used in the pilot self-rostering projects. The service may have assumed that the needs and issues at each pilot site

were the same. However, the main message for the service was that there were different needs and issues associated with each scenario.

The external consultants

The consultants involved in the self-rostering stated that they had learned the following lessons from the work-life balance initiative:

- The importance of engaging and involving staff in the projects from the beginning of the consultancy.

- Ensuring a strong buy-in and ownership of ideas.

- The significance of helping the client organisation to develop better ways of working (in spite of initial resistance from certain sectors of the organisation).

In relation to the work-life balance project pilots, the consultants deemed that:

- Wider/senior management decisions affected the implementation of the schemes.

- The expectations of staff may have been raised but not met due to the pilot projects not being fully implemented (even though a solution had been formulated).

Durham County Cricket Club (DCCC)

Training and developing managers: engendering top down culture change

Industry area: retail, wholesale and hospitality

Background and context

Durham County Cricket Club has recently undergone significant organisational reconfiguration, changing from a traditional cricket club to a commercial leisure and hospitality organisation delivering a range of services, including corporate catering, hospitality and entertainment, conferencing and meeting facilities, and a health club. The organisation has differentiated the following departments: cricket, administration, marketing, finance and catering. DCCC appears strongly business- and service delivery-focused. In 2000, the visiting PwC consultant reported that, as a result of rapid commercial expansion, DCCC was expected to 'break even' for the first time in three years.

The organisation had a committed core-staff (including managers) of between 50 and 70 employees across its organisational divisions. However, the overall personnel total was dependent upon seasonal demand and workload peaks (especially in the areas of operations and catering). For example, during the cricket season and Christmas period the number of additional temporary staff increased by a factor of between two to 200. Available data did not allow for gender differentiation of personnel.

The organisation had an interesting and complex orientation to its external markets. There were a number of peaks in workload for all staff in addition to the significant seasonal peak around the cricket season. During these times, there was an increase in the level of temporary contract workers employed in order to meet the heavy workloads imposed by raised business demand. During these peak periods staff could expect heavier workloads and unsociable hours of work (e.g. working at weekends). As a member of the administrative staff stated, 'Once people give their commitment to work at DCCC they know the issues the organisation faces – long work hours.' During the off-season, however, workloads, business focus and concomitant levels of temporary staff (especially in the catering and operations section) were expected to shift. As a result of the fluctuating demands of external markets, DCCC faced considerable challenges in implementing a flexible, successful work-life balance strategy across the whole organisation – a strategy which could successfully cope with predictable business demand variations, shift working and the temporary profiles of a significant proportion of its personnel. Interview data also suggested that a significant proportion of temporary contract workers employed in catering and operations were drawn from the local area through employment agencies.

Diagnostics and organisational issues

A brief, early scoping review by PricewaterhouseCoopers (Lomas, Nov, 2000) identified the following main organisational problems and symptoms prior to project roll-out:

- Low staff morale.

- Difficulties in complying with employment legislation.

- Not following 'best practice'.

Senior management recognised that due to concerns over profitability, there had previously been a low level of investment in the staff themselves. The external consultants also diagnosed (via survey work) a number of other problems within the organisation, some of which the client wished to address through the work-life balance initiative. These included weak leadership, fragmentation and schism between departments, problems with management teamworking (inter-departmentally) and communications, staff motivation and morale, and staff attrition and absences.

The early scoping study conducted by PwC also indicated that staff perceived management as not having a commitment to, or understanding of, staff issues. Further evidence from the anonymous qualitative responses to the panel survey administered by The Tavistock in 2002, suggested ongoing problems in the culture of the organisation, especially in terms of communication between managers and staff; employees sense of 'worth' and respect in relation to management; and specific work-life balance issues concerning working hours. The following quotes are indicative:

> '*If staff at DCCC could trust and communicate together, this business would not be where it's at today.*'

> '*Consideration and respect from higher levels of management. Being paid more money doesn't mean working fewer hours...*'

> '*Change my line supervisor who always has favourites and does not work fairly. Would like to work school hours - not necessarily be off on school holidays – to see my son as I'm a one-parent family.*'

For one employee, working long hours was simply viewed as 'part and parcel' of the job:

> '*Some of the answers to questions of hours of work and how it affects my social and home life are due to the fact that we work very hard during a cricket season, with little spare time, even at weekends. However, come the winter months, we have plenty of spare time and holidays. These times of work are accepted as part of being a cricket groundsman.*'

Another employee reported that work-life balance opportunities were dependent on rank or department, and that the organisation was fragmented owing to differing management styles:

> '*I am allowed, within reason, to choose my balance of work and life. However, I believe that this is not the case in other segments of the business, particularly 'catering'. In my opinion this is due to having various management styles throughout the business, which tend not to vary to meet the needs of the individual employing it. Someone in need of a directive style can get too much room to make decisions, whilst another in need of being empowered receives directive management. I believe we need to firmly move towards a common management style*

which adapts to suit individual needs. Unless we do so, the business will remain fragmented and lacking a common direction.'

Tackling problems: action and intervention

PwC agreed with the CEO (Lomas, 2000) that the project should focus initially on providing training and development for management staff in the understanding of WLB issues. However, this focus was also extended to training and developing managers in a range of areas, including teamworking and team skills, ways of working efficiently, the latest thinking on work-life arrangements and facilitating an action plan for improved work-life balance.

After conducting an initial survey and employing the initial scoping report, the external consultants constructed an intervention in the form of a series of workshops with middle and senior management. Workshop activities included:

- Team development and cohesiveness building exercises.

- Personality testing.

- Effective meetings.

- Goal setting and effective decision making.

- Improving communications.

For senior management, the project also appeared to have a more general purpose aimed at 'improving the working culture' and 'people's positive experience of work'. As a senior executive reported:

> *'We want people to enjoy working here. If it is a fun place to work then we can be more effective at work. This is a top-down move from the management to transmit a cultural change across the rest of the organisation.'*

The CEO also stressed that actual working practices at DCCC tended to be a response to market forces and business pressures, and reported that whilst the work-life balance initiative had been identified as being worthwhile, it was difficult for the organisation to tackle work flexibility from the 'life-side of the equation'. Rather, the objective for senior executives was to 'make people's experiences of being at work more positive.' For DCCC, the underlying logic appeared to be that if management worked better as a team and were more integrated, this would lead to a more positive working environment for all.

Data indicated that at the beginning of the project, 'all-day' work-life balance workshops were run intensively (approximately two per month) by the external consultants. However, when the cricket season started in the New Year (2001), the project slowed down owing to the managers' preoccupation with running the business and managing staff in their departments.

Communication and publicity

Whilst the intervention was restricted to middle and senior management, interviews indicated that media communication, dissemination and publicity of the initiative across the organisation had been minimal.

Implementation of the work-life balance initiative

As already mentioned, seasonal business demand had meant a lull in project activities during the cricket season of 2001. In terms of the actual implementation of the project, a senior executive reported that:

> *'The problem has been that we have tended to pay lip service to the initiative, but it is difficult to implement. We needed to have more facilitation – more 'hands-on help' in implementing the initiative. We don't have enough time or energy.'*

Although a senior executive reported that the project was ongoing and that you 'can't build Rome in a day', the actual level of implementation and impact across the organisation appeared to be relatively low. The CEO stated that the initiative had been concentrated on departmental management only as they were better placed to implement the initiative.

For management, a barrier to the implementation of, and commitment to, the work-life balance project was that it added an additional workload 'on top of people's existing work practices'. Furthermore, at the time of evaluation, there was no hard evidence of dedicated, internal procedures to manage the project or its objectives. Stakeholder interviews indicated that the CEO was the only real 'champion' of the project.

Outcomes, impacts and benefits

Senior management reported that there had been some changes to line-management structures and improvements in the way that management teams worked together as a result of the initiative. The external consultants also felt that the consultancy process had brought intangible benefits to the organisation, particularly in terms of raising awareness and educating management on certain work-life balance issues. In addition, a senior executive stated that a staff handbook containing information on grievance procedures and a contract of employment was now issued to all members of staff (including temporary staff).

At the time of the evaluation there were no formal work-life balance policies or procedures extant in the organisation, and it was noted that there had been no significant cascaded effects or major impacts of the work-life balance project across the organisation as a whole. Neither the organisation nor the external consultants reported that any formal impact or outcome evaluation measures had been set in place.

On balance, and given the timing of the Round Two evaluation reporting stage, later monitoring reports may indeed reveal that there have been core benefits and impacts which the Challenge Fund project has brought to the organisation. It is important to note that in an organisation facing such a large-scale reconfiguration, change and impact require time to embed before becoming significantly measurable.

Sustainability and progress

Whilst there had been approximately 12 workshops in 2001, progress on the initiative appeared to have ground to a halt at the time of the evaluation interviews. The impression gained was that the operational and business demands of the new cricket season had meant that all 'hands were thrown to

the wheel' and that there had been little time for project activities. When asked what plans had been devised to carry forward the work-life balance project over the next few years, a senior executive reported that there was no strategy in place. It was subsequently recognized that in order to make the most of the opportunity and secure ongoing staff commitment, it was essential to maintain the momentum of the initiative. As a result, previous work was followed up and used as a platform to launch the Investors in People programme.

With the implementation, progress and impact of the project being low at the time of evaluation, DCCC faced considerable organisational challenges in embedding organisation-wide work-life balance policy initiatives. Indeed, the inevitable pressures of business, coupled with the lack of a dedicated human resources department and the changing profile of personnel, may have militated against the prompt implementation and embedding of flexible working practices or 'off-the-shelf solutions.' In their early scoping report (Lomas, 2000), PwC recommended that:

> 'There should be a commitment to the generation of an action plan at the end of the training and development programme. Without this stipulation there is a danger that operational needs will override the project. The organisation must therefore commit the necessary time and resources to complete the project and have a commitment to take forward staff initiatives in work-life balance thereafter.'

The sustainable success of the work-life balance initiative at DCCC was not only dependent on the enthusiasm of senior management, but also on a long-term commitment to change and investment in staff.

London Borough of Merton Council

Involving staff at all levels

Industry area: Public Sector Administration

Background and context

The London Borough of Merton Council is a public organisation delivering services to a population of 184,000. Typical of a large inner-city borough council, Merton is a complex organisation with diverse service functions, including housing, benefits, social services, education and leisure. Merton has an annual budget of £197 million and employs 5,000 staff.

At the time the project began the organisation was facing multiple, complex external and internal challenges:

- Dealing with top-down political agendas from central government concerning the accessibility of public services; increasing organisational accountability, performance and customer focus; assessing the implications of 'Best Value' reviews for service delivery and dealing with resource constraints.

- Meeting increasing customer and service-user expectations concerning the quality and accessibility of council services.

- Merton was also considering a possible move to new accommodation. Staff had associated this move with an increase in service hours and this had negatively impacted on morale.

- Merton was also in the process of rolling out a wider programme of organisational change.

- Whilst Merton had spent relatively large sums of money on recruitment advertising, the council were having difficulties in recruiting talented new staff and retaining existing staff. There were also above average (for London) sickness levels amongst staff. Merton was perceived as a relatively low profile borough council which was not viewed as being 'cutting edge', 'best practice' or 'employer of choice' by other councils or its own employees. Furthermore, the organisation was viewed as having a 'long hours culture'.

Diagnostics and organisational issues

In order to deal effectively with staffing difficulties and low staff morale, Merton Council recognised that it needed external assistance in changing its organisational culture and work practices. Consequently, the initial objectives for the WLB-CF project were to address low staff morale, the working culture of the council and the perception of the council as not a 'best practice' organisation or employer of choice.

Although there had been an awareness of work-life issues and an informal accommodation of flexible working arrangements by some senior managers, these had tended to be isolated practices. Indeed, at the time of the PwC scoping report, there was no evidence of the implementation of widespread policy initiatives concerning work-life balance issues. Whilst Merton 'had responded to changes in the law with changes in the terms and conditions of

employees, these changes have been minimal.'[2] Furthermore, evaluation data indicated that prior to the work-life balance initiative, Merton had tended not to be effective in listening to, or acting upon, its employees' concerns and specific needs. For example, early research by PwC identified a large group of employees – parents with school age children – who found it especially difficult to balance their work and life obligations. This was seen as an important area for further work-life balance intervention.

Tackling problems: initial action and interventions

In consultation with Merton, PwC (2000) identified the following areas in which consultancy support would be required:

- Implementing cultural change.

- Investigating staff concerns (e.g. through attitude surveys/focus groups).

- Identify work-life balance options that the organisation could consider.

- Communicating and implementing change.

Initially, the approach to the intervention was to roll out the project to defined pilot departments within the organisation, in order to:

- Evaluate and assess the WLB options developed by the staff and consultant.

- Evaluate staff perceptions of change.

Implementation of work-life balance interventions

Building on PwC's original terms of reference, an overall consultancy strategy was developed emphasising co-participation and consultation between staff and managers across a range of organisational levels. This approach was designed to improve relationships, empower staff and ensure 'tailor-made solutions' that fitted both organisational and staff requirements.

Merton Council also set-up an internal steering group, made up of the Assistant Chief Executive and representatives from both personnel and the union (UNISON), to manage the initiative. The management consultancy Barony [3] devised the following four key intervention activities:

I.   Focus groups:

Five focus groups were undertaken and participants were drawn from black and ethnic minority staff, staff with disabilities, staff with caring obligations, front-desk staff and third-tier managers. Three additional focus groups were also held with 20 departmental Heads of Service and Chief Officers. A total of 61 members of staff were involved in the activity. The focus group discussions explored staff perceptions and attitudes across a range of key themes, including equal opportunities, awareness of existing work-life balance options, the long hours' culture, outcomes and output-based management, issues affecting people with disabilities and the role of IT, stress and pressure at work, and the benefits of more flexible working.

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[2] Final Report,(Oct. 2001), p. 3.
[3] Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund, Final Report (October 2001).

II.   Identifying new flexible work-life balance options:

Following from the initial terms of reference for the project, two service areas were selected for the pilot – Housing Lettings and Council Tax Revenues. Within these sectors there were 15 teams and over 100 members of staff. Initial management team meetings in these areas were designed, *inter alia*, to communicate the business case for flexible options, address concerns and potential options, communicate the aims of the work-life balance challenge fund initiative and Merton's specific work-life balance project. Subsequent staff discussions followed a similar format to those with management – although there was a shift of emphasis towards identifying the particular types of work-life balance options they wished to test.   The Assistant Chief Executive introduced a number of these meetings, demonstrating the commitment of senior management to the project and promoting the initiative within the context of Merton's programme of change.

Barony (2001) reported that the management reacted positively to staff wishes and that this bottom-up/top-down approach was key to reducing staff concerns that the project was being used as a vehicle to drive a 'hidden agenda' – allowing the council to surreptitiously impose new working patterns on staff.

III   Piloting new flexible working options:

 Following the identification and planning activities, work-life options were implemented and tested in these service areas. Importantly, in order to regulate pilot activities and avoid implementation difficulties within teams, certain ground rules were established, which included respect for each individual's work-life balance needs; reserving the right for an individual to withdraw from a scheme; being prepared to compromise; and finding joint solutions to business and work-life issues.

Barony (2001) reported that, 'empowering staff and supporting managers are two critical and parallel actions that can create the conditions for success (of WLB):

- Empowering staff to identify flexible working patterns that will meet their individual, team, and service needs.

- Supporting staff and managers by setting ground rules designed to promote joint working and responsibility between staff and managers to make flexible working patterns successful.

Working in teams to establish individuals' new working patterns means potential problems are aired and resolved openly by the team, promoting a sense of ownership and commitment to the new ways of working. The approach:

- Empowers staff, giving a sense of control and trust and;

- Supports managers who may otherwise be left to resolve any conflicts which could result in the withdrawal of options from the team or individuals.'

The management consultants also noted that the tabled suggestions of staff-management teams to work-life balance options could be quite radical. Indeed, teamworking provided an open context in which work practices could be completely reviewed and revised. To illustrate, Barony cited the following example :

'Dispensing with the notion of core hours requirements [i.e. a requirement to arrive no later than 10 a.m. and leave no earlier than 4 p.m. with lunch being taken between the hours of 12 noon and 2 p.m.]. Rather, the requirement became that the necessary level of cover is provided, particularly during customer interface hours.'

IV   Staff attitude survey:

In order to explore staff concerns and attitudes, a survey was designed and administered across the organisation. The results from this baseline survey were evaluated and fed back to the original cross-organisational focus groups for further interpretation. The survey contributed to the development of options for work-life balance solutions and provided the basis for a self-monitoring tool for the organisation.

In summary, the consultants employed a sophisticated yet subtle approach to constructing and implementing effective work-life balance interventions. The actual process of managing and achieving a staged solution was designed as an integral part of the solution itself. For staff-management teams in particular the implementation of work-life balance solutions was facilitated by ensuring a co-ownership of both the decisions and the decision-making processes itself.

Specific work-life balance changes implemented

As a result of the interventions, a diverse range of flexible work options were implemented across the pilot service areas, including:

- Two days a month flexi-leave.

- Flexi-hours operating from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

- Compressed working.

- Homeworking amongst management teams.

- Improved flexibility around taking leave for whole or half days.

- 12 – 3 pm lunch period.

Spin-offs and outcomes

The following spin-offs and outcomes emerged from the implementation of the project:

- News releases concerning the success of the project were disseminated to the national press and members of senior management had been asked to speak at conferences as well as advise other local authorities.

- A significant spin-off outcome of the work-life balance initiative was the development of a 'Work-Life Balance Toolkit' by the Council, the union (UNISON) and Barony. A CD-ROM-based product aimed at assisting other local authorities in designing an implementing strategy for work-life balance, the toolkit utilised Merton's experience of the work-life balance initiative as a basis for the dissemination of shared learning. Barony reported that Merton had sold over one hundred toolkits.

- The Minister for Employment Relations and the Regions mentioned the Merton project as a model of good practice at the Work-Life Balance Challenge fund fair in September 2001.

- Previously, the organisation was seen as being 'behind the times' and not an 'employer of choice' in comparison to other London Borough Councils. As a result of the Challenge Fund initiative, the profile and reputation of Merton Council had been elevated and promoted.

Impacts and benefits of work-life balance

Whilst there had been an extensive take-up of the work-life balance initiative across the organisation with senior management hailing the project a success, the consultant's final report (October, 2001) did not offer rigorous or systematic evaluation data to clearly support claims concerning the beneficial impacts and outcomes of the pilot initiative at Merton. Rather, the evidence presented tended to be somewhat anecdotal or represented one-off descriptive statistics.

As a result of the staff survey activity, Barony's final report provided basic descriptive data concerning the benefits of the work-life balance initiative, with the addition of a selection of anecdotal quotations from staff. However, this quantitative data was based on a 'snapshot survey' rather than a systematic prior and post-implementation comparison. Without such a baseline comparison, the qualification of change or levels of beneficial impacts were difficult to meaningfully determine.

The appendices of the Barony Final Report (2001) contained synopses of core benefits arising from the implementation of the project. These headings (e.g. financial savings, staff retention and absence) corresponded with the measures of core benefits outlined in the original PwC scoping report. However, data relating to change was difficult to interpret conclusively. By its own admission, Barony commented that:

> *'We are currently developing more effective and robust monitoring procedures and expect that by September 2002 we will be in a position to have clear targets for change in place.'*

Lessons learnt and issues raised: the consultants and the organisation

Overall, the external consultants pointed to three main factors that had facilitated the success of the project:

- The commitment of senior management to allow managers and staff to take risks and 'experiment with new working patterns'.

- The championing of the project by the Assistant Chief Executive in partnership with the union, Unison. This gave credibility to the project and ensured that any obstacles were dealt with effectively from the top.

- The bottom-up approach to making decisions and creating options for flexible working by both the staff and the management teams in each of the pilot service areas helped to create conditions of empowerment and a sense of the co-ownership of solutions.

The three main barriers to the success of the project were identified as:

- The limited availability of IT solutions that could enable staff and managers to work outside of the traditional patterns of working hours.

- A strong concern among staff that the work-life balance initiative would be used instrumentally by management to impose changes on the workforce.

- The assumption that opportunities for work-life balance were limited by the size of teams, workloads and customer needs at the point of service.

The organisation's view on the consultancy process

The organisation pointed to two main aspects of their work with the consultants that seemingly facilitated the success of the project:

- The consultant had a commitment and a belief in the process/product.

- The consultants quickly gained credibility within the organisation, provided high quality products and delivered on time.

Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)

Reviewing work-life balance issues within a charitable organization

Industry area: education, health and other services

Background and context

The Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) is a registered charity that provides direct and indirect services to visually impaired children and adults. Direct services include information and advice, products, transcription, education, and accommodation. Indirect services are provided in order to influence and support others to improve their goods, services and facilities to visually impaired people; for example, expert advice, training and support to public and private organisations, campaigning for change, fundraising, raising awareness amongst the general public and undertaking research (RNIB Strategic Directions, 2000-2006). To achieve this, the RNIB employs approximately 3,005 staff, of which approximately 2,078 are permanent.

There were a number of factors that prompted the RNIB's interest in taking part in the Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund.

Firstly, the central office of the RNIB moved premises in 2002, moving from a building in which it had been based for the last 100 years, to a new, open-plan, modern and technologically equipped building. The move was a significant milestone in the history of the organisation. As one Director commented:

> '...[the move] provided the opportunity for RNIB to look at how we work, provide services and the culture of the organisation. We saw the work-life balance project as an integral part of the change.'

Secondly, charitable trusts in general face a unique set of personnel and cultural issues. Typically, staff are not paid very well, have a very high workload and are expected to work long hours. In addition, there is the expectation that people are working for the charity because they are committed to the goals of the organisation. This compounds the expectation to work longer hours.

Thirdly, in March 1998, an equalities audit was conducted which revealed that while policies were strong on content related to disability, there was no mention of gender. With 70 per cent of the workforce being female, this was recognized as a disparity – especially given the long hours culture and the need to balance work and home commitments.

Diagnostics and organisational problems

The main organisational problems were identified in an initial report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (Rolland, 2000). The key work-life balance issues facing RNIB were low employee retention, high absenteeism and recruitment difficulties.

The initial report also identified some inflexibility in work options, as identified in exit interviews. These included:

- High workloads.

- Reluctance to take leave because of the stress it causes when returning to work.

- The reward for good work and hard work is even more work.

- Inconsistency in application of part-time working.

- Difficulties for women returning from maternity leave (i.e. not being viewed as promotable if leaving at 5pm).

Further issues identified by the consultants were those surrounding health and safety, and the need to develop an overarching policy related to work-life balance.

Tackling problems: action and intervention

The intervention was designed and conducted by the consultants in close consultation with RNIB staff. It involved a range of activities at staff, line-manager and senior management level.

Initially, a workshop was held with senior managers to develop a vision for work-life balance within the RNIB and facilitate their buy-in to the project. At approximately the same time, a survey was sent to all staff at the central London site about their working styles – exploring how they work, how they would like to work and options that should be available to them.

Internal managers were then asked to identify any of their staff that wanted to work differently or more flexibly. Thirty people were included in the pilot that started in October 2001 and ran for three months. The HR Manager stressed that when the pilot commenced, it was essential that both managers and staff understood the implications and additional responsibilities they had as being part of the pilot. In addition, practical support from the consultant on issues such as how reporting arrangements work in flexible working, or how to work with support staff from home, was essential. Teething problems mostly centred on setting up computer equipment, sorting out phones and arranging Internet access.

During the pilot, a number of flexible work arrangements were trialled. These included: a nine-day fortnight; permanent home-working; multiple sites working; and hot-desking. Staff taking part completed a pre- and post-pilot survey.

Implementing the intervention was not easy for the RNIB. Obstacles included: constant workload issue; a resistance to the intervention from various quarters; a feeling that too many other changes and initiatives were coinciding; the tendency to loose sight of the long-term vision; and a lack of enthusiasm among workers borne of uncertainty. Though the process of implementing the intervention took longer than anticipated, staff were supported by the consultant and spurred on in the belief that work-life balance could make a real difference.

Implementation of the work-life balance initiative

A key factor in the implementation of the initiative was achieving the support of the Chief Executive. One HR Manager noted the reason why the CE eventually came on board:

> *'...[The Chief Executive] could see that work-life balance could provide an alternative to monetary rewards for the review of the rewards system that was going at the same time as the work-life balance project' (HR Manager).*

In addition, one of the Directors had a significant role as a champion of work-life balance issues on the management team, and was considering work-life balance options in his last year of service before retirement.

Despite the high level of support for the project, it was reported that one of the key barriers to implementation had been the role of line managers. Feedback from staff noted that while the RNIB had good working policies, their implementation depended too much on line managers. Two participants were told by their line managers that working from home was not possible, despite the fact that others in similar positions were home based (Survey, The Tavistock Institute).

Other key challenges with the implementation of the work-life balance initiative concerned the additional demands made on staff time. This had impacted on:

- Senior managers and their involvement in scoping workshops and working groups.

- HR staff and their involvement with setting up the project, arranging seminars, working with the consultants, explaining benefits to senior managers, working with participants in the pilot.

- Health and Safety advisors, especially in terms of ensuring homeworkers had safe working environments.

- IT support staff who dealt with queries from homeworkers, and supported them to set up workstations at home.

It was noted that an outstanding issue was that of addressing the underlying cause of poor work-life balance practices – the long hours culture – within the RNIB. Indeed, there was a belief that the work-life balance initiative would address this. However, changing aspects of the way in which an organisation is run does not necessarily lead to a change in the fundamental way in which the organisation works. The need for an ongoing commitment among senior management to addressing this issue – the need for them to look at their own long hour work behaviour, along with their preparedness to address the 'hard and difficult' issues – was highlighted.

Outcomes, impacts and benefits

One of the major changes from the work-life balance pilot had been the acceptance by a large and influential part of the management board of the importance of work-life balance issues and their expediency in retaining key staff. In addition, staff expectations were beginning to change, with evidence of the issue being raised at staff consultation fora. The project allowed the RNIB not only to trial flexible working, but also to examine existing practice,

particularly in relation to homeworkers. This led to reviewing policies, particularly in the area of Health and Safety (Final Report, 2002).

Direct impacts from the Challenge Fund initiatives have included the attitude of staff involved in the pilot towards their job and work environment. Two staff members involved in the pilot stated that, were it not for the work-life balance initiative and the opportunity to work more flexibly, they would have left, thus indicating the potential for improving staff retention. The Final Report (2002) also notes that there has been an overall softening and shift of approach by senior managers from a focus on presenteeism to a more results driven style of management.

Sustainability and progress

The RNIB intend to continue the roll out of the work-life balance initiative within the organisation. Key issues that need to be addressed in order to progress the initiative further within the RNIB include:

- Extra support for Health and Safety advisors and IT staff, particularly in assisting staff with visual impairments and dealing with the associated technological requirements. Certainly the additional workload of IT staff needs to be planned for and managed with further roll out.

- Ensuring mechanisms are in place for staff to broach the subject of working more flexibly with line managers.

- The need for managers to be more explicit about organisational needs and how changes in working arrangements will be reviewed.

- Providing transition training for staff wanting to change their work arrangements.

Consequently, a staff satisfaction survey was scheduled to be undertaken in November 2002, with a view to exploring work-life balance issues such as working hours, up-take of flexible working arrangements and the ability to balance work and life.

Like other organisations involved with the WLB-CF, the RNIB continues to face the challenge of tackling the difficult issues associated with implementing new work-life balance arrangements and being prepared to 'go the full distance'. An ongoing ability to overcome the barriers and objections that arise through the course of wider implementation will be critical in taking the project forward within the organisation.

J. Rothwell and Son Ltd

Work-Life balance as a catalyst for effective recruitment and retention

Industry area: agriculture, mining and manufacturing

Background and context

J. Rothwell and Son Ltd is an established family firm, growing, picking, packing and distributing mushrooms to a number of large supermarket outlets. This market producer's business is cycle-intensive; mushrooms are grown 12 months a year and the elapsed time from harvesting to customer delivery can be a matter of hours.

Whilst the firm had a turnover of around £3.5 million per year[4], its ambitions were to expand its operations and productivity by up to 30 per cent through the creation of additional production capacities and by increasing the size of its workforce of 141 employees[5]. However, whilst J. Rothwell and Son Ltd was strongly business- and delivery-focussed, it faced very considerable organisational challenges in order to meet these expansion targets and respond to changing customer needs in a highly competitive market-produce sector. The main barriers to growth and change in the firm were complexly related to: (i) organisational culture and structures; (ii) personnel and recruitment; (iii) difficulties with middle management; and (iv) specific work-life balance issues.

Diagnostics and organisational problems

The harvesting and packing of mushrooms is particularly labour intensive. Previously, staff at J. Rothwell and Son Ltd worked for long shifts in the picking and packing sheds, and were often obliged to work for extended periods at very short notice in order to meet immediate customer demands. The organisation had gained a misinformed reputation in the local region as being the sort of firm where people 'worked underground and in the dark' for long hours and in poor working conditions. Although there was a loyal and skilled core labour force (especially in the picking-sheds), at the time of application to the WLB-CF there was both a decrease in the retention of core staff and only a very short-term retention of new recruits, and consequently high staff-turnover. Indeed, at the time of the Wave 1 WLB-CF application, the CEO reported a 72 per cent staff turnover in the 12 months prior to the initiative. These personnel and staffing problems were compounded by high levels of unplanned absenteeism amongst some staff and an increasing disaffectedness amongst the core workforce – who were disappointed with the quality and turnover of new recruits. Overall, the economic consequences of these factors for the business were serious; particularly given the short demand cycles of 'picking to client delivery' and the extreme competitiveness of the market sector for larger contracts.

In order to address these difficulties, the company realised early on that they needed help to develop their working practices, policies and internal systems, as well as addressing work-life balance issues. However, the management staff

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[4]Robertson-CooperLtd(http://www.robertsoncooper.com/case_studies/rothwell.html).
[5] At the time of the evaluation interviews.

lacked the experience and time resource to implement and develop them and needed the help of external consultants. In particular, PwC (2000) reported that:

> *'The company needs to retain its good workers, attract ex-employees back into the company who were good workers and attract new workers who stay with the company. In order to achieve this, the company needs to understand why employees leave and why their requirements are not being met.'*

Prior to the initiative the company was not aware of the nature of its personnel problems – as one interviewee stated, 'People just came and went'. There had been little systematic monitoring or review of personnel data concerning sickness, absence or reasons for leaving, and the operational or strategic impacts of these factors on the business.

Although the firm is situated in a rural area of relatively low unemployment, J. Rothwell and Sons Ltd were keen to attract and retain female employees, many of whom had young families. Although the organisation recognised that this dominant employee group was having difficulties in reconciling work obligations with childcare and domestic responsibilities, the firm considered that an important aspect of its development and growth programme would be to develop childcare facilities and flexible work practices with this employee group.

Tackling problems: action and intervention

In agreement with PricewaterhouseCoopers (2000), the original terms of reference for the consultancy support package consisted of the following recommendations:

- Needs assessment of staff requirements.

- Assistance in the development of innovative ways of working/policies, drafting and implementation of those policies.

- Communicating the above to senior management and employees to: a) bring about behavioural/attitudinal/cultural change; and b) convey an action and business plan to employees.

Implementation of the work-life balance initiative

The chosen external consultants for the work-life balance project at J. Rothwell and Son Ltd were Robertson-Cooper Ltd (RC), a new consultancy company specialising in business psychology solutions. Following the initial suggested recommendations of PwC, Robertson-Cooper Ltd (Organisational Progress Report, Wave 1, September 2002) embarked on the following four key consultancy activities:

- A diagnostic and documentary data collection process was conducted and the findings and recommendations were fed back to the management and staff. This audit of staff requirements identified a range of work-life balance and organisational culture issues. Recommendations were subsequently made to the CEO concerning improving retention and recruitment as well, as offering improved flexibility in ways of working. In order to foster a sense of ownership in the project and its impacts, RC held workshops and meetings with staff and management to encourage participative involvement.

- Recruitment and retention activities were developed with an internal team that reviewed the existing recruitment, retention and induction practices. This group linked up with local and regional job centres, and employment service staff were invited to the firm so that potential new recruits could be informed of what it was like to work on the farm. The team also formed a link with an early years' partnership in order to offer advice and support on childcare opportunities for both new and existing personnel. Subsequently, the consultants reported that 'increasing the numbers of good staff had a significant impact on the work-life balance of existing employees', and that 'there is much improved initial induction and communications between new staff and supervisors'.

- Developing Flexible Work Practices for staff to give: a) existing and new part-time workers the flexibility to negotiate their work hours, given operational demands; b) time off in lieu or paid overtime; and c) the introduction of a 'toil' system to enable employees to have time out of work to address work-life balance issues and conflicts. Although it was envisaged that this would help to decrease unplanned absences, at the time of the progress report these sub-activities were in the planning phase only.

- Consultants were involved with coaching management staff –facilitating and developing two members of staff, encouraging the development of strategic ideas and building the confidence to implement change.

Outcomes, impacts and benefits

In evaluating the activities from which there were substantive outcomes, the progress report indicated that, generally, they were well received, had met the planned objectives and improved business performance. Further quantitative indicators (pp. 4 – 6; Progress Report, Wave 1, September 2002) concerning the benefits and outcomes of the project in terms of financial savings, improvement in staff retention and reduction in absence, show that there was both significant improvements over baseline values and clear on-target values[6]. Furthermore, the progress report indicated that, as a result of the initiative, there had been a 'tremendous improvement in staff morale. This is tangibly evident amongst the staff'. The company now offers more flexible working hours for staff and, at the time of interview, the external consultants were planning on writing a work-life balance manual for employees.

Overall, the progress report indicated that the project had been 'very successful', suggesting that 'the results speak for themselves' and that the project had provided a 'positive catalytic effect' to management and staff groups. The project has also been cited as a beacon work-life balance project and given national press.

In order to maintain the initial momentum of the consultancy activities and move closer to optimal solutions, the data indicated that J. Rothwell and Son Ltd had subsequently spent nearly as much on consultancy as the initial *tranche* of work-life balance funding. When dealing with work-life balance

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[6] Figures based on a comparison of periods: March 2000 – September 2000 and September 2000 – March 2001 (and see p. 4, Case Studies: J. Rothwell and Son Ltd: (http://www.robertsoncooper.com/case_studies/rothwell.html)

issues, it is unlikely that they will be tackled in isolation of the other aspects of an organisation. The complexity of organisational systems and their dynamics can mean that a change to one part of the system affects the others. Whilst one-off solutions may be effective in the short-term, for both the organisation and the external consultant, such interventions can open-up a 'can of worms', thus requiring further readjustments or interventions. Rather than moving towards a clear, closed solution space, this may give the impression that the complexity of the issues increases (at least in the short-term). At the time of interview, J. Rothwell and Son Ltd were continuing to work with the external consultants on the personnel management issues facing their organisation.

Whilst tangible measures of outcome were important indicators of the success of the project, there are intangible benefits to implementing the work-life balance consultancy process. As the CEO reported:

> '...The whole process itself was extremely beneficial in terms of the thought process and the questions that it posed and the way it made us look at our own issues from a different angle... The process itself helped us to understand our problems far better and, in the long term, gave us the insight and tools to think how to go about things now.'

The consultancy had the effect of providing an external perspective and assessment of the organisation and the challenges that it faced. For senior management the work-life balance project had been a learning process that had been catalytic in creating a climate of reflexivity and in providing an insight into understanding the dynamics of their own organisation.

This type of organisational and individual learning can be a powerful impetus to the long-term sustainability of work-life balance within an organisation. Solutions to organisational challenges and work-life balance issues have to be something that an organisation itself feels that it can realistically manage and sustain. This sense of confidence and control can, in part, be attributed to the external consultant's approach to working with the organisation. In the case of J Rothwell and Son Ltd, the consultant had worked in a collaborative and participative manner from a very early stage, and this had fostered a sense of ownership over the initiative within the organisation. This approach enabled senior management to continue with their everyday responsibilities.

Lessons learned and issues raised

The organisation's perspective:

- The relative costs of external consultancy to an SME can be high and there may be additional consultancy work that needs to be done on top of work-life balance funding in order to achieve a solution. In such cases, the SME may need to consider the costs and benefits of being further involved in the process.

- Consultancy can bring about long lasting changes to organisational thinking, as well as offering tools and insights. This can be a powerful driver to change and the long-term sustainability of the work-life balance initiative.

- Building and maintaining a good working relationship with the external consultants is a key factor in the success of the initiative.

- The external consultants involved all levels of the organisation in their range of activities, giving staff the opportunity to voice concern and raise issues of specific importance to them. Such an inclusive approach was important in ensuring take-up and the adoption of the project across the organisation.

The consultants' perspective:

- The initial process of the Challenge Fund Fair and client-consultant matching could be somewhat idiosyncratic and confusing. The onus on organisations to decide who they would work with at the Fair may have been unrealistic in that both the client and the consultants need to have a number of conversations in order to match effectively.

- The initial terms of reference or engagement for the project can be unachievable – 'You don't know what you will be addressing until you've done the diagnostic phase.'

- Across the early six month monitoring and reporting phase it may be too early to: a) assess the actual or expected impacts and outcomes of WLB on an organisation; or b) understand any causal relationships between the intervention and outcomes. Another approach to measuring performance and monitor the development of the process of intervention could be to employ an audit procedure with key benchmarks.

- The importance of fostering the organisation's involvement in, and sense of ownership of, the process and initiative so as to reduce the possibility of dependency when the consultants are no longer present.

- PricewaterhouseCoopers were effective and supportive of the external consultants throughout, and it was easy to form a relationship with them.

RC report that they would like to continue to be involved in the WLB-CF and that it has been a good initiative for the firm and has led to follow-on consultancy opportunities.

Perfecta Ltd

The importance of introducing flexibility and business feasibility planning in an SME

Industry area: independent commercial production

Background and context

Perfecta Ltd is a small independent family firm supplying high-quality foodstuffs and ingredients to the food and associated industries. The business specialises in mixing and packing food ingredients (herbs, spices, colourings, additives, flavours, etc.) according to the customer's specific requirements.

The company employs all four members of the immediate Roberts family: Dr. Roberts, Managing Director, is a food technologist and company founder (1972); Mrs Roberts, his wife, is a Director; and their two children are Sales Manager and Human Resources Manager respectively. The plant employs a mixed staff of approximately 40, of which 31 are full-time and 10 part-time (PwC, 2001).

In their scoping report, PwC (2001) reported that the company was about to move to a single dedicated site. Previously, the firm was run from two sites: the administrative and technical arm of the company in an extension of the Managing Director's house, and the factory production unit (in which packing and storage occurs) a short distance away.

At the time of PwC's scoping report (2001), market forces were impacting on the firm and sales targets were down for the year. This was primarily due to issues in the food industry concerning the foot and mouth disease and BSE crises.

The company operated from within an economically prosperous area in North East Somerset. The labour market was very competitive and there was full employment in the area. As a small firm, Perfecta was not able to offer high wages to its employees. The firm envisaged that a primary route to improved staff retention, recruitment and morale was the introduction of highly flexible working practices and meeting the work-life balance needs of the workforce. An overarching aim of the project was to construct a pool of core 'packing' employees who would rotate around a number of production activities, not just packing (PwC Perfecta Case Study, 2001).

At the time of the scoping report the company was expanding into new premises. By consolidating operations from a single site, it was hoped that the move would both improve communications and the working environment.

Organisational diagnostics and work-life balance issues

Through their scoping interviews and group discussions, the three main diagnostic issues identified by PwC (2001 pp. 4-5) were:

- Retention
  The company had high staff turnover and retention problems. The intensive training that staff had to undertake in order to work in the

factory compounded this. The financial outlay and skills benefits were lost when staff left the company to work for other organisations.

- Recruitment
  Perfecta had faced low response to recruitment advertisements. Individuals were influenced in their choice of employer by the attraction of other benefits on offer (such as childcare facilities).

- Morale
  In certain areas of the company – such as packing – there was low morale and low self-esteem among staff.

These issues served as the main indicators of improvement and impact of the work-life balance project within the organisation. Focus groups with employees identified the following work-life balance issues:

- Development of a crèche facility to encourage women recruits.

- Holiday flexibility to allow people to accrue days for longer leave.

- Improvements in the physical environment (e.g. air conditioning and a water cooler).

- Development of a TOIL (Time Off In Lieu) scheme to enable staff to work more flexibly.

Perfecta had already achieved the *Investors in People Standard* in 1999 (PwC Perfecta Case Study, 2001) and had implemented a number of welfare policies (including a sick pay scheme, paternity leave, compassionate leave and a group health scheme). However, prior to the work-life balance initiative, there were no formal work-life balance policies in operation. PwC (2001) identified that an important aspect of the consultant intervention would be to review existing policies and provide support in terms of human resources strategy and work-life balance development. PwC did not foresee any barriers to the project and at the time the only other initiative under development was a performance appraisal system which would not impede any consultant-led work-life balance initiatives.

There was a strong commitment among management to develop flexible working practices and policies. In particular, the Managing Director was very enthusiastic about a plan to provide an on-site crèche facility that would benefit both the workforce and the wider business community. Early research conducted internally by the organisation had identified a lack of local childcare facilities and the need for a crèche in the area. As part of their scoping report, PwC (2001) recommended that a feasibility study be conducted into the need for a staff crèche.

Tackling problems: action and intervention

Following the work-life balance fair, Perfecta chose The Worklife Company (CTC) to undertake the consultancy interventions. A small niche consultancy that specialises in providing work-life balance solutions, CTC had considerable experience in working with private clients and on DTI sponsored projects. The consultants reported that the PwC scoping report (2001) provided a clear basis for the terms of reference, direction and delivery of the project:

> *'In 100 per cent of the cases our clients have found that the PwC consultants were excellent, and they have used that word 'excellent'. When they [the consultants] come in they do the scoping exercise and they try to establish what is going on within the company, they really enjoy that exercise ... and 100 per cent of our cases said that. But, overall, the scoping reports are fine ... they give us a good baseline or platform. But when we go in to do the terms of engagement – that is when we really can get the essence.'*

Feasibility plan for the children's crèche

Working largely with the senior management team, an important focus of the Challenge Fund project was to develop a detailed feasibility business plan and review for the establishment of a children's crèche. Following detailed research of existing local area childcare provision, a needs analysis survey of staff and other local businesses, and a projection of set-up and running costs, it became apparent that this would not be an effective intervention. As the external consultants reported in 2002:

> *'With Perfecta the (PwC) scoping report was very clear about investigating the idea of setting up a crèche and to look up what the internal work-life balances were. That was the actual scope of the project as we delivered it, but the outcome was that they decided not to go with the crèche. But, we had to go through that investigation. The outcome was great because the chief executive actually stood back and said: 'Yes I would have gone long into this and done this although it would not have been a good idea'. And in fact since then, because I am still working with them and we have had some interesting outcomes, Asda has opened a superstore five to ten minutes from where the company is and they have also opened up a massive crèche. So in hindsight it was a good decision not to do it.'*

Other work-life balance interventions

The consultants were able to successfully persuade senior management to accept their recommendations concerning the crèche. Upon completion of the feasibility study, the following recommended activities were also undertaken and the necessary changes implemented (Round Three, Final Report, October 2002, pp. 5 – 6):

- Data collection

  Surveys and focus group work was undertaken. An employee survey was also conducted across all employees in order to identify needs and to focus work-life balance issues.

- Senior management development

  A number of half-day interventions to examine: management style, communication; teamwork; role-modelling; values; and performance management. The consultants reported that this contributed to helping managers to focus on how effective people management and communication are the bedrock for culture change in work-life balance. As a result of regular briefings and the distribution of fliers and newsletters, communication and teamwork has improved.

- Staff communication

  This process was perceived as a major issue. Communication problems were discussed in focus groups and recommendations for improvements were made and implemented. Focus groups involved both senior management and production staff. A staff-friendly guide to the Employee Handbook was produced.

Although the consultants worked mainly with the senior management team, throughout the planning and implementation phase of the initiative factory and production managers were consulted on a regular basis. Indeed, there was considerable enthusiasm for the project throughout the company. As the consultants remarked:

> 'When I had focus groups to talk to employees they all wanted to come, and you just could not exclude because they were all interested. All the managers and supervisors and all the employees were therefore involved in the communication process of the project.'

Staff and management within the organisation were able to give a more than adequate time commitment. This high level of involvement (Round Three Final Report, October 2002, p. 8) had the following outcomes:

- Project timescales and objectives were achieved.

- Perfecta took ownership of change and future plans.

- There was a clear impact of the consultancy activities and interventions on a smaller management team.

Evaluating the impact of work-life balance interventions

This small firm clearly benefited significantly from the PwC scoping exercise, the outcomes of the different intervention activities and the close, supportive working relationship that developed between management and the external consultants. However, the organisation felt that the impacts of the year-long project on indicators such as staff attrition and absence would not be significant. Rather, such impacts may have become more visible over a two-year project period (Round 3, Final Report, October).

Although sickness and attrition are complex problems that are unlikely to be purely related to work-life balance issues, the concern may have been reflected in the quantitative impacts reported by the organisation across a number of the key outcome measures (i.e. take-up, project specific benefits, financial savings; Round Three, Final Report, October 2002). Whilst the direction of the quantitative data on outcomes appeared generally positive, there were few strong shifts. However, this finding may have also been influenced by a lack of baseline data provided for a number of indicators. Such comparative data would clearly show the relationships of change between baseline information, target and actual outcomes achieved.

Qualitatively, for each of the work-life balance project areas the following example outcomes and benefits were reported by the organisation and the consultants: (WLB-CF Final Report, October 2002 pp: 8 -10)

- Business feasibility planning

Although a somewhat unexpected outcome, the process of business and feasibility planning provided significant added-value and impact for the organisation and the senior management team. Not only did the exercise promote organisational learning, but the organisation saved approximately 140k by deciding not to develop a crèche.

- Team building
  The management development facilitated team building and cohesion, as well as developing a range of styles that could be employed to support employees differing needs.

- Communication
  Utilising a range of media tools, Perfecta were developing a more open, supportive and listening 'communication culture'.

- Recruitment
  The company adopted a sharper recruitment focus on hiring the right staff that had the early outcome of reducing costs and improving quality. Furthermore, including company information in the application pack had contributed to the early filtering of applicants.

Additionally, the company had been successful in recruiting a laboratory technician who had been attracted to the company because of the offer of flexible working. The firm was also witnessing the beginnings of its 'core pool of packing employees' – an all women group able to balance work and family commitments due to the flexible working arrangements available to Perfecta employees (PwC, 'Perfecta Case Study', 2001).

Organisational future and sustainability of the work-life balance project

The external consultants reported that the sustainability of the initiative was not a problem for Perfecta, 'because they have completely clicked with this being a journey' (2002).

The quality of relationship formed between the firm and CTC was confirmed in the subsequent evaluation interviews, with the external consultants revealing that

> *'The relationship is still ongoing; we just signed a contract to work with them over the next year. We are continuing with management development because they love it, they eat it up! We are also supporting them with business planning. It is a really good relationship.'*

A considerable amount of the Challenge Fund money had been spent on the feasibility study for the proposed crèche facility, and both the consultants and organisation considered that it was still 'early days' in terms of addressing the internal work-life balance issues. However, the senior management team was clearly committed to the future development of the project across the following range of key issues:

- The development of a longer-term strategy and values to support that strategy.

- A further increase in management development activity.

- Continuous improvements in communications.

- Continued development of work-life balance.

Barriers to progress and factors contributing to the success of the work-life balance project

The organisation and consultants reported (WLB-CF Final Report, October 2002, p.10) that the three factors contributing most to the success of the project were:

- High levels of commitment and enthusiasm from senior management.

- Flexible, supportive and structured approach of the consultants.

- Support and feedback from the employees within the organisation.

In addition, the organisation reported that the external consultants quickly understood the organisation and structured the consultancy interventions into 'manageable chunks', which were effectively communicated to the organisation.

It was reported (WLB-CF Final Report, October 2002, p.10) that the three most significant barriers to progress within the organisation were:

- The operational demands of the business meant that it could be difficult for such a small organisation to devote sufficient time to the project.
- The geographical separation of technical and administrative staff from the plant employees meant that increased effort. Was required to effectively manage the project and to ensure that issues arising were being dealt.
- Short-term and daily changes occurring within the organisation hampered project progress.

Comments on the role of the DTI and PwC

Echoing a finding from a number of case studies, the external consultants (2002) suggested that the opportunity to share best practice and experience with other consultancy organisations would have further promoted organisational and programme learning:

> *'I think it would be nice to have more time with the DTI. I would like the consultant companies to get together and feel part of a team. It would be great if we had the opportunity to share best practices and to move this country forward a bit – I think we could do better.'*

> *'We do work hard for the DTI and it would be good to share our experience.'*

Whilst there was a clear appreciation of the value of the fund, the organisation and external consultants considered that information was difficult to find and

that the WLB-CF could be more effectively marketed. It was suggested that regular communications from the DTI, in the form of updates and opportunities to attend events, would have been welcomed.

Appendix B: Methodology

Objectives of the evaluation

The central task of the evaluation was to assess whether the Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund (WLB-CF) achieved its aims and objectives by determining the extent to which outputs and outcomes were delivered in practice. This involved focusing on both macro/programme and micro/individual project levels. It was important also for the evaluation to capture the potential unforeseen impacts of the WLB-CF and to be able to assess the impact of extraneous influences on key outcome measures such as sickness absence, retention and employee morale. The evaluation was also designed to assess the processes associated with the running of the WLB-CF. These included: how effectively the WLB-CF processes had operated at each key stage; the effectiveness of working relationships between the various stakeholders within the WLB-CF (DTI, PwC, WLB consultants and the WLB-CF employers); the quality of the delivery and value for money of the consultancy advice.

The need for a multi-methodological approach

It was clear, given these diverse objectives, that reliance on a singular evaluation methodology would be unlikely to yield satisfactory answers to these questions. It was therefore intended that the evaluation design should utilise a variety of methodological approaches in addition to gathering data from multiple sources. The evaluation design aimed to capture:

- Individual-level impacts, in terms of the effect of the development of WLB practices on employees.
- Organisational impacts, in terms of the resultant benefits for the participating organisations.
- Findings relating to the administration of the WLB-CF itself.

This was accomplished by adopting a multi-method approach utilising both quantitative (documentary analysis) and qualitative (semi-structured interview and case study) methods. The following sections outline the evaluation methods utilised in detail.

Mapping and case study selection

The purpose of the mapping exercise was to enable the selection of an appropriate sample of WLB-CF organisations to participate in the evaluation. The initial mapping of the participant organisations was carried out involving an analysis of the demographic features of the participating organisations from Rounds One, Two and Three. The objective of this exercise was to analyse in detail the project designs and objectives and the organisational characteristics of all the successful project organisations, and to select a sub-sample of these to be included in the research. The specific features against which the project organisations were mapped included:

Organisation size

This was defined in terms of number of employees currently employed by the organisation. The data pertaining to participating organisations classified those organisations into three categories:

- Small – from one to 49 employees
- Medium – from 50 to 249 employees
- Large – 250 + employees

Industry sector

Since it was likely that different industry sectors would have different constraints and requirements in terms of their employees' working patterns, it was important to include organisations from a variety of industry sectors. To maintain consistency, the selection of organisations, in terms of industry sector, adopted the same classification utilised in the WLB-CF documentation. The industry sectors were:

- Agriculture, mining, manufacturing and utilities
- Construction
- Education, health and other services
- Finance and business services
- Public sector administration
- Retail, wholesale and hospitality
- Transport, storage and communication
- Other

Geographical location

It was likely that the local labour market conditions in the regions in which the organisations operated would partially determine the extent to which those organisations felt the need to adopt flexible working practices, particularly, for example, in order to recruit new employees through offering improved conditions of service. It was therefore important for the evaluation to include a good spread of organisations across the regions in which the WLB-CF operated. The taxonomy for the regions was as follows:

- East Midlands
- East of England
- London
- North East
- North West
- Scotland
- South East
- North West
- West Midlands
- Yorkshire and the Humber

The evaluation aimed to target six organisations from Round One, two from Round Two and Seven from Round Three. Subsequent to invitations being sent out to selected organisations to participate in the evaluation, a number of refusals were received. Due to two organisations within the Scottish region

declining to take part at an early stage, no organisations in the Scottish region were represented in the study. The final list of participating employers is outlined in Table 1 of the main report.

Exploratory interviews with Round One and Two employers

The aim of the interviews was to capture the experiences of managers and other employees within each organisation with regard to the organisation's participation in the WLB-CF. Since organisations in Round One of the WLB-CF were nearing the end of their projects in October 2001, while Round Two projects were half-way through their life-cycles, the aim was to capture the immediate experiences to emerge from the organisations both immediately after (Round 1) and during (Round 2) the projects. This would both provide data which would satisfy the need for immediate reporting back to the Department in January 2002 and would also inform the design of the methodology for the evaluation. The approach adopted was to carry out semi-structured interviews with a number of (an average of four) key stakeholders within each of the Round One and Round Two organisations selected. Those people interviewed would typically include:

- The person within the organisation who had instigated participation in the WLB-CF or 'product champion'.
- A line manager with responsibility for employees' working arrangements.
- Employees who did, or who might, benefit from taking up work-life balance opportunities.

The topics explored during these interviews were as follows:

WLB-CF processes

This section explored the experience of key stakeholders in terms of the mechanisms put into place for the management and administration of the WLB-CF. This included the means by which they found out about the WLB-CF, their reasons for applying, their views on and their experience of the application process, the reporting process, the support received from PwC and the DTI and what suggestions they wished to make to further enhance the WLB-CF processes.

Internal processes

This section relates to the processes within the organisation, which were instigated in order for the work-life balance projects to be carried out. This includes the processes put into place for the ongoing management of the projects, the role of the 'product champion' within the organisation, the extent to which senior management were engaged in the process and the barriers encountered during the process.

Communication

This aspect concerned the extent and effectiveness of the communication of the aims and progress of the projects within the organisation and the level of consultation with staff which took place throughout the project.

The consultancy process

This section focused on the actual processes involved throughout the lifetime of the projects. This included questions on the objectives of the intervention

and the extent to which this was starting from 'square one' or building on previous practices. It also explored the activities that were carried out during the consultancy assignment, the quality of working relationships between the employer and consultant, and the employer's impression of the effectiveness of the process.

Impacts and outcomes

This pertained to the actual outcomes of the WLB-CF projects and whether the WLB-CF projects had been successful. It included an assessment of the effects of the projects in terms of changes in policy and practice, the emergence of unforeseen outcomes, the extent to which these have been assessed and measured in terms of their impact on the effectiveness of the organisation, what were the main lessons learned throughout the process, and to what extent did plans exist to further extend the work on work-life balance in the future.

The work-life balance audit

Those organisations selected in the mapping exercise from Round Three were approached to undertake a full audit of their work-life balance practices. The aim was to gather data at the start of the projects, (November 2001), 12 months later when the projects had been completed (October 2002), and then at a six-month point after the projects' had been completed (March-April 2003). The audit was developed from previous research carried out in the field of work-life balance and by reviewing current best practice guidelines, with particular reference to the Industrial Society's (now The Work Foundation) Work-Life Balance Manual (2000).

The audit identifies five types of key informants within the organisational setting, each of whom were asked corresponding questions concerning various features about their work and the organisation. These individuals include:

- Senior executives and project 'product champions'.
- Human resource managers.
- Line managers and team leaders.
- Union representatives.
- Individual employees, some of whom were currently working non-standard working arrangements.

The procedure for the audits consisted of in-situ structured interviews with these key informants. The audit, therefore, represents a review and assessment of current work-life balance practices. The key themes covered included:

- **The reasons for the organisation adopting work-life balance practices,** for example, employee demand, problems of recruitment of certain types of staff, composition of the workforce, legislative demands, or market demands such as the need for longer opening hours.
- **The mechanisms currently in place to help employees balance work and life outside of work**. This aspect examined the extent of support for employees from within the organisation regarding working arrangements, including special circumstances such as emergency leave.
- **The characteristics of the work-life balance projects** in terms of their design, aims and expected outcomes.

- **The prevailing culture of the organisation** in terms of working practices, general expectations, and management style.
- **The quality of communication within the organisation**, specifically with regard to work-life balance. This included the efforts made by the organisation to disseminate information about the project and the level of awareness across the organisation of the aims and implications of the work-life balance project.
- **Perceived success factors and barriers** associated with the implementation of the work-life balance interventions, for example, whether the work-life balance project prompted greater numbers of employees to take up flexible working and other work-life balance options, reduced recruitment costs, or lowered sickness absence rates. Barriers would include management resistance, conflicting priorities or a lack of sustainability.
- **The experiences of employees in terms of balancing work and life outside of work**, their reasons for adopting flexible working patterns and their impact on employees' ability to enjoy a better work-life balance.

Interviews with work-life balance consultants

It was recognised that one of the principal stakeholder groups in the WLB-CF were the consultancy organisations that provided advice and support to participating organisations. It was judged advantageous, therefore, to gain the perspectives of a selection of consultants assigned to the organisations participating in the evaluation; the aim was to approach the lead consultant for each of the WLB-CF projects to seek their participation in a semi-structured interview. Eleven representatives from the following eight consultancy firms assigned to the WLB-CF were interviewed between the months of February and June 2002:

- Balance at Work
- Barony
- BT Workstyle
- CTC
- Deloitte Consulting
- General Physics
- Penna Crane
- Robertson Cooper Ltd

The interviews covered in detail the various stages of consultancy intervention. Given the general level of uniformity in the key stages of each work-life balance intervention, it was possible to delineate the stages of the consultancy process in a reasonably consistent way. The following sections outline the main themes covered in these interviews:

1. Background information on the consultancy practice

This area of inquiry focused on the consultancy firm's portfolio of activities, their track record in work-life balance, and their intention to develop and expand that aspect of their portfolio.

2. Experiences of the WLB-CF processes

This section related to the consultants' experiences of engaging with the WLB-CF. Within this area of inquiry, the consultants were asked to give their

impressions of the WLB-CF processes, including their application and selection for the WLB-CF, and their experience of the various aspects of the 'matching process'; such as the WLB-CF Fair. The consultants were also asked whether they felt that more could have been done to improve the process to help them meet the objectives of the WLB-CF. 3. Diagnosis

3. Diagnosis

Typically, during the diagnostic phase, the client and the consultant develop ideas concerning the nature of the problem, the type of information required, the type of data required, the key informants within the organisation and the development activities required. The consultants were asked to outline their diagnosis of the issues facing the client organisations, to what extent were the organisation's issues associated with work-life balance, and to what extent was the intervention tailored to the specific needs of the organisation. They were also asked to comment on how far the scoping report and subsequent briefings from the DTI prepared them for the project.

4. Planning & negotiation

Planning and negotiating the intervention – as opposed to simply mounting an intervention without adequate mutual planning – is a stage intended to build commitment before action. This involves ensuring the involvement of all significant stakeholders in terms of their receiving the results of the diagnosis, working with them and planning the actions to be taken on the basis of their reactions and views. As a result, the likelihood of commitment to the intervention will be increased. The consultants were asked to describe the steps taken to involve the workforce in the planning and execution of the intervention, who was involved in the planning process, and whether they encountered any barriers such as resistance or lack of management/employee 'buy-in' during the process.

5. The intervention

This stage of the process relates to the actual move towards change and the activities that are instigated to enable change to occur. The consultants were asked to describe the key features of the intervention, to what extent the interventions accorded with the organisation's objectives as identified in the scoping reports, the nature and quality of the working relationship that developed between the consultants and the organisation's management and the extent to which the working relationship contributed to the achievement of WLB-CF objectives.

6. Evaluation

The main tasks of evaluation are to assess what worked well during the intervention, what lessons were learned, what aspects could have worked better and, therefore, what steps were required in terms of further diagnosis and action. Consultants were asked what mechanisms were put into place to measure the success of the intervention, the extent to which the measures set out in the 'Target Setting Guide' were appropriate and relevant in measuring the outcomes of the project, and what were the main outcomes and findings of the evaluation process.

7. Completion and outcomes

Depending on the outcome of the intervention, the final phase will lead to 'institutionalisation'; i.e. the intervention leading to the desired change in the

practices of the client organisation. True institutionalisation relates to the extent to which the new policies are embedded within the established policies and practices of the organisation. In this final section, the consultants were asked to reflect on the extent to which they felt that the objectives of the project had been met, the extent to which they felt that the outcomes were sustainable, whether there were any unintended consequences – positive or negative – and whether there were any outstanding issues to be resolved.

On more general level, the consultants were also asked whether their organisations would continue to be involved in the WLB-CF, their reasons for this, and what recommendations they had for the further enhancement of the WLB-CF.

Interviews with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and the DTI Work-life Balance Challenge Fund Team

The aim of this aspect of the evaluation was to gain the perspectives of those individuals charged with actually managing the WLB-CF. This included the core team within PwC with the responsibility for the administration of the WLB-CF and the team of staff with responsibility for co-ordinating the WLB-CF within the DTI. The interviews focused, in each case, on their experiences of working on the WLB-CF in relation to the main achievements, the problems encountered and the areas in which improvements might be made for future rounds. The interviews took place with three members of the PwC work-life balance team and the lead member of the Department of Trade and Industry WLB-CF Team during the months of February and March 2003.

The interviews with PwC focused on the organisation's role, the main activities, and their experiences of project managing the WLB-CF. This included:

- An outline of the design of the systems and procedures that were developed to manage the WLB-CF and the rationale behind them. This included all of the main elements including the scoping report process, the award criteria for successful applicants, target setting, and the reporting systems for employers.
- The mechanisms that were put in place to ensure the quality of delivery of projects, their progress and the achievement of objectives.
- What worked well and whether any problems had been encountered relating to the WLB-CF processes.
- What changes had occurred in the WLB-CF processes since its inception, and the reasons for the changes.
- The effectiveness of the working relationships between themselves and the other stakeholders – the DTI, the employers and the work-life balance consultants.
- Since one of the roles of PwC was to give support and advice to the projects, one aspect of the interviews examined the main issues to emerge from the work-life balance projects.
- The members of the PwC team were asked whether, from their experience, the WLB-CF had met its objectives and what further suggestions they would like to make regarding the development of the WLB-CF.

The interview with the DTI WLB-CF team focused on very similar themes. It was particularly helpful, from the perspective of placing the WLB-CF in the context of wider government policy agendas, to also enquire more about the origin and rationale behind the development of the various work-life balance initiatives, the formation of the Work-Life Team and their experiences of managing the WLB-CF. The interview covered:

- The origins of the shift towards greater recognition of the importance of work-life balance in government policy.
- The establishment of specific initiatives pertaining to work-life balance, such as the Work-Life Balance Campaign, 'Employers for Work-Life Balance', and the WLB-CF.
- The main activities and responsibilities of the Work-life Balance Team.
- The mechanisms that were developed in order to chart the progress of projects, guarantee that project objectives had been met and ensure quality of delivery from work-life balance consultants.
- What worked well and what problems had arisen during the various phases of the WLB-CF.
- Whether changes had been introduced in the WLB-CF processes since its inception, and the reasons for those changes.
- Since the Work-Life Balance Team held a central position with regard to the management of the WLB-CF, it was valuable to gain their perspective on the main issues to emerge from the work-life balance projects for both the employers and the work-life balance consultants.
- The interview also examined whether, in their experience, the WLB-CF had met its objectives and the reasons why.
- What further suggestions they would like to make regarding the further development of the WLB-CF.

Documentary review

The original work-plan for the evaluation of the WLB-CF included conducting a review of the data from the reports produced by the WLB-CF project organisations. Initially, this was planned to occur on a regular basis throughout the period of the evaluation, and was timed to coincide with the submission of both WLB-CF interim reports (which were submitted six months after the instigation of the projects) and the project final reports (which were completed after 12 months, on the completion of the projects). It was found, however, that the quality of information and the level of actual 'findings' from the interim reports were fairly sparse. Many projects had not progressed sufficiently enough to enable key findings and achievements to be reported. In addition, in many cases, the submission of the final reports had been significantly delayed. It was decided, therefore, that the analysis of the data from the WLB-CF final project reports would occur at a stage when all the reports from Rounds One, Two and Three were made available, and that this analysis would contribute to the findings to be included in the final evaluation report.

In order to analyse the data from the WLB-CF final reports, a database was designed using Microsoft Access. The analysis of the data from the final reports from Rounds One, Two and Three was carried out by transferring the content of the electronic versions of the final reports to the database which had been custom-designed for this purpose by The Tavistock Institute evaluation team. PwC had started the work of designing the database but, as new reports were

added, its structure had to be modified. Due to some inconsistency in the format of the final reports, some sections were amalgamated and analysed together.

The total number of reports received at the point of analysis was 109, of which 105 were included in the analysis. Due to the different size and time frames of the projects, it was not possible to gather all final reports from the three rounds. The numbers for this analysis were 49 reports from Round One organisations, 15 reports from Round Two organisations and 45 reports from Round Three organisations. All the final reports from Round One and Two organisations were included in this analysis. The missing reports came from Round Three organisations.

The data was subdivided within the database into the key headings as laid out in the final reports. From this, the data was analysed under the following themes:

- Background demographic characteristics of the WLB-CF projects. This included features such as organisation size, industry sector and location.
- Context and aims of the projects.
- External and internal research. This included the data gathered by the consultants, the diagnosis of the issues which were highlighted.
- Work-life balance project implementation.
- Time commitment made by the fund organisation.
- Examples of impact.
- Further interventions for work-life balance.
- Overall impressions of the WLB-CF.
- Success factors and significant barriers to progress.
- General comments on the process.
- Comments on the roles of DTI and PwC.
- Whether the WLB-CF made a difference to the organisation.
- Concluding comments with suggestions/considerations.

The timing of the research

The evaluation was designed to capture the experiences and lessons learnt from those organisations within which projects were well advanced (Rounds One and Two), and assess the processes and progress of projects from their inception and to track their experiences and outcomes at key milestones throughout the course of those projects (Round Three).

Since the different project rounds were being carried out under different timescales, the evaluation was timed to coincide with the key milestones occurring for Round One, Two and Three projects. For Round One projects, the project cycle started in November 2000 and was due to end in October 2001, whereas the project lifecycle of Round Two ran from April 2001 to March 2002. Similarly, the Round Three project timetable ran from September 2001 to August 2002. Clearly, for the evaluation to reflect the processes and experiences of participating organisations throughout the critical stages of the work-life balance projects, the research approach needed to be closely aligned with these key milestones. Table B1 outlines the key activities carried out through the lifetime of the evaluation.

B1. Timescales for the evaluation activities

Date	Evaluation Activities	Round One	Round Two	Round Three
2001				
September	Development of mapping framework and criteria for selection of employers to be involved in the research			Projects start
October	Selection of WLB-CF organisations for inclusion in the research			
	Exploratory interviews with Round One and Two employers			
	Development of the WLB Audit	Projects end		
November	Audit interviews with Round Three employers			
December				
2002				
January	First report submitted to the DTI on findings from the case study projects			
February				
March				
April			Projects end	
May				
June				
July				
August				Projects end
September				
October	Second stage work-life balance audits with Round Three organisations			
November				
December				
2003				
January				
February	Interview with the lead of the DTI WLB-CF Team			
March	Interviews with members of PricewaterhouseCoopers WLB-CF team			
April	Review of WLB-CF project final reports			
	Follow-up work-life balance audits with Round three organisations			
May	Draft final report on the WLB-CF			

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