

The International Corner

Work-Life Balance Working Group of the British Psychological Society



Suzan Lewis

Bio: Suzan Lewis is Professor of Organisational Psychology at Middlesex University Business School, London. Her research focuses on work-personal life issues and workplace practice, culture and change in different workplace and national social policy contexts, the relationships between national and organisational policies and practices, and the impacts on work-life integration across the life course. She has led many national and international research projects and has recently completed the coordination of an eight country EU study: Gender, Parenthood and Changing European Workplaces. She is a founding editor of the international journal *Community, Work and Family*. Her publications include: *The Work Family Challenge: Rethinking Employment* (Sage 1996); *The Flexible and Profitable Workplace. A Guide to Implementing Flexible Working Practices in Professional Services* (ICAEW, 2004); *Work-Life Integration. Case Studies of Organisational Change* (Wiley 2005), *The Myth of Work-Life Balance. The Issue of Our Time for Men, Women and Societies* (Wiley 2006) and *Women, Men, Work and Family in Europe* (Palgrave, 2007). She has advised governments and worked with employers and policy makers on these issues in Europe and Japan and is currently a member of a European Union Expert Group on Women in Science, Engineering and Technology.



Gail Kinman

Bio: Gail Kinman is Professor of Occupational Health Psychology at the University of Bedfordshire, UK. Her primary research interests focus on work-related stress, work-life balance, emotional labour and emotional intelligence and how they impact on wellbeing. Gail has conducted research in this areas with workers in the public sector, such as teachers, academics, social workers, nurses and police.



Almuth McDowall

Bio: Almuth McDowall's primary research area is work-life balance. She has successfully delivered several research studies funded by organizations, such as a report commissioned by the Police Federation of England and Wales which was widely reported in the national press. She has presented her work at national and international conferences and been an invited keynote speaker on the topic at several events. Almuth is currently undertaking a research programme across two UK Police Forces to determine the predictors of work-life and life-work conflict as well as enrichment with the view to informing best practice; and continues to co-chair the Working group on Work-life Balance. Almuth is committed to dissemination, for instance presenting and co-presenting several submissions at the DOP conference each year, and organised a two-day international workshop on work-life balance in 2010. She received funding from the University of Surrey to develop the dyadic intervention which this proposal draws on. Relevant papers and submissions have been published in the *Psychologist*, *Occupational Psychology Matters*, *EAWOP inPractice* and *Personnel Review*. Almuth also works as a work-life balance coach and co-edits *Coaching: an International Journal*.

An Interview with Suzan Lewis, Gail Kinman and Almuth McDowall

by Judi Casey

Work-life balance has been a hot topic for some years in the UK. This has been supported by a work-life balance campaign of former governments and various policy developments, at least partly to conform to European Union directives. In response to this interest, the Division of Occupational Psychology of the British Psychological Society launched a Special Interest Group on Work-Life Balance in 2009.

The Work-Life Balance group brings together psychologists including academics and practitioners in the fields of occupational and organisational psychology and human resource managers with an interest in work-life balance. The group is also interested in forging alliances and building on links between UK researchers and practitioners and those working in other countries.

The aims of the group are:

- To raise awareness of work-life balance as a core issue for occupational and organisational psychologists
- To respond to current challenges, such as the recession and public sector cuts
- To promote a triple agenda, addressing organisational and individual needs while ensuring work-life balance issues are adequately reflected in government policies
- To enhance the profile of UK research in the field of work-life balance
- To consider the current state of knowledge, and disseminate up-to-date psychological evidence and highlight best practice to individuals and organisations on how to manage the work-home interface more effectively
- To stimulate debate on key issues
- To identify priorities for future research and pursue a relevant research agenda

The group organised an international workshop last year at the University of Surrey. Delegates debated the perspectives of different stakeholders, such as employers, unions, and individuals and shared good practices from diverse national and workplace contexts. The Finnish keynote speaker, Kaisa Kaupinnen from the Institute of Occupational Health, shared Nordic approaches that are often upheld as best practice, while the US keynote speaker, Lotte Bailyn from MIT, talked about redesigning work for a dual agenda.

Another conference to be held in June 2011 will focus on work-life issues in diverse groups of workers, including single parents, fathers, and workers at different life-course phases and people in same-sex relationships. Organisations that have introduced inclusive work-life balance policies will discuss their approach and the potential benefits to their business and their employees.

How Work-Life Balance Issues Feature in Postgraduate Occupational and Organizational Psychology Courses

Little is known about the extent to which UK postgraduate occupational and organisational psychology courses cover work-life issues in general or introduce students to models and theories in the field. The working group is currently planning a survey of course managers with a view to raising the profile of work-life balance as a topic of key importance to the discipline.

A Research Project on Public Sector Financial Cuts and the Work-Life Balance Agenda

Considerable progress had been made by the former Labour UK Governments in terms of policies and other initiatives to encourage employers to implement flexible working arrangements to meet both business and

social needs. The public sector has tended to take a lead in such initiatives, with policies predating regulations in many cases. It is unclear how commitment to work-life balance will fare in the current rounds of public sector financial cuts. The aim of this ongoing study is, therefore, to explore the impact of public sector cuts on the work-life balance and equality agendas in a range of public sector organisations.

For further details on the Working Group, see [http://www.bps.org.uk/dop/psychologists/dop-structure/working-groups\\$/work-life-balance-working-group/work-life-balance-working-group_home.cfm](http://www.bps.org.uk/dop/psychologists/dop-structure/working-groups$/work-life-balance-working-group/work-life-balance-working-group_home.cfm) or email [Almuth McDowall](mailto:Almuth.McDowall@bc.edu) or [Gail Kinman](mailto:Gail.Kinman@bc.edu).

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network appreciates the extensive support we have received from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the Boston College community.

E-mail: wfnetwork@bc.edu - Phone: 617-552-1708 - Fax: 617-552-9202



www.bc.edu

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network is funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation