JUGGLING WORK, FAMILY… AND LIFE IN ACADEMIA: THE CASE OF THE "NEW" MAN

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Although the notion of the "new man" is gaining currency, there is very little research on how he manages to balance work and family. It is therefore timely to look more closely at this issue. We present preliminary results from an explorative pilot study on work-life balance and "new men" in academia. Using an interpretative approach, in-depth interviews were carried out with academics from construction-related university departments in Britain and Sweden. Drawing on figures from the OECD and on Hofstede's masculine (Britain)/feminine (Sweden) dimension, we found that the small population of academic respondents studied struggled with the same kinds of work pressures and desires to achieve/perform according to the traditional norm of a masculine society. However, the Swedish men were more inclusive of the whole family life/circumstances in their accounts while the British men tended to be more focused on themselves. Since the analysis of the data is still on-going, the findings remain tentative. Early conclusions suggest that a satisfactory juggling of work-life balance for all these men is dependent on negotiations and re-negotiations of responsibilities between them and their partners. Some British men seemed to expect compromise and sacrifice by their partners, while for all Swedish men there was an expectation of compromise and sacrifice by both partners.

Keywords: academia, family, new man, work-life balance, cross-national comparison.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally the male role has been that of the breadwinner with long working hours (Watts, 2009: 43; Ranson, 2011). Concepts such as the "new man" (Hearn, 1999; Watts, 2009: 42) and "working father" (Ranson, 2011) have recently emerged to refer to men who do not conform to the traditional male work model, but value personal wellbeing, and are keen to spend time with their family (Bevan and Jones, 2003; Family Friendly Working Hours Task Force, 2010; Linkow *et al.* 2011). Importantly, most of these men seek to achieve "work-life balance" while also experiencing their work as rewarding and satisfying. Indeed, for professional employees in particular,

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work is often a source of self-fulfilment and identification (Eikhof *et al.* 2007: 326-327; Watts, 2007; Ford and Collinson, 2011: 263-264).

Contemporary definitions of work-life balance tend therefore to emphasise the *balance* rather than viewing work as constraining personal life, or vice versa. Noon and Blyton (2007: 356) argue that work-life balance should be about:

"the ability of individuals to pursue successfully their work and non-work lives, without undue pressures from one undermining the satisfactory experience of the other."

In today's Western society, where it is quite common for both partners in a relationship to be pursuing professional careers, finding balance is not so easy. There is a plethora of research concerning women's (mothers) work-life balance, yet how men (and fathers) manage to balance their work and family roles and responsibilities remains under-researched. Here we focus the work-life balance of new men in academia.

Rapid and fundamental changes in Higher Education over the last few decades have transformed the culture and nature of the academic workforce, resulting in uncertainty, anxiety and stress among university employees (e.g. Woods, 2009; OECD 2010). The changes have mainly been driven by external pressures: increasing financial constraints; growing national and international competition; stronger demands on accountability; contradictory institutional goals; shifting disciplinary boundaries, restructuring of departments and knowledge areas; expanding use of ICT; and new types of faculty appointments competing with traditional tenured positions (e.g. Gappa *et al.* 2005). As a consequence of these pressures, job satisfaction seems to be on the decrease and stress and burnout on the increase (e.g. Woods 2009).

Work-life balance issues are therefore gaining increasing attention and support politically in the UK and the European Commission (Bryson and Karsten, 2009: 40) and within the academic community (e.g. Woods, 2009). Hakim (2008) points to the imbalance of men's much more restricted choices regarding their involvement with family than those of women. Despite advances in legislative provision (for example fathers' entitlement to maternity/parental leave), gendered-ness prevails: e.g., women are more likely than men to think they achieve the right work-life balance, and men are less likely than women to agree that their organisation is supportive in this area (CIPD, 2009: 12; Johansson and Kinth, 2008: 60, Allard 2007).

Accordingly, although contemporary definitions aim to enable individuals to maintain a satisfactory equilibrium between work and non-work, the reality is that the concept is synonymous with women and caring responsibilities. In the construction industry, the working population is heavily male dominated. Thus, it is no surprise that a large proportion of academics within University Departments of Construction, Civil Engineering and the Built Environment are mostly men. Organisational work-life balance initiatives that cater for the minority (women) in these types of environments are not achieving their full potential (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005: 149; CIPD, 2009) and indeed stand to reinforce the traditional gendered view.

Societal and cultural contexts and Governmental support for work-life balance vary considerably between countries. Our interest is directed to two countries, which the literature portrays as very different: the UK and Sweden. It is generally understood that in Sweden gender equality has come much further in terms of men's involvement with family. Certainly, parental leave campaigns since the early 70s have contributed

to the image of a Swedish new man that is masculine and baby-oriented, and interestingly called "soft man/soft daddy" in Swedish ("mjukisman/mjukispappa"). However, uptake of parental leave still remains a moderate 20% (Johansson and Klinth, 2008: 43-44). One could ask whether the soft man connotation has anything to do with the weak uptake! In the UK this process of change has only just began. While the public (political, expert and media) discourses promote "involved fatherhood", in practice low take-up of parental leave, and limited contribution to childcare generally, appears to be related to a traditional male long-working-hours culture (Gregory and Milner, 2011).

In an explorative pilot study, we have chosen two internationally acknowledged measures on qualitative data as an initial step to compare the work-life balance situations of a small population of new men in the two academic contexts. One measure is specific to work-life balance: the OECD better-life index (OECD, 2012); the other is one of Hofstede's well-known dimensions of national culture (Hofstede *et al.* 2010). The next section in this paper describes these measures. We then outline our research methods, before critical discussion of the research findings.

OECD BETTER LIFE INDEX

The OECD better life index (OECD, 2012) covers research on all aspects of well-being in society, including housing, education, income, safety, and work-life balance. Thirty-four OECD countries are ranked on a scale of 1-10 (ten being the best) on three key criteria: (i) employment rate of women with children, (ii) employees working long hours, and (iii) time devoted to leisure and personal care. Although unable to provide data on men and their involvement with family life, this index is a useful initial indicator of the overall societal and cultural context within which Swedish and British men work.

As shown in Table 1, in the overall ranking Sweden is positioned 7th (scoring 8.1) and the UK 17th (scoring 7.0). Key differences between the two countries arise from the number of employees who work very long hours and the percentage of working mothers.

Table 1: OECD better life index work-life balance data for Sweden and the UK

	Sweden	UK
Overall rank position	7th	17th
Score	8.1	7.0
Working long hours	1.24%	11.92%
Women with children in work	76%	67%

Concerning work hours, in Sweden only 1.24% work very long hours (defined as working on average 50 hours or more per week). This figure for the UK is 11.92%, which is not only much higher than that for Sweden, but also represents a relatively large proportion of the working population (near enough one fifth). This confirms other studies which suggest that the British work longer hours than their European counterparts (Sheddon, 2012: 8-9).

The other, although smaller, difference is in the number of working mothers. In Sweden three quarters (76%) of women with children are employed, which is higher

than the OECD average (66%). In the UK it is 67%. While these figures do not show a significant difference, closer examination of the number of hours both women and men in these countries work reveals marked differences between the sexes. Men tend to work full-time in Sweden and in the UK (OECD, 2011: 137). The work hours for women in Sweden is close to full-time employment, averaging 35hrs/wk (ibid). Women in the UK are much more commonly engaged in part-time work: over 40% of women work 30 hours or less per week (Sheddon, 2012: 9).

HOFSTEDE'S DIMENSIONS OF NATIONAL CULTURE

Geert Hofstede's work on national and organisational cultures is widely known, and widely debated. Already in 1980 he introduced the idea that established theories in psychology, organisation sociology and management theory may not be universally valid because of differences in national and organisational cultures (Hofstede *et al.* 2010: xi). He built his claim on extensive data from IBM employees world wide, which he later supplemented by material from the World Values Survey and other available databases. In essence, Hofstede measures differences in national cultures along six dimensions: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede *et al.* 2010). This approach has been met with mixed views. For example, Williamson (2002: 1391) identifies dangers in assuming that: (i) all members of a culture homogeneously carry the same cultural attributes and that a culture can be uniform, and (ii) individuals' values or behaviour are wholly determined by their cultural background. At the same time, he recognises the value in Hofstede's naming and describing attributes that enable the opening of what is otherwise a black box of cultural factors (ibid; see also Hofstede, 2002).

It is in this latter vein that we have applied his constructs of masculinity-femininity in our explorative cross-cultural comparison. Hofstede and colleagues recognise that there are absolute biological differences between men and women, but also that the two genders tend to conform to different social, culturally determined roles (Hofstede *et al.* 2010: 137). At national level:

"a society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life" (Hofstede et al. 2010: 140).

Anglo-Saxons countries, including the UK, tend to be masculine while Scandinavian countries, including Sweden, are characterised as highly feminine (Hofstede *et al.* 2010: 140, 144).

When translated into a work context, the interesting issue is what motivates people: wanting to be the best (masculine) or liking what you do (feminine) (Itim, 2012a/b). A web resource that facilitates country specific research on Hofstede's dimensions provides the following excerpts for Sweden and the UK on the masculinity-femininity dimension:

"Sweden scores 5 on this dimension and is therefore a feminine society. In feminine countries it is important to keep the life/work balance and you make sure that all are included. An effective manager is supportive to his/her people, and decision making is achieved through involvement. Managers strive for consensus and people value

equality, solidarity and quality in their working lives. Conflicts are resolved by compromise and negotiation and Swedes are known for their long discussions until consensus has been reached. Incentives such as free time and flexible work hours and place are favoured..." (Itim, 2012a)

"At 66 Britain is a masculine society – highly success oriented and driven. A key point of confusion for the foreigner lies in the apparent contradiction between the British culture of modesty and understatement which is at odds with the underlying success driven value system in the culture. Critical to understanding the British is being able to "read between the lines''. What is said is not always what is meant. In comparison to feminine cultures such as the Scandinavian countries, people in the UK live in order to work and have a clear performance ambition." (Itim, 2012b)

The differences between the two national cultures, according to this description, is clear cut: Sweden is described as an environment where work-life balance is valued and people focus on *balance*. In contrast, the UK is a success-driven value system where performance ambition (work) clearly outweighs time with the family (life).

RESEARCH METHODS

Using an interpretative approach, in-depth interviews were carried out with academics from construction-related university departments in Britain and Sweden. There were no work-life balance preconceptions or theoretical framework informing the data collection, rather we wanted to see what perspectives would emerge through the stories in the interviews.

During the interviews, which lasted approximately one hour, the respondents were prompted to give retrospective accounts of their work and non-work trajectories from their university studies to the present day. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

A narrative analysis was then applied on the data to code the various, and often overlapping, fragments of accounts. These fragments were then sorted and united by a plot that made the fragments cohere (Czarniawska, 2004). In applying this analytical tool, we are not claiming that our interpretations convey the truth, but rather they convey one point of view. From our close readings of the transcripts, a plot gradually emerged for each interview. The analysis was iterative and carried out separately first. We then compared our analyses and resolved the few discrepancies that arose through dialogue.

Our sample of respondents included academics from five institutions in the UK and Sweden: three of them are Swedish and seven British. Their job roles include Lecturer (4), Senior Lecturer (4) and Professor (2). Seven of the respondents work full-time at their respective Universities and three have part-time posts. Age range of the respondents is 39-57. Eight are married and two have long-term partners. Most of the couples have 2-3 children aged between 18 months and 25 years.

With regards to sampling, it is important to note that the research respondents were selected to take part in the study via informal approaches to people within our professional networks. Thus the sampling strategy was based on a purposive key informant approach.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are addressed under three sub-headings introduced in the theory section: orientation to work (informed by Hofstede's masculine-feminine cultural

indicators); employment rate of women with children; and working hours (the latter two issues are informed by key measures in the OECD better life index).

Overall the respondents reported a wide variety of interests/commitments which may be considered to fall outside their emplo3yment at the University as well as outside the family: one respondent runs a private architectural practice, another a yoga studio, and one works 50% in industry, two indicated keen interest in sports and one in music. Two had commitments that could be said to bridge both work and family: they were heavily engaged in building: one a new dwelling; the other renovating the family's summer home.

– Orientation to work

The achievement orientation (or performance ambition) noted in Hofstede's work on culture in Britain (Itim, 2012b) is strongly reflected in the interviews with the British respondents. However, two of the Swedish respondents manifested the same traits. Four respondents (two British and two Swedish) expressed their work-orientation in explicit terms, but the trend was detectable in most of the narratives in that more space was given to the work situations compared to family situations. Non-work or 'life' related references tended to be short and devoid of detail, and required prompting from the interviewers. In contrast, professional pride was clearly articulated, as were work/ educational achievements. Also, tendency to divert the conversation to work-related matters was evident in many interviews.

Success in life and in relation to family specifically was said to be

"… enabled by an understanding partner and children." (British man)

Interestingly, most of the respondents (both British and Swedish) reflected on their life in terms of maintaining work and family fitting-in with careers. For example, for one couple where both partners worked in professional roles, it had always been clear that they would be sharing the care responsibilities, but more importantly:

"…we wanted children, but… There was never any consideration that either of us would stop work to look after the kids." (British man)

Later in the narrative, care of the children and sharing the responsibility was mentioned mainly in connection with the work arrangements and drop-off and pick-up from school; a common situation among all respondents (British and Swedish). One Swedish man had committed to picking up his children from school and day-care regularly, but highlighted that:

"I will still be very much engaged in my work. I've always been like that, and I have stopped thinking that it will be something else, because my work is also my hobby, or it has become my hobby." (Swedish man)

He reflected on absent-minded conversations with his wife in the evenings whilst checking e-mails on a laptop. Another Swedish man noted that he had taken parental leave when his children were small, but now that they were older they complained about his work-oriented life style:

"…the kids still love me! They actually sang a song about me on my birthday, about how much I work…" (Swedish man)

Elsewhere (Raiden and Caven, forthcoming), typologies of work-family orientation were used to investigate construction professionals' life-priorities. Results showed that most individuals working in construction-related professional roles sorted under

"career/work-centred"; only a few sorted under "adaptive". The career/work-centred individuals prioritise professional careers over family commitments; and those who have adapted their careers to take as active a role as possible in parenting are termed adaptive (Halrynjo, 2009; Hakim, 2000).

This was also true in our small sample on British academics. Even though three men in the sample worked part-time at their Universities, their orientation was more career/work-centred than adaptive. They all had significant engagements with work elsewhere (for example at their private practices). Only one British full-time academic in the sample could be said to sort under the 'adaptive' category in that he abstained from advancement:

"I had the opportunity to [advance] and decided not to, for a few reasons [....] flexibility I've had, in that I can finish early or start later, or whatever, would diminish. At the moment, the kids are still relatively young, still need a lot of looking after, and that's how I want it to be." (British man)

Although childcare was described as shared, it was relatively shared not equally shared. The *relative* sharing of childcare was evident in the narratives of the Swedish men as well. Apart from the token parental leave, which is now fairly common in Sweden, especially among academics, the men talked about taking their children to school or day-care. However, it was clear that the main responsibility for childcare was with the partner; these did not work full-.

One British respondent who now worked full-time at the University referred to a career change due to his inability to spend time with family:

"I had fantastic time in xxx as a single person, as a newlywed, as a couple, but when the kids came along it was just a bit too much disruption. So when my oldest was three I'd only spent a year with him, so that watershed was a good time to come out." (British man)

Thus, even though his current work commitment to the university would indicate that he would sort under career-oriented, his career choices overall indicate that he made efforts to combine work with family.

There was one distinctively adaptive in the sample, who combines two jobs work and childcare in his working week: his own practice (three days a week); a part-time job at the University (one day a week); and one day being a "house husband" caring for his youngest child. He reflects on the journey that took him to this life situation with some seeming regret. His narrative indicates that the choices were not his, but circumstantial (for example to work only one day a week at the University): e.g., "I had to", "she had to", "ended up" and "It's not ideal…" In spite of this, he seems to have benefitted from the circumstances:

"I'm very happy that I can have one day a week with my family. I think it's quite unusual for a man to do that. It's becoming increasingly normal, but I'm quite glad I share responsibilities for family with my wife in a pretty equal kind of way." (British man)

Sharing the child care in this family does indeed seem to be equal: the younger child has three days a week in kindergarten, then one day with the father and one day with the mother, while the older child is at school five days a week.

The Swedish respondents tended to speak much more about their time with the family, and with positive associations:

"I'm happy every day I see, especially, Sara and Olle, but obviously my wife as well, so basically I think life is very good…" (Swedish man)

It is clear that the time with family is appreciated, especially by the adaptives.

– Employment rate of women with children

As alluded to earlier, much of the work-life balance within our sample of academics was achieved because the men enjoyed a traditional family set-up with the man dedicated to his work and the woman prioritising childcare over career. Thus, work-life balance seemed to be understood in terms of the family as unit contributing to the care of the children, rather than men and women contributing equally. Indeed, some of the partners of the British men in particular had put their careers on hold in order to be home with the children thus allowing their husbands to develop their careers. In the Sweden sample, all of the women worked, except for the time they spent on maternity leave. However, none of them worked full time, but rather between 60-80%. This supports the OECD (2011) findings.

There is a difference, however, in how the British and Swedish men reflected on the careers of their partners. All of the Swedish respondents volunteered details about their partner's work and explanations as to why responsibilities were divided in the way they were. They were more inclusive of the family unit as a whole in their narratives. This somewhat supports Hofstede's (2010) claim that Sweden has a feminine national culture. British men tended to be much more focused on their own careers and volunteered little information about the circumstances of their partners.

– Working hours

Many respondents in our sample (both British and Swedish) referred to working long hours regularly. In Britain, one Professor estimated that on average his working week totalled 65-70 hours; one senior lecturer mentioned working 12-hour days and taking work home frequently. In Sweden, a senior lecturer noted working 50 hours as his norm and also taking work home regularly most evenings. Another Swedish respondent referred to *"stealing hours"* in the evenings at home for work three nights a week. These figures do not support the OECD (2012) better life index data that suggests that very few people in Sweden work overtime. It may be that these hours do not get recorded as much of the work is done outside of the workplace.

Flexibility in the job was noted as the key to managing working time and commitments with family. Flexibility is further facilitated by new mobile technology, which, however, also generates challenges such as difficulties of setting clear boundaries between work and non-work time. Moreover, through mobile technology constant availability may cause undue stress (Nurmi, 2010).

For a British respondent, time with the family was referred to as a useful way of managing "spill-over":

"Those things that you have to do, picking the kids up from school, are often an excuse to say, 'I'm stopping work now, because I've got to pick up the kids from school so, it's a great thing to be able to say "It's 5 now, I have to go and get the kids from after-school club." So, actually, contact with the family puts a limit on the "creep"." (British man)

In contrast, another respondent finds that adjusting working time to put family first creates more "spill-over":

"with a new child, I am being more strict about leaving on time, because otherwise I wouldn't see her because she goes to bed early, but then that does lead to me spending the weekend working." (British man)

CONCLUSION

In the literature Sweden is portrayed as having a feminine national culture (according to Hofstede's masculine-feminine dimension) and thus being a family-friendly society. Our findings reveal that our respondents struggle with exactly the same kinds of work pressures and desires to achieve/perform according to the traditional norm within the masculine society/culture in the UK. Although the Swedish national social policy allows for much more extensive rights for men than is on offer in the UK, and official figures (from the OECD) suggest that few work long hours in Sweden, two of our Swedish respondents talk about frequently working at home in the evenings (2-3hrs) on a weekly basis, with core working hours in the region of 50-60hrs/week. Flexibility in academic jobs may allow them to leave early and collect children from school and day-care regularly, but ICT enables them to often amply "make up" for those allowances by working after the family has gone to sleep.

To sum up, contrary to Hofstede's claim we found little difference between British and Swedish men on the masculine/feminine dimension. What was interesting, and needs to be further researched, is the way the ways in which the men positioned themselves in their narratives. The Swedish men tended to be more inclusive; they talked about themselves as part of the family unit. The British men were more I-oriented, and sometimes seemed to distance themselves from family affairs. While some British women have sacrificed their careers to support their family, all Swedish families had explicitly considered both the women's and men's careers.

This small pilot study has highlighted some interesting discrepancies between theory and the life narratives of a few new men in the UK and in Sweden. These findings warrant further in-depth research on a larger population, using various theoretical lenses.

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