
1. Introduction

Cary L. Cooper

In 1851, the social reformer John Ruskin wrote, ‘in order the people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: they must be fit for it, they must not do too much of it, and they must have a sense of success in it’. Indeed, from the Industrial Revolution until the middle of the twentieth century, most people in the developed world worked extraordinarily long hours, and in many cases in unpleasant and dangerous working environments, and certainly did not achieve the balance that Ruskin felt essential for a good quality of life. Post-World War II, the movement toward a more regularized working week took hold in many developed countries, given the strength of the unions and more powerful health and safety legislation. Working practices and hours of work became more stabilized, although there were still some noticeable differences between sectors, levels within organizations and between different socioeconomic groups. The 1950s and 1960s were still dominated by the male breadwinner, with many women in unpaid housework or in jobs but not careers! The 1970s was about industrial relations strife, but the 1980s was the forerunner and decade that laid the foundations for the great ‘work–life balance’ debate in the developed world, particularly in the West.

In the 1990s, the globalization of the workplace led to a massive change in work culture as we entered Industrial Revolution mark II. Jobs were no longer for life, working hours were long, human capital was ‘mean and lean’, new technology created the 24/7 society, rigorous performance indicators abounded and the psychological contract between employee and employer was under greater strain (e.g., outsourcing, short-term contracts), with the individual employee considered by many employers as a necessary but ‘disposable asset’. This was all taking place in the context of a major social upheaval in family life, with two out of every three families being working families (or single working parents). In a ‘long hours, 24/7 culture’, with dual-earner families the norm, the possibility of obtaining ‘balance’ was almost unattainable. In 2005, the Working Families organization in the UK made a large-scale study of working hours and found that 27 per cent of men (and 15 per cent of women) said they were contracted to work 40-hour weeks but 67 per cent of men (and 54 per cent of women) actually worked far beyond their contracted hours (Swan and Cooper, 2007). And for those who consistently worked over 45 hours, they

were significantly more stressed, and spent only a minimal time with their children (less than one hour a night) and with their partners.

During the last two decades, the number of publications on the interference between work and family (work/family interference, WFI) has increased dramatically (e.g., Lewis and Cooper, 2005; Mayo et al., 2011; Gatrell et al., 2012; Biron et al., 2014). However, over 95 per cent of the WFI studies are based on Western samples, which means that a major limitation in this literature is its decidedly Western focus. In developing and emerging countries, work and family issues are only beginning to gain attention. Asian societies, such as those in the Greater China Region, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and India, in recent decades, have undergone fundamental transformations of industrial structures from being labour intensive to high tech, as well as rapid social modernization in both work and lifestyles. Consequently, Asian employees are becoming exposed more than ever to stressful Western and industrialized work situations. The pressure of social change and increasing competition caused by economic globalization is compounded by the long hours work culture, especially prevalent in the Pan-Confucian societies. For instance, a recent survey showed that South Koreans, Singaporeans and Taiwanese worked the top three longest hours in the world (Department of Statistics, 2010). Corroborating the survey, a large national representative sample of full-time Taiwanese employees admitted that on average they worked 48.96 hours per week, which is much higher than the statutory 40-hour working week found in Europe and North America, although even those hours have increased (Lu, 2011). Furthermore, with the rising proportion of females in the workforce, more and more Asian employees are now caught between the demands of work and family life, especially as family life is traditionally and still highly valued in Asia. With a labour participation rate of 63.73 per cent among mothers with children under age three in Taiwan, and a similar trend in other Asian societies, the gravity of the challenge to balance work and life is inescapable (Lu et al., 2008). The aim of this handbook is thus to address the gap in knowledge by adopting a distinct Asian perspective in theory, research and practice of WFI, and to provide a state-of-the-art collection of evidence from studies conducted in Asia to explain why and how WFI arises and affects well-being for Asian adults.

The ultimate value of scientific research is to better human life. For some time now researchers in the developed West (e.g., Scandinavian countries) have lobbied and successfully promoted family-friendly organizations. However, work–non-work arrangements are an alien concept in many Asian organizations, whereas working ‘extra-hours’ is a social norm, and face time is a show of solidarity and diligence. It is thus imperative to

conduct a comprehensive review of the accumulating empirical research on WFI conducted in Asia to provide a scientific basis for understanding its causes and consequences, and further to identify possible meanings of coping with the phenomenon in Asia. Such scientific evidence can then challenge the long-held beliefs about working long hours and sacrificing personal needs to fulfil social obligations as an employee. Only through reflections upon the implicit cultural values and explicit work (mal) practices, can more humane and individually fulfilling arrangements of work and life be renegotiated and constructed at the individual, familial, organizational and societal levels.

This handbook focuses on theory, research and practice on the major issues associated with work and life balance in Asia. The book is comprised of 14 further chapters, divided into three parts, with authors from nine countries: Taiwan, China (Hong Kong and Macau), Japan, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, USA, UK and Korea. The topics explore the central issues in the work–life balance field but specifically in the context of Asia, where the research, after a slow start, is now growing in numbers in the areas that are relevant to the Asian context. We start the book with this brief introduction, highlighting the developments in the West and then exploring the importance of the work in the field of work–life balance in the context of the fastest-growing economic region in the world, Asia. It has to be said at the outset that Asia has for a long time had some of the longest working hours in the world, and this has grown worse for most of these emerging economies (Burke and Cooper, 2008), so the consequences of an increasing and excessive working hours culture, in many Asian companies and public sector bodies, has serious health implications for all employees.

This dilemma is explored in Part I (on work–life balance at the individual and familial levels), Chapter 2 by Luo Lu who examines a cultural theory of work and family in the context of Taiwan, highlighting the real dilemma experienced by many in an emerging country, ‘I love my work, but I love my family more’. The third chapter by Hsiu-Lan Tien and Yu-Chen Wang assesses the variety of work–family conflicts and how people tend to cope with these. There are important lessons to learn about better coping strategies for the future. The fourth chapter by Akihito Shimazu highlights the problems currently in Japan of how working long hours and investing too much in one’s work can damage dual-earner couples in Japan. Mental ill health due to workloads and long hours of working has always been a problem in Japan but now it is seriously affecting dual-earner couples. In Chapter 5 Huimin Liu and Fanny M. Cheung looked at the crossover effects in the work–family interface among Chinese dual-earner couples, that is, how work affects the family and vice versa.

4 *Handbook of research on work–life balance in Asia*

Chapter 6 by Jiafang Lu highlights many of the work–life balance issues in urban China, taking a closer look at work–family conflict, particularly early childrearing experiences in dual-earner couples. Chapter 7 by Chang-qin Lu, Xiao-min Xu and David E. Caughlin underlines the critical role of Chinese work values in the work–home interference context in Chinese employees. Chapter 8 by Yuan Li and Jianmin Sun too explores the relationship between work–family conflict and Chinese employees’ well-being (burnout), this time focusing on gender-role attitudes as a moderator.

Part II explores work–life balance at the organizational and societal levels. Chapter 9 by Ting Wu and Jin Feng Uen explores the generational differences of work–life balance values in Asia, by illustrating the case of Greater China Region workers. Chapter 10 by Oi-Ling Siu examines how family-friendly employment practices and policies in Hong Kong have affected the work–family interface. The next chapter by Noraini M. Noor and Nor Diana Mohd Mahudin discusses the work–life balance policies and practice in Malaysia, linking this to theory as well. Chapter 12 by Jong-Min Woo highlights some of the major policy issues of work–life balance in Korea.

Part III takes a cross-cultural perspective. Chapter 13 by Chiu-Lan Chang highlights the differences in work–life balance policies and practices between Taiwan and Japan, which illustrates how cross-cultural differences even in the same geographical region can be different and culturally linked. In Chapter 14 Eunae Cho and Chee-Wee Koh explore interventions and social re-engineering to facilitate work–life balance in Singapore and South Korea. The rapid growth of these economies has encouraged interventions to obtain better balance in employee’s lives. And finally, Chapter 15 by Carolyn Timms, Paula Brough, Oi-Ling Siu, Michael O’Driscoll and Thomas Kalliath extends the previous chapter to explore the cross-cultural impact of work–life balance on health and work outcomes across the whole region.

CONCLUSION

Do we really believe that a long hours culture, in a society where most families are working families, and the competitive pressures of the modern workplace are penal, is either healthier for the family, the individual or the company? Do we really believe in the often heard phrase that ‘the most valuable resource we have is our human resource’, or is this only rhetoric or HR management speak? Do we really think that 60- or 70-hour working weeks are good for our businesses? Of course not. Then why do we have finance directors or marketing managers or anybody for that matter in any

senior role consistently working long and unsocial hours, under intensive conditions in central office environments, with little time for their families and the other people in their lives that mean something to them and to the community they live in (e.g., schools, local politics, charities)? I thought we had entered the era of good corporate responsibility, where employers committed to a range of stakeholders (i.e., the community, their employees, the environment, etc.).

There are answers to these questions: more flexible working arrangements and trust in the workplace, where our employees could work partly from home and partly from central work environments (Cooper, 2007). Let's begin this millennium by using new technology to our advantage, by allowing people (where it is possible) to engage in flexi-place as well as flexi-time. Many countries are now service- or knowledge-based economies, which should enable us to use technology in such a way that we can meet our work, family and community demands, and still be productive. In the follow up to the Working Families study, it was found that truly flexible working arrangements led not only to greater job satisfaction and less stress at work but also to greater productivity. There are many studies now emerging showing the same thing – that good flexible working arrangements can lead to a more productive workforce at a time when our productivity per worker in the UK is less than many of our competitors. But this requires greater 'trust' by employers – that if individuals are given more autonomy and flexibility, that they will honour their work commitments and deliver to the bottom line. It all depends on our view of people: if you treat people as disposable assets than you are unlikely to get them committed or motivated. If you nurture them, give them some autonomy and value them, you may be pleasantly surprised.

The challenge for senior management and HR directors is to understand a basic truth about human behaviour – that developing and maintaining a 'feel good' factor at work and in our economy generally is not just about 'bottom line' factors. It is, or should be, in a civilized society, about quality of life issues as well, such as hours of work, family time, manageable workloads, control over one's career and a sense of job security. As Studs Terkel suggested in his acclaimed book *Working* (1974), 'work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash for astonishment rather than torpor, in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying' (cited in Cooper, 2007).

REFERENCES

- Biron, C., R. Burke and C.L. Cooper (2014), *Creating Healthy Work Organizations*, Farnham, UK: Gower Press.
- Burke, R. and C.L. Cooper (2008), *The Long Working Hours Culture: Causes, Consequences and Choices*, Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- Cooper, C.L. (2007), 'Finding the golden mean', *The Director*, October, 24.
- Department of Statistics (2010), *Singapore Census of Population*, Singapore: Singapore Government.
- Gatrell, C., S. Burnett, C.L. Cooper and P. Sparrow (2012), 'Work–life balance and parenthood: a comparative review of definitions, equity and enrichment', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, **3**(15), 300–317.
- Lewis, S. and C.L. Cooper (2005), *Work–Life Integration: Case Studies in Organizational Change*, Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons.
- Lu, L. (2011), 'Working hours and personal preference among Taiwanese employees', *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, **4**(3), 244–56.
- Lu, L. S.F. Kao, T.T. Chang, H.P. Wu and C.L. Cooper (2008), 'Work/family demands, work flexibility, work/family conflict, and their consequences at work: a national probability sample in Taiwan', *International Journal of Stress Management*, **15**(1), 1–21.
- Mayo, M., J. Carlos Pastor, C.L. Cooper and A. Isabel Sanz-Vergel (2011), 'Achieving work–family balance among Spanish managers and their spouses: a demands-control perspective', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, **22**(2), 331–50.
- Swan, J. and C.L. Cooper (2005), *Time, Health and the Family: What Working Families Want*, London: Working Families.
- Terkel, S. (1974), *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*, New York: Pantheon/Random House.