

UPDATE: WINTER 2004

Looking forward to 2005, what can we expect?

Work-life balance was topical throughout 2004, yet the UK's prime position in the league of long hours working remains unchallenged. In fact many believe long hours' working has *increased* over the past five years.

While we sense a growing revolt, significant change is unlikely in 2005. Before it can take place, some of our cultural dragons need to be slain:

First on the list is a machismo culture which denies men an active role in parenting, by seeing flexible working as a form of downshifting. Despite the introduction of paid paternity leave, men remain disenfranchised from workplace flexibility in a way that's not the case elsewhere in Europe.

Second is the continuing belief that working long hours is productive: why then do we lag behind France with its 35 hour week?

Third there's the dichotomy between the government's attempts to promote work-life balance whilst piling the pressure on Britain's civil servants.

Finally comes the underpinning belief we can't allow ourselves to stop and reflect on how things could be different.

LACK OF HIGH QUALITY PART-TIME JOBS HOLDS BACK EQUAL PAY

- According to a new research report from the London School of Economics.

The report, commissioned by the DTI's Women and Equality Unit, analyses the Part-time Pay Gap (ie the gap in average hourly earnings between full and part time working women) and reveals:

- The part-time pay penalty has increased over the last 30 years, and is estimated at around 10%.
- Almost all of this can be explained by increasing occupational segregation. Women working part-time have failed to match the occupational up-grades made by women who work full-time.
- Women who move from full-time to part-time work are very likely to change employer and/or occupation when making the transition.
- Women moving to part-time work on average make a downward occupational move, evidence that many part-time workers are not making full use of their skills and experience.
- In 2003 45% of female workers in Britain were working part-time and the majority of British women will work part-time at some point in their lives.

HalsAllan director Anna Allan has been a long-time champion of both part-time workers and the valuable contribution they make to organisational success. Her book, 'Part-time Workers' (part of the CIPD Good Practice series) was published in 1999 and provides invaluable advice on recruiting, managing and developing the part-time workforce.

So what do we predict for 2005?

Work-life balance will remain in the news, the emphasis shifting away from working mothers to issues around caring for other dependants, and opportunities for groups (such as the disabled) currently excluded from many work opportunities.

Transport difficulties will grow and falling house prices may *increase* worker insecurity (although Mike Johnson whose new book we review on p2 disagrees!). What's likely is that this combination will lead to more demand for homeworking.

The HSE's new management standards on stress will produce a greater focus on this area over the coming 12 months with potential for further growth in stress claims against employers.

HalsAllan will continue supporting workplace change and promoting better work-life balance. Our plans for 2005 include:

- An interactive work-life balance CD Rom.
- A wide range of in-house and public courses and workshops.
- Personalised coaching for HR change-makers wanting to progress the work-life balance culture in their organisations.

Details will be available on our website early in the New Year.

Book Reviews

Willing Slaves, is the result of Madeleine Bunting's research into Britain's working culture. It appeared in June this year and struck a chord with us as work-life balance consultants.

It poses two main questions: Why do we work so hard and why do we put up with it?

Willing Slaves does not make for contented reading. Bunting claims we work so hard because we are stuck in a trap, afraid to change for fear of losing our jobs, incomes, standard of living. Meanwhile our children, families and society suffer.

She does not blame individuals for this, but points out that it is endemic in the culture of our society, both at government and organisational level. We're on a ladder and have reached the top rung: there isn't any slack left!

Bunting claims responsibility for change now rests with the government which must make proper provision for paternity leave to encourage men to participate in family life more and must work towards curtailing long hours' working, starting with its own employees.

Willing Slaves provides the best summary we have read on the work-life balance crisis in Britain.

ISBN 0007163711, £12.99

The New Rules of Engagement: Life-work balance and employee commitment by Mike Johnson

The central argument of this newly published CIPD book is that our increasingly diverse workforce is looking for tailored working arrangements to support personal lifestyle and value choices. Employers must respond appropriately if they are to fully engage employees in the business of their organisations.

Johnson, a marketing and communications expert, asserts: "On the evidence of what employees say, there is no doubt that our businesses are going to change dramatically over the next decade". And the changes are being driven by the personal search for life-work balance. (Johnson suggests we've got the phrase the wrong way round – 'life first, work later'.)

To quote:

"Life-work balance is not going to blow away, it is here to stay. How you harness it inside the business may vary, but those that recognise and celebrate flexibility and diversity will most probably have an edge on the competitors."

What does all this mean for HR? The new world of work will have new job roles, and new areas of responsibility for HR specialists.

HR must persuade the CEO and top management team that life-work balance is a key business issue by providing tangible evidence of the result of getting it wrong.

HR must also take the lead in sustaining change, which according to Johnson takes time, some money, "But most of all it takes a change in attitude." The business benefits are potentially enormous:

"If your business wants to be seen as a talent magnet you are going to have to build this ability to be naturally flexible into your operational culture."

ISBN 1-84398-072-X, £25

Helping you make the business case for life-work balance

Mike Johnson suggests the new role of Chief Life-Work Balance Officer for HR. Outlining a clear three step process for developing an organisation which values diversity and individual life-work choices, he admits you'll need to develop a compelling business case and find a champion at Board level.

That's where HalsAllan can help. We've more than a decade of experience in supporting clients through: developing a tailored business argument; identifying appropriate strategy and planning implementation. As external experts we're happy to come and champion the cause with you. We bring with us a wealth of practical and research-based knowledge on every aspect of life-work balance and how it will impact positively on your organisation.

We're always happy to have an exploratory discussion with you (at no cost and with no obligation on your part). Please get in touch with us via our website or email.