

A CIAR study in a male dominated  
ICT Company in Malta which looks at work-life  
issues through the masculine lens:  
A case of: if it ain't' broke, don't fix it?

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## **Abstract**

**Key words:** Gendered organisations; Hegemonic masculinity; Work-life issues; Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR); Intersecting layers of context; Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

The focus of this action research study is the analysis of invisible assumptions that sustain gendered work processes based on the ideal worker values. The case study, which is set within a Maltese ICT company, also explores the potential for action research (CIAR) to challenge the gendered processes in ways that enable better work-life integration through the Dual Agenda logic.

Data for this research, which adopts a constructionist and interpretivist approach, were obtained through various cycles of qualitative interviews and focus group meetings with participants, the majority of whom were males. These were analysed through NVivo on the principles of Thematic Analysis.

This research showed how the hegemonic masculine values of the leaders which led to the conceptualisation of the ideal worker, allowed them the opportunity to perform their masculinity in a culturally approved manner, and because this brought them power and benefits, such values prevailed. It also confirmed that the default expectations by which ideal worker values were measured, stemmed from culturally normative behaviour typically linked to unencumbered men. This rendered anomalous, suspicious and undesirable attempts to integrate work and life for family-related reasons. This happened in an organisational context where

the means to assess productivity were low, where organisational learning was weak, and within a national context where the work-life challenge is typically linked to mothers. This illustrates how interlinking factors within the multi-layers of context underpin the current notions of ideal worker thus rendering CIAR insufficient to tackle the multi-forces at play which perpetuate the Single Agenda logic.

This research highlights the importance of studying situated hegemonic masculinity in the micro context of organisations without neglecting the interlinking factors at play within the broader context that sustain it. This multi-dimensional approach is useful in allowing a better understanding of the complexities surrounding the concept of gendered organisations within a dominant hegemonic masculine culture.

Overall, this research strives to make a contribution to the debate about gendered organisations and work-life issues through a better understanding of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, it adds knowledge about the potential and barriers to Dual Agenda change through the use of the CIAR approach.

## **Declaration**

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Middlesex University Business School for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. No material in this dissertation has been used in any other submission for an academic award at this or any other university.

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Anna Borg

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**For**

Those who are striving to dismantle the shackles imposed by gender.

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# **Chapter 1 Introduction to the Thesis**

## **Introduction**

This chapter is divided into three main parts. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss the work-life challenge and explain why this subject, which in the past was often linked to women, is becoming an important matter for men too. I offer two models for conceptualising the relationship between paid work and life - the Conflict Model (Single Agenda) and the Integration Model (Dual Agenda). Here I explain how gendered assumptions around 'Ideal Worker' values (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher & Pruitt, 2002) give rise to a logic that assumes that paid work and personal life (which includes the family) are mutually exclusive. After arguing why such values need to be challenged and changed, I propose an alternative model (the Integration Model), which raises hope for innovative work practices that allow workers to integrate paid work with life. I then focus on Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR), which is one approach used to address the work-life challenge in Conflict mode.

In the second part of the chapter, I present the main aim of the study and give details on how it will be fulfilled. I also explain why I chose to set this case study in a Maltese organisation operating in the ICT sector, and include a biographical note on why I decided to focus on work-life issues and the subject of gendered organisation. I conclude this chapter by giving an overview of the remaining chapters and their content.

## **1.1. The Work-life Challenge**

Paid work, including commuting to and from work and essential restorative sleep, occupy the largest chunks of time for many workers in a typical full-time job (Eurofound, 2011b). This means that workers have to fit the rest of their lives, including time for their family and leisure, in the remaining few hours of the day when they are awake and not working. I call this the work-life challenge.

Overall, there is a general tendency to associate the work-life conflict with women rather than men. However, there are indications that men, especially fathers, are increasingly encountering problems in fulfilling their multiple roles (Mc Donald & Jeanes, 2012; Harrington, Van Deusen, Humberd, 2011; Linkow, Civian & Lingle, 2011). As women's educational achievements continue to rise (Eurostat, 2011a) and as the dual-earner family increasingly becomes the norm in many parts of the industrial world (Nilsen, Brannen & Lewis, 2012; Crompton, Lewis & Lyonette, 2007), women are more likely to demand that their husbands/partners share the family responsibilities more equally with them (Lyonette, Kaufman & Crompton, 2011). In fact, a study that draws its findings from a representative sample of the U.S. workforce, confirms that men are experiencing more work-family conflict than women in the American context (Auman, Galinsky and Matos, 2011). This is happening because whilst men have retained their primary role as providers, expectations about their roles as fathers, husbands/partners and sons, are changing.



It is unknown whether this new phenomenon which has been labelled as the “new male mystique” (Auman, Galinsky and Matos, 2011, p.1) has extended to men in other parts of the world. However, the demands on men to share the burdens of unpaid work are unlikely to diminish (McDonald & Jeanes, 2012). There are also signs that more men, especially the more educated ones, are showing a greater interest in being involved in their children’s upbringing (Taylor et al., 2011). However, men are rarely given the opportunity to discuss work-life issues and to voice their opinion on this subject (Guatam, 2012). Hence the time is ripe to analyse work-life issues with men in mind because ultimately men’s choices “around care and paid work are the unspoken flip side of the choices made by women” (Stephenson, 2010, p.237).

Whilst it may be obvious to link the work-life challenge to working parents, other, studies are showing that many young European workers are yearning to find new ways of working that integrate their personal life needs with their work-life (Brannen, Lewis, Nilsen & Smithson, 2003; Lewis, Cooper, Smithson & Dyer, 2002). Furthermore, as the European Union (EU) continues to push Governments to increase the pensionable age up, flexible and shorter working hours are being suggested as a means to retain older workers in the labour market (Coote, 2010). Whilst noting that the need to challenge rigid and traditional work models based on outdated assumptions is coming from many fronts and is becoming more urgent (Bailyn, 2010), this thesis specifically focuses on the work-life perspective of males and looks at the possibilities for systemic organisational change from their standpoint. In their positions of power, men can act as gatekeepers or as facilitators of change (Connell, 2003)

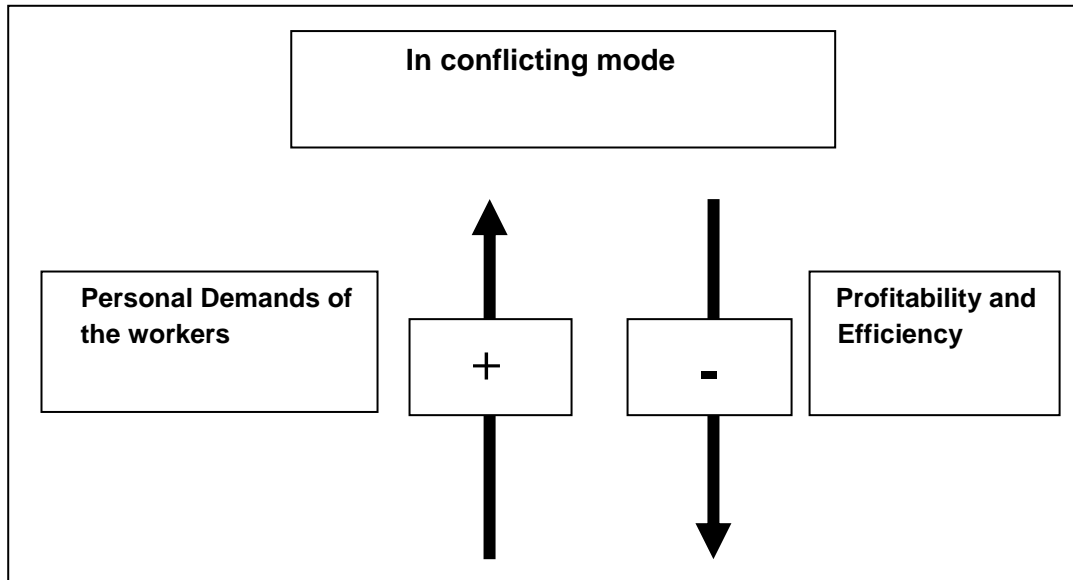
and hence, their role in addressing the work-life challenge cannot be overlooked.

As employers and employees operate in a context of sluggish economies where cost-cutting bids and efficiency drives are the order of the day, the work-life challenge is likely to intensify (Lewis, Brannen & Nilsen, 2009). In such a scenario, there are two possible models for conceptualising the relationship between workers' personal needs and the needs of the organisation: the Single Agenda (work-life in conflict mode) and the Dual Agenda (work-life in integration mode). I shall deal with these separately, and will first focus on the Single Agenda model.

#### **1.1.1. The Single Agenda: Work-life in Conflict Mode**

In the single agenda model, the personal demands of workers to adjust their work in order to combine work and life are likely to be perceived as being in conflict with the company's main aim to achieve profitability and efficiency (See Figure 1.1 below).

**Figure 1.1 Single Agenda Model - Work-Life in Conflict Mode**



In this scenario, paid work is prioritised over the personal side of life. Hence, workers who are willing to sacrifice their life outside work for the profit of the organisation are generally considered to be ideal workers (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher & Pruit, 2002). Ideal worker values are not gender neutral and decisions regarding the organisation of work originate from basic assumptions about women and men's roles in the family, at work and in the community (Lewis, 2010; Rapoport et al., 2002; Acker, 1990). These values are generally based on male norms and as a result men are generally rewarded and promoted for showing more dedication and commitment to paid work, whilst women who try to combine paid work with care, are often labelled as nonconformists in a world built around male standards (Acker, 1990). In order to explore the Single Agenda (work-life conflict) model in more detail, I draw on theories of Gendered Organisations (Acker 1990, 1992, 1998; Ferguson, 1984; Cockburn, 1983; Kanter, 1997) and theories of Hegemonic Masculinities (Khan,

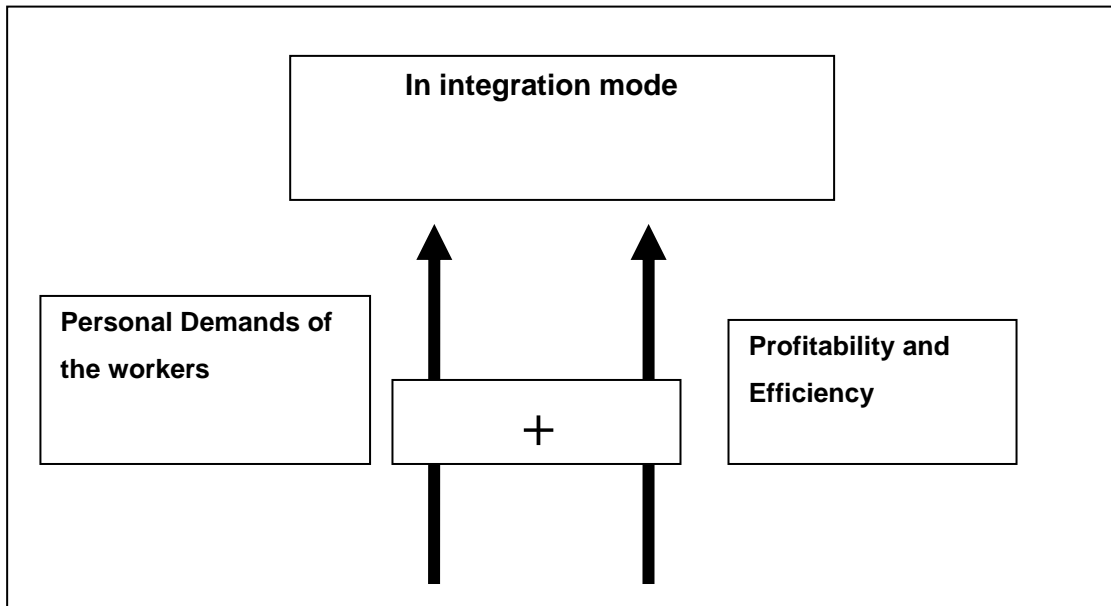
2009; Connel, 2005; Donaldson, 1993) which will be discussed in more detail in the Literature Review chapter.

The gendered order of work tends to be taken for granted and is rarely challenged. In turn, these gendered values perpetuate the status quo and ensure that men stick to their role as paid workers without allowing them room for much else. This shows that the work-life challenge is not just a question of personal or individual choices, but it highlights the significant role that structures play in shaping those choices. Recent studies suggest that if this negative conflict paradigm is challenged, there is room for an alternative pool of work options that seek to integrate the work-life needs of workers with the business needs of the organisation successfully (Bailyn, 2010; Moen & Sweet, 2004; Rapoport et al., 2002; Lewis & Cooper, 2005). This is called the Dual Agenda (work-life in integration mode).

### **1.1.2. The Dual Agenda: Work-life in Integration Mode**

Whilst the Single Agenda model focuses on the possible conflicts between the demands of work and life, the Dual Agenda model offers a different perspective that assumes that responsiveness to work-life demands need not interfere with the company's drive for efficiency and profitability (Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2007). See Figure 1.2 below.

**Figure 1.2 Dual Agenda Model - Work-life in integration Mode**



Whilst the integrative work-life paradigm looks like a positive alternative to the conflict model, and as much as the demands to challenge the outdated assumptions about the ideal worker and Single Agenda thinking may sound logical and timely, yet the road to change is not as easy as it sounds. Moen and Sweet (2004, p. 220) warn that changes within institutions are likely to be “long-term and complicated” and typically move “at a glacial pace”. Old ways of organising work along single agenda thinking seem to be ingrained in logic, which is difficult to confront and understand.

Hope alone is not sufficient to challenge the deeply embedded gendered values that sustain the Single Agenda (work-life in conflict mode). This suggests that some form of action or remedy is essential to create new models of work where paid work and life are not considered to be in conflict each other. But how do we get there and what options do we have? In order to address this question I

draw on theories of organisational change but more specifically to Collaborative Interactive Action research (CIAR), which has been described as both a theory and a method for challenging gendered organisations (Bailyn, 2006b). A full discussion of the CIAR approach can be found in the Literature Review.

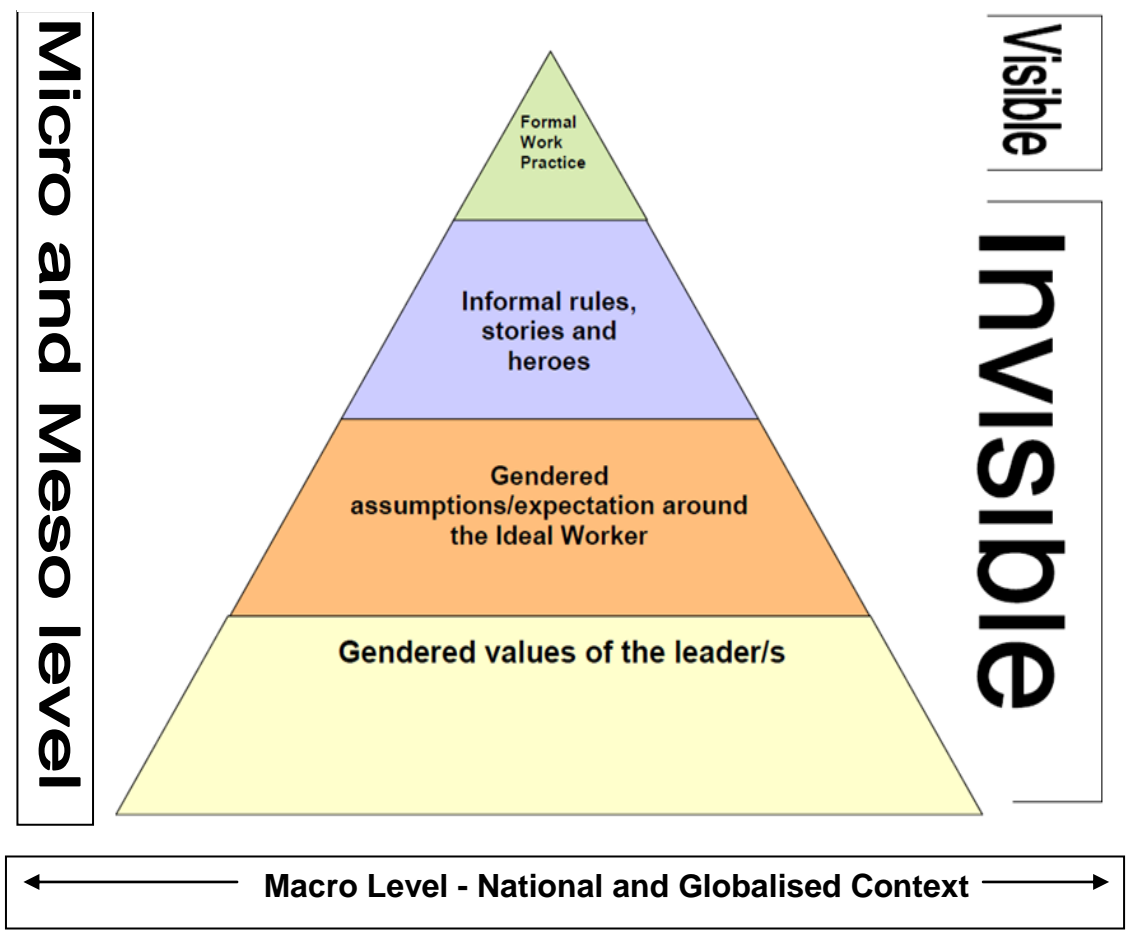
## **1.2. Looking at the Intersecting Layers of Context**

When looking at issues related to gendered organisations, Rapoport et al., (2002) suggest that studies in organisations are context specific. However, more recent research (Nilsen, Brannen & Lewis, 2012; Bamberger, 2008) is suggesting that we should broaden the boundaries of context in order to look at how the micro and meso context in which participants operate, are influenced by what happens at the macro layer. This entails looking at the national and global contexts in order to assess how all these factors interact with each other and affect work-life issues (Kossek, Lewis & Hammer, 2010; Lewis & Den Dulk, 2008). When looking at the national context, this means taking note of the “broader institutional, economic, ideological and sociocultural conditions” as well as public policy support that build up the multiple layers of context (Nilsen et al., 2012, p.131).

The model below gives an indication of the multiple layers of context and the complexities surrounding this issue. Essentially, this entails looking at the organisational culture and the underlying assumptions at the personal and organisational level (micro and meso level), whilst noting how these levels

interact with the wider national, European and global context at the macro level. The research context provides important “insights into how meanings and their implications are shaped by or are dependent upon external forces (Bamberger, 2008, p. 843). This analysis is useful to narrow down the micro–macro gap in research (Nilsen, et.al, 2012).

Figure 1.3 Looking at the multiple layers of context



### **1.3. The Aim of the Study and how it will be Fulfilled**

The broad aim of this study is to examine how gendered workplace assumptions are manifested and reinforced in a male-dominated organisation operating in the ICT sector and a national context that is traditionally gendered. It will also explore the potential for action research to challenge these values in this context. This is a multi stage, iterative, action research process, which is carried out in collaboration with various stakeholders including the company directors, managers, and workers who operate in the case study organisation. It looks at the invisible ideal worker values and assumptions and how these affect formal and informal work practices that impact on work-life issues (Bailyn, 2010). The study gives a lot of attention to the sub and micro culture of the organisation without neglecting the multiple forces at stake which build its context (Lewis & Den Dulk, 2008).

### **1.4. Why I Chose the ICT Sector**

This case study is set in an ICT company in Malta called Tech Co. (pseudonym). High Tech Companies are often associated with fast and unpredictable working rhythms driven by customer demands (Valenduc & Vendramin 2004). At the same time, knowledge workers who operate through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are also considered to be in a better position to negotiate their work in ways that are more individualised



and flexible (Kelan, 2005). But, does this happen in reality or do ideal worker values still condition employers and employees into thinking that work and life are mutually exclusive? This sector, which is largely dominated by men (Truss, Conway, D'Amato, Kelly, Mons, Hannon & Flood, 2012, Whitehouse, 2006; Gill & Grint, 1995) provides a unique backdrop to analyse the interesting relationships between ICT the organisation of work and masculinity, and to assess how gendered workplace assumptions are manifested and reinforced in the ICT context.

Opportunities of work in the ICT sector are likely to continue to play a dominant role in future economies and hence the working conditions of people operating in this area are also likely to be in focus. For example Malta is investing heavily in the ICT sector and is in the process of setting up a technology park called Smart City for high-Tech Companies who want to set up their business in Malta (Malta Employers Association, 2008). In the industrialised world, many jobs based on low education in the manufacturing sector are being replaced by knowledge workers as the economy is shifting to the services industry whilst the manufacturing companies are moving to countries like China and India where labour costs are lower (Eurofound, 2011c). Hence, as the importance of the ICT sector continues to increase, our understanding of the dynamics of gender in organisation should likewise be expanded especially in the area of work-life issues.

## **1.5. Autobiographical Note**

Deciding which subject to investigate is directly linked to one's values and past experiences. For the last twenty years, I have been actively involved in women's organisations, first within the fold of one of the main political parties in Malta and later-on in an NGO which is affiliated to the European Women's Lobby. Throughout this process, I have seen many positive changes as a result of direct and indirect lobbying with politicians, employers, and unions members, who in their vast majority are males. As gate keepers, men in public positions, have a very important role to play in the walk towards gender equality. Yet, there is less talk about the important role that men play in their roles as fathers and workers and after many years of talking about the importance of family friendly measures, men still seem reluctant to use them in order to take on a bigger share of the non-remunerated work in the family. As a result, women have continued to take-on those burdens in their stride without kicking much fuss and perhaps unknowingly, paying a high price for it in terms of financial losses (in the form of the wage gap) and missed opportunities to advance in their career. With time, I became more aware that unless men are involved in the change process, progress will be slower. And where else can change begin if not at the work place? For this reason, I decided to focus on the issue of gendered organisations and how men can be enticed to work in ways which allows them enough space and time to have a life outside work with enough time to dedicate to their family and to personal matters.

It could be argued that women have had more opportunities to experience the benefits of being able to integrate work with life through flexible ways of working, albeit making trade-offs to do so. One can also speculate that men have been reluctant to do so, because organisations have always discouraged it. I personally went through an experience which convinced me of the importance of moving away from rigid and outdated gendered assumptions about how, where and when work can be done. This strengthened my resolve to give this issue the attention it merits. This happened when the previous organisation I worked with decided to install a time recording system through a palm reader for all workers. This meant that we had a 30 minute time window in which we could palm-in for work. The 30 minute time window was seen as a concession which had been painfully negotiated with the union under the assertion of flexibility. This newly discovered flexibility meant, that if after driving for one hour to work, for any reason I did not manage to come within the stipulated time, money was deducted from my pay, regardless of how long I worked after my normal working time from the office or at home. Alternatively, I had to go to the CEO to instruct the HR manager to adjust my time and pay. This was very humiliating.

So, after years of managing my time I had to abide by the rules and organise my life around them. I immediately felt constrained and started feeling unhappy with this arrangement. At the time, I was responsible for writing and managing EU projects related to gender equality which amounted to millions of Euro. Yet I felt I was not being trusted with my own time. As soon as this happened, I immediately started looking for an alternative place to work. I no longer wanted

to work there. Instead, I wanted to work somewhere where the workers are not treated like children who need to be controlled and who are punished if they do not keep to the regulated time. I wanted the freedom to adjust the time at work without feeling that I was being spied upon. This led me to my present job at university, where in spite of the heavy work load, I have a lot of flexibility where, when and how to work. The possibility to be able to control my time and to be able to work from home is priceless. This flexibility allows me to integrate my life with all its complications with my work, and I am not willing to give it up now that I have discovered it. Whilst being conscious that not all workers can have full flexibility, I am convinced that if more workers and more organisations realise the benefits of being able to integrate work with life, there is much to be gained.

## **1.6. Overview of the Structure and Content**

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. In this chapter (*chapter one*) I presented the main aim of this study, its broad theoretical frameworks and how I plan to fulfil it. In *chapter two* I review the literature relevant to this research. Here, I focus on various theories which can lead to a better understanding of the complex dynamics of gendered organisations and draw on theories of Gendered Organisations (Bailyn, 2010; Rapoport, et al., 2002; Acker, 1990); theories of Hegemonic Masculinities (Kimmel, 2010; Khan, 2009; Beynon, 2002; Connel, 2005; David & Brannon, 1976); Sense of Entitlement theories (Lewis & Smithson, 2001); and theories on Organisational Learning (Lee, et al., 2000) to do so. In this chapter, I also look at Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) and

take an in-depth look at past Collaborative Interactive Action Research Projects (CIAR) carried out across the world in order to draw key learning points that can help set this study on a better footing.

In *Chapter three* I provide rich contextual details about Malta, its economy and the gendered Maltese labour market. Here, I also focus on national values related to work and family in order to get a better grasp of the ideological and practical factors relating to gender, paid work and care - which can all impact on this study. I also take a close look at the ICT sector in which this case study is set and use the gender lens to look at work practices in this sector. Finally, I also take note of the recession and its possible impact on work-life issues in relation to this study.

*Chapter four* is dedicated to the methodology and method. Here I summarise the main aims of the research and then discuss the inquiry paradigm and the philosophical commitments around it. I then move to justify the research approach adopted and amongst other things examine the issue of quality and authenticity in research. In the second part of this chapter I look at the case study approach and evaluate Participatory Action Research with a special focus on the CIAR process. This is followed by a detailed account of the methods adopted to fulfil the research aims and objectives. I conclude this chapter by discussing the strengths and limitations of the method and methodology adopted and discuss some of the ethical issues surrounding my study.

*Chapters five to eight* make up the Findings, Analysis and discussion chapters. Considering the importance of the multiple layers of context, in chapter five I report how gendered assumptions and the Single Agenda Logic are manifested and reinforced in the case study organisation. In chapter six I discuss the findings in relation to the ideal worker and the work-life interface, whilst in Chapter seven and eight I continue reporting how gendered workplace assumptions are manifested and reinforced through the use of time and space in the case study organisation.

In *Chapter nine*, which brings this research to a close, I synthesise the key research findings of the study and highlight its key contributions to knowledge. This is followed by an in-depth discussion of the findings in relation to the broad aims of this study. The third part of this chapter captures my methodological reflections on the study with a special focus on the CIAR process. In the fourth and final section, I conclude this work by assessing the implication of the findings to the broader context, discuss its limitations and finally propose some recommendations for future research on this subject.

## **Chapter 2      Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the relevant literature that can help us understand the complex dynamics of gender in organisations and how they link to work-life issues in a specific context. The chapter is structured into two main parts. In the first part, I discuss issues related to gender and work and expand on the theoretical frameworks that guide this research. Here, I examine how gendered processes in organisations lead to the conceptualisation of ideal worker values based on the Single Agenda logic which tends to exacerbate work-life conflicts. I argue that the Single Agenda logic assumes that responsiveness to the personal needs of the workers is not compatible with the ultimate aim of increasing efficiency and profitability in business. In order to get a better understanding of the underlying male values that support this idea, I introduce the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity and discuss why men may find it difficult to transgress ideal worker boundaries. I then bring in the issue of Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) and explore whether these can resolve the work-life challenge not only for women, but especially for men. Here, I analyse FWAs in more detail and conclude this part by arguing that FWAs generally leave the gendered processes intact and that FWAs alone are not sufficient to change the underlying gendered values in organisations.

In the second part of this chapter, I focus on organisational change and ask whether the Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR) approach can be

useful in challenging the gendered order of work based on ideal worker values. I give details about the first CIAR project, which led Rapoport et al., (2002) to claim that responsiveness to personal needs and organisational effectiveness can be mutually reinforcing. Here I analyse how the CIAR process can be used to challenge outdated assumptions about the organisation of work and can lead to the creation of new values that take an integrative (rather than a conflicting) approach to work and life. I then review several CIAR projects from across the world and sustain that the majority gave little attention to men and masculinity, but instead focused largely on women's needs. I conclude by showing that these projects brought limited organisation-wide systemic change to the underlying gendered values in organisations, possibly because the issue of masculinity was given far less attention. In pointing this lacuna, I argue why it is useful to look at issues related to masculinity and work when looking for systemic change in organisation.

## **2.1. Understanding the Complex Dynamics of Gendered Organisations**

The study revolves around the issues of gendered organisations, work-life issues and potential change. It examines how gendered workplace assumptions are manifested and reinforced in a male-dominated organisation and a national context which is highly gendered (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2012). Yet it becomes immediately clear that one cannot contemplate change before understanding the complex dynamics of gender in organisations. This is especially important for this research, which is located in the ICT sector where the majority of workers are men.



It is interesting to note that the word 'gender' does not exist in the Maltese language and in Anglo-American contexts it still raises problems of interpretations. For example some theorists claim that we can arrive to some common meaning about gender appropriate behaviours in a specific time and place (West & Zimmerman, 1991), whilst others suggest that the meaning of gender is, and will always remain fluid and multi dimensional (Gerson, 2004). Being hypothetical constructs, gendered assumptions about appropriate roles for women and men, have the added problem of invisibility (Kelan, 2005; Gill, 2002; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998). Research on the perception of gender is increasingly showing a trend where workers negate the gendered differences between women and men in the organisation (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005) or else it is assumed that equality between the sexes has already been achieved (Kelan, 2007). In line with assumptions about the declining impact of gender, theories of late modernity are suggesting that through increased individualisation and reflexivity, gender is becoming less relevant in shaping our destiny (Giddens, 1991; Giddens, 1992; Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Whilst one cannot deny women's impressive achievements towards gaining gender equality in the last decades, it is pertinent to note that most of the changes which have been branded as being "revolutionary", in reality involved "women moving into positions and activities previously limited to men, with few changes in the opposite direction" (England, 2010, p.151). For example, women's entry into educational fields like business and law which in the past

attracted greater numbers of men, now draw more female students than male (Eurostat, 2011). In spite of this, in parallel one can still notice men's reluctance to enter fields typically linked to women like social work, education, or nursing. The presence of more women in the labour market who are determined to have a career with a good income is also frequently brought forward as sufficient proof that gendered stereotypes are being eroded (Wilkinson, 1994). However, the gender wage gap at around 16% across the EU (European Union, 2014) is but one of the many indicators of gendered differences that prevail in organisations in spite of the advancement of women on many fronts.

Negating gender differences and considering the fight for gender equality between women and men as passé (Kelan, 2007) renders the subject of gender in organisations a difficult one to tackle. However, this does not mean that workers are no longer affected by gendered assumptions or that the benchmark of what constitutes an ideal worker is no longer based on male ways of working (Lewis, Rapoport & Gambles, 2007; Kelan, 2007; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005; Gerson, 2004; Rapoport et al., 2002). Many of the differences become evident on the threshold of parenthood and especially during the first years of parenting. For example in Sweden, which is considered to be a role model country as far as gender equality is concerned, it took fathers over 30 years to "reach a level of utilisation of about 20 per cent of the total parental leave allowance" (Johannson & Klinth, 2008, p.45). Differences between women and men continue throughout the life course and mothers are generally still expected to take on bigger responsibilities for the care of their children, other family members and the home (Mc Donald & Jeanes, 2012; Lewis, & Den Dulke,

2008; Caruana, Borg & Debono, 2011). For example, whilst it is acceptable for women to reduce their working hours or to work part-time in order to combine family with care (Crompton, Lewis & Lyonette, 2007; Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2007), it is still uncommon for men to do so. These may be some of the reasons why feminist researchers (Mulinari & Sandell, 2009) tend to challenge theories of late modernity (Giddens, 1991, 1992; Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) which suggest that gender is becoming less important in shaping our work-life choices.

Some theorists claim that it is heterosexuality which perpetuates the gendered household arrangements (Kurdek, 2005; Dunne, 1998). However, Kanter (1977), Ferguson (1984), and Cockburn (1983) were amongst the first researchers to suggest that rather than focusing on the gendered characteristics of women and men as individuals, one should look at organisations and work processes in order to see how these contribute to producing and reproducing gender inequalities. Following this line of thought, Acker's theory of Gendered Organisations (1990) provides a useful theoretical framework within which to analyse the issue of gendered organisations and work-life in Single Agenda logic.

### **2.1.1. The Theory of Gendered Organisations**

The main tenet of Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organisation is that organisations are not gender neutral. This means that workers operate within

frameworks and systems that give rise to a series of gendering processes. These lead to the conceptualisation of the ideal worker and ultimately to Single Agenda reasoning. These gendered processes affect the division of work, the workplace culture, and how people see themselves and interact with others within the organisation (Dye & Mills, 2012; Acker, 1990).

Values around the ideal worker stem from basic assumptions about women and men's roles in the family, at work and in the community (Lewis, 2010; Rapoport et al., 2002; Acker, 1990). These assumptions are hence linked to the separation of family from work and reinforce the idea that nurturing and caring is best done privately by women at home (Britton, 2000). In the Single Agenda logic, work and life are thought to be mutually exclusive, and those who strive to fit into the ideal worker norms must decide which side, between paid work and the personal side of life, they want to prioritise over the other. Essentially, this means that they must make a trade-off between work and life, but they cannot have both. In the Single Agenda logic, those who prioritise work over life are generally considered to be serious and committed ideal workers who devote their energies where it matters most (Bailyn, Drago & Kochan, 2001), the rest fail to do so.

Various assumptions surround the myth on which ideal worker standards are built. These take various forms but are closely related to temporal and spatial issues. For example, ideal workers are normally expected to structure their work trajectory around a traditional career path of uninterrupted full-time work without any breaks for family, education or other personal reasons (Carter & Silva,

2011). As a result, ideal workers tend to avoid interruptions in their career for fear that this may otherwise bring a 'flexibility stigma' that risk putting them in a bad light (Williams, Blair-Loy & Berdahl, 2013). In this mindset, and in order to conform to ideal worker values, men take a smaller share of the unpaid work. This often means that the burdens of care are left to women to sort out. This decision allows men to work full-time and to spend longer hours at work (Bailyn, 2010). For the same reasons, men are less likely to take family-related leave, to reduce their workload, to work part-time, or to take career breaks in order to juggle family responsibilities with paid work (Bailyn, 2011; Antopolous, 2008; Kolb & Merrill-Sands, 1999).

Using the same values, committed workers striving to fulfil ideal worker norms must be ready to travel at short notice and are expected to show their loyalty by giving up their personal time for the organisation (Carter & Silva, 2011; Rapoport et al., 2002). Although this reasoning may be flawed, 'face time', especially being seen at the place of work after normal working hours, is often equated with ideal worker dependability and initiative (Elsbach, Cable & Sherman, 2010, Bailyn, 2010). Values that promote face time, give rise to the idea that "a worker out of sight is a worker out of control" (Rayman, Bailyn, Dickert, Carre, Harvey, Krim & Read, 1999, p.175). This assumption can limit spatial flexibility and hinders work-life integration. It also strengthens the assumption that work can only be done away from home during particular hours under the supervision of others. Furthermore, these ideal worker values, promote the idea that workers who tackle work in 'fire fighting mode' (Bohn &

Jaikumar, 2000) by staying late at night to solve work problems, rather than prevent them in the first place, are often applauded as heroes (Perlow, 1999).

Work patterns based on Single Agenda logic means that the life of many men is practically consumed by paid work with little time for much else (Bailyn, 2009). This may be more accentuated in some countries over others (North, 2012; Gregory & Milner, 2012) and in particular sectors of the economy like finance (Connell, 2012). However recent research is suggesting that the traditional career model typically tied to men is changing, as the nature of work itself is undergoing a transformation in the new economy (Williams, Muller, Kilanski, 2012). For example, certain type of jobs may no longer come with long-term security and workers in certain sectors expect to change jobs either as a choice or as a consequence of downsizing, layoffs or mergers. This renders career trajectories less well defined (Williams et. al., 2012) and less in line with the masculine norms surrounding the ideal worker as suggested by Acker (1990). Furthermore, research on the uptake and provision of flexible working in the UK, suggests that 70% of men were working flexibly in some way. At first glance this looks very positive, however, this does not mean that men in organisations are shunning the gendered values imposed by invisible assumptions that are built around the ideal worker. So, whilst noting that things are changing, Acker's theory remains a valid tool through which we can assess and understand the mechanisms that produce and reproduce gender inequality at the work place (Williams, et al., 2012).

Gendered processes and gendered divisions of work are generally taken for granted and are often justified through rational and technical reasoning which privileges men over women for being able to fit more easily into the 'abstract job' linked to ideal worker reasoning. This logic assumes a "disembodied and universal worker" unencumbered by procreation and care whose primary role is paid work (Acker, 1990, p. 139). So whilst Acker's theory highlights the structural barriers to inequality at work, in parallel we must also ask what supply-side factors are inducing men to stick to ideal worker norms and what benefits and costs this brings them. For example, conforming to ideal worker values tends to give men higher dividends that come in the form of a better average income and more power in organisations. Issues of power are linked to theories of Hegemonic Masculinity (Khan, 2009; Connell, 2005; Donaldson, 1993). Hence, it is useful to look at the costs and benefits that ideal worker values bring to men (and women) and how these affect work-life decisions they take. By looking at the issue of masculinity, we may be in a better position to identify the push or pull factors that may dampen or entice men to cross the gender boundaries in organisations. This is especially important for this study where the majority of informants are men, who are led by other men.

### **2.1.2. The Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity**

Masculinity is a theoretical construct which contains a variety of assumptions about how we make sense of the "social, behavioural, emotional, expressive-laden experiences of men and characteristics associated with them" (Khan, 2009, p.283). In the recent past, there has been a move to discuss

masculinities (rather than masculinity in the single tense) in view of the multiple and varied ways through which this is experienced and manifested in specific contexts (Beynon, 2002). Recognising the diversity in masculinities is the first step, in that we also need to take note of the relations between the different kinds of masculinities on matters relating to power, domination and subordination within a hierarchy that goes beyond the male/female dichotomy (Connell, 1987).

Historically, the term hegemonic masculinity, was used by Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) to replace essentialist sex-role theories which typically drew on nature to explain the marked social differences between women and men. This also proved useful in replacing models of patriarchy that exclusively highlighted men's domination over women and children, but which did not give enough attention to the impact of masculinity on men themselves as a category (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hence, theories of hegemonic masculinity allow us to focus on men and how masculinity is produced and reproduced in different contexts. This can help us understand how issues related to power are not earned, but are culturally achieved and maintained through normative practices within business, religious, and social organisations (including the family). Theorising about hegemonic masculinity also allows us to explore gender politics within masculinity and to assess its impact like exclusion, exploitation and intimidation on others (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This can help understand how through implicit - but at time explicit - processes, can lead to the categorisation of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities (Carrigan et al., 1985; Wedgwood, 2009). For example, in their original work on masculinity,



Carrigan et al., (1985) pointed out to the category of homosexual men and how they can be marginalised or punished for straying from the assumed heteronormative values of the hegemony on issues related to embodiment and sexuality. Of course, this concept extends beyond arguments related to heteronormativity and can also be used to study gendered organisations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). More specifically, in this study theories of hegemonic masculinity will be useful to focus on the construction of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity in relation to work processes adopted within the case study organisation and how these affect work-life issues for the male and female workers.

### **2.1.3. The Debates around the Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity and its Links to Gender Theories.**

Originating from the Greek word *hēgemōn* which is translated as ‘the leader’ (Merriam Webster, 2014), the term hegemonic masculinity has been around since the 1980s. This term was formulated in tandem with the notion of “hegemonic femininity” or “emphasized femininity” - although this latter concept was eventually dropped (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848). Realists tend to critique the fuzzy concept of hegemonic masculinity, its ambiguities, elusiveness, overlap with other theories (like gender theories) and the inconsistent application in the usage of the term (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Hearn, 1996, 2004; Yancey Martin, 1998). On the other hand, questions may also be raised as to whether the concept of hegemony is concrete and definite

or is simply a discursive one. In fact, Poststructuralists imply that instead of highlighting the discursive construction of masculine (and feminine) identities, the term hegemonic masculinity erroneously strives to systemise something which in essence is ephemeral and variable (Petersen, 1998, 2003; Collier, 1998). However, criticism over its fluid concept are contested in that its very strength emanates from the fact that the concept can change and evolve as necessary within the context that it is enacted in (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Thus, whilst it can be argued that the term leaves some questions unanswered especially in the absence of something which is clearly “counter-hegemonic” (Hearn, 2004, p.58), or something comparative like hegemonic femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), the emphasis on the different positioning of men along the hierarchy, Carrigan et al., (1985) can provide a useful comparative means of assessing men in terms of their adherence or their departure from the normative values set by the hegemony. This conceptual approach is most useful for the study of hegemonic masculinity in organisations, since men still dominate at the top of most business organisations and have a lot of influence on what happens in them.

The term hegemonic masculinity has also been used in order to makes sense of the increasingly noted problems of men and boys (often called a crisis in masculinity) in relation to their lower educational achievement, increased crime, violence, hooliganism, and ill-health (Kahn 2009, Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, the terms goes beyond these restricted negative and harmful

configurations of men and allows us a better understanding of how men position themselves in relation to other men; and in relation to women in organisations, in the family and in society at large (Hearn, 2004).

When focusing on theories of Hegemonic Masculinity it becomes evident to note that that this theory is closely interlinked to theories of gender. Connell (2005) claims that when we speak about masculinities we are speaking about gender relations. Likewise, Wedgewood (2009, p.332) sees the study of masculinity as "a crucial development in gender theory" and agrees with Connell (1995, p.44) who argue that "that masculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition". So whilst noting the many links between theories of gender and theories on hegemonic masculinity, it can be argued that that theories of masculinity puts the spotlight on men and on issues of power and privilege over others. This allows us to get a better grip of why things are fashioned in a certain way (for example in organisations like Tech Co) rather than in another way - and how such practices may serve the interest of those who occupy position of power within the hierarchy (generally men) first and foremost. Furthermore theories of hegemonic masculinity permit us to note the processes through which the hegemony establishes and naturalises their values within the organisation thus rendering anomalous non-hegemonic work values and work practices. This is useful in helping us gain an understanding of men's experiences and the impact of prevailing notions of masculinity in order to tackle the barriers to change when carrying out action research on work life issues, as I am doing in this study.

Considering that the main protagonists of this research are men, and bearing in mind that one of the main aims of this study is to challenge some of the work practices that may be based on gendered masculine values, theories of hegemonic masculinity are useful in that they allow room for what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 853) call the “democratisation” of gender relations as applied to organisations. However, since the concept of hegemonic masculinity remains fluid and discursive and is historically related to the gendered processes around us, in the section below I will highlight how I will use it in my study in relation to the concept of the ideal worker and work-life issues.

#### **2.1.4. The Blueprint of Manhood and its link to the Single Agenda Logic**

Hearn (2004, p.65) warns that “rigid, monocultural notion of hegemony” needs to be treated with great caution, yet at the same time it is imperative that we also have some substantive elements to analyse the phenomenon of gendered work practices when using theories of hegemonic masculinity. Organisations offer a fertile scenario to study patterns of hegemonic masculinity (Rapoport et al., 2002; Acker, 1990; Wajcman, 1999). But what exactly would we be looking for when researching the mechanisms of hegemonic masculinity in organisations? What practices emanate from this concept and how can these be picked-up from the radar when analysing the ideal worker in organisations?

More than three decades ago, David and Brannon (1976) drew up the four fundamental tenets of true manhood. Called the 'Blueprint of Manhood', in a rather crude way, these suggest that; men are expected to do '*no sissy stuff*' by avoiding things that women typically do; they should "*be a big wheel*" and dominate others, hide their emotions and be independent like "*the sturdy oak*", and "*give 'em hell*" by being daring and taking risks. Within the concept of hegemonic masculinity, these broad concepts may act like guidelines for men to emulate and serve as a means to keep control over other men even though they may not necessarily correspond to the lives of actual men always and in all contexts.

Whilst the tenets of true manhood emanated from the American culture at a specific time and place and may have evolved since then, an essential and non-negotiable building block of male identity and true manhood is paid work (Kimmel, 2010). Paid work was relevant to men in the 1970s (when the blueprint was conceptualised) and is still relevant today to most men in many contexts. This is especially relevant to Maltese men in view of the low number of women who are active in the Maltese Labour Market. Hence, paid work tends to be directly linked to masculinity in "that a man who is not a provider doesn't feel like much of a man at all" (Kimmel, 2010, p.17). Furthermore, men "who do not perform their masculinity in a culturally approved manner are liable to be ostracized, even punished" (Beynon, 2002, p. 11), thus becoming the 'other' and occupying lower positions within the masculine hierarchy.

One of the ways in which men enact their masculinity is by living up to ideal worker principles (Kelly et. al., 2012). This is based on the underlying assumption that giving attention to things outside work and especially to the family, would sidetrack workers from focusing on the important things at work (Bailyn, 2006). Therefore, it is often assumed that those who are committed to the organisation, especially those who want to make it to the top (to be the big wheel), should give their unadulterated attention and energy to the organisation and not to too much else (Williams et al., 2013; Carter & Silva, 2011; Kelly et al., 2010; Acker, 1990; Cooper, 2000). By doing so, men in specific contexts can avoid the pitfalls of being linked to work-patterns that are often equated with women and which hence can become labelled as doing “sissy stuff”. This risks rendering work options like part-time work or reduced working hours into non-hegemonic work practices.

Such assumptions carry a lot of weight because in organisations, there is a general tendency to view hegemonic masculine values as normal and acceptable, and by implication, non-hegemonic masculinity as anomalous. These values are taken for granted and are rarely questioned (Acker, 1990). Antonio Gramsci’s Marxist concept of hegemony is often used to describe such processes wherein those in power impose their values on others. Generally, this is not done through the use of sheer force, although at times this may be backed by some form of force or through the exclusion of deviants. Typically this is done through persuasion and “coaxing” in order to create consent and acceptance so that those subordinated accept it as being natural or as being common sense (Khan, 2009, p. 31; Hearn, 2004). Since the gendered order of

work tends to be taken for granted and is rarely challenged, in turn, these values seem to perpetuate the status quo and go a long way in ensuring that most men stick to their primary role as paid workers in order to remain within the boundaries of “true manhood”. Hence by using theories of Hegemonic Masculinity and linking them to the blue print of true manhood in relation to paid work, I am in a better position to illustrate the complex web of norms, rules and gendered expectations that reward the ideal worker in a broad hegemonic masculine culture. This suggests that the work-life challenge is not just a question of personal or individual choices, but it highlights the significant role that structures, context and culture all play in shaping those ‘choices’ which sustain the Single Agenda logic.

Whilst, Hegemonic Masculinity is often linked to issues of privileges and entitlements that this brings to men at the expense of women (Mc Intosh, 2000), masculine values linked to ideal worker norms, can also restrict work-life options for men in their bid to conform to prevailing hegemonic values (Beynon,2002). When looking at the dynamics of work in practice, this raises many important questions related to masculinity and work. For example, is there hope that more men can use Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) in order to resolve the work-life challenge when FWAs (and indeed work-family dilemmas) are still linked to women and femininity? Do men risk infringing their gender boundary if they use FWA– especially if this is for family reasons? And if the male identity is intrinsically linked to paid work, how easy is it for men to reduce their working time and their income if this brings them benefits and privilege and allows them to occupy the top posts within the hierarchy? Using

the ideal worker and the concept of hegemonic masculinity, in the next section I will discuss FWAs in relation to men.

## **2.2. Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs)**

The issue of flexibility at work has been gaining importance in recent years, although there is the tendency to link FWAs to women rather than men. In spite of this, one can note interesting shifts in that younger men especially young fathers, are becoming more interested in FWAs in order to balance work and life (McDonald & Jeanes, 2012; Russell & O' Leary, 2012; Pini & Mc Donald, 2008). However, showing interest in FWAs does not necessarily mean that men use flexible work arrangements in the same way that women do and neither is the uptake by men similar (Kaufman & Gerson, 2012; Ranson, 2007). Whilst men seem to be making a greater effort to work flexibly, structural and cultural resistance still seems to be hampering them from doing so (Gerson, 2010).

Because the term FWAs has multiple connotations and means a lot of different things to different persons, when discussing this issue, one needs to be more specific on the type of measure in question. In general, this phrase is normally used to describe a "group of alternative work options that allow work to be accomplished outside of the traditional temporal and/or spatial boundaries of a standard workday" (Rau, 2003, p.1). Examples of FWAs include part time work, reduced working hours, flexible starting and finishing time (also known as



Flexitime), telework (working from home or elsewhere); job-sharing; and seasonal work, amongst others (McDonald & Jeanes, 2012). Rather than looking at FWAs out of context, it is useful to analyse their application according to specific sectors and to specific jobs. For example, it may be more challenging to introduce FWAs in sectors like the health and the manufacturing sector where workers have to carry out their work in a specific time and place.

On the supply side, in general, FWAs are more likely to be offered in the public rather than in the private sector (Lewis & Den Dulk, 2008; Caruana et al., 2010). Furthermore, larger organisations tend to have more formal work-life policies in place than smaller companies. However, formal policies do not automatically result in better practices and in some cases, smaller firms offer more informal flexibility (CIPD, 2012; Lewis & Cooper, 2005). One can speculate that this may be due to the closer relationship that evolves between employer and employees in smaller firms. Access to FWAs also differs according to the seniority of employees; with higher earning and higher-status workers like board directors, senior and middle managers normally gaining more access than workers at the lower end of the hierarchy (Kelly et al., 2010, CIPD, 2012). FWAs can be branded under various names including: family friendly measures (FFM); family friendly benefits (FFB); or as work-life measures (WLM), amongst other. The term should not be confused with non-traditional work arrangements such as shift-work or work which is normally done outside standard working days, for example during the weekend or at night (Lewis, 2003b). One should also distinguish between employer led flexibility, and flexibility which is sought by the workers. Here I will focus on the latter.

The usefulness of FWAs to increase or decrease work-life conflicts differs considerably by type and whether these are taken by women or men. For example it was noted that working from home through telework may increase work-life conflict and stress for women, but not for men (Russell, O'Connell & McGinnity, 2009). Studies suggest that men who work from home tend to be confident of receiving their partners' support, whilst "women tend to anticipate neither collaboration nor support at home, and therefore are more subject to interruption and fragmentation" of their tasks by those around them (Rodriguez Araujo, 2008, p.496). This is bound to happen more often when young children are present. This suggests that the uptake of FWAs depends on a number of factors, and gender plays a significant role in this issue. The underlying intentions behind employee driven flexibility vary. These include the ability to decrease work-life conflicts (Costa, 2004); to enable employees to better integrate their personal needs with the demands of work (Lewis, Cooper, & Dyer, 2002); to improve the quality and productivity at work (European Employment Strategy, 2005); as a means to reduce turnover costs; and to act as morale booster for the workers (Stavrou & Kilanliotis, 2010; Hohl, 2006). Whilst all these intentions sound logical and positive, this does not mean that FWAs are easy to put in practice. What are the stumbling blocks that limit the implementation of FWAs? Are these based on wrong perceptions or on real concerns?

### **2.2.1. The Challenges of Implementing FWAs in Gendered Organisations**

Supervisors and managers are often concerned about the implementation of FWAs and the problems these can cause in organising work at the practical level. In their study of the implementation of FWAs in the legal services sector in the USA, Baily and Harrington (2010, p.202-203) claim that the 22 directors who participated in a work shop to discuss work-family issues reported “high levels of frustration, irritation and dissatisfaction.” They found demands for FWAs created “chronic uncertainty” and they faced many practical difficulties to implement them. The directors in this study reported that they were constantly deliberating what was reasonable or unreasonable of employees to ask for, and what degree of work-flexibility was justifiable. Such conclusions suggest that the final decisions on how to organise work are still taken top-down rather than collaboratively and this in itself says much about the worker-manager relationship which is often based on control rather than trust.

The issue of how best to assess productivity, if one is absent from the workplace, can also raise concerns to managers especially in organisations where the means of assessing productivity are low. On this, Friedman (1999) warns that, in general, managers are normally reluctant to have people work remotely, because they feel that they are not in control and cannot check whether the workers are actually engaged in productive work or whether they are doing something else. Even when employers trust their employees, in general, they still tend to worry about allowing persons to work away from the

office (Friedman, 1999). Furthermore, badly designed and badly implemented FWAs in a culture where differences in work arrangements are considered to be unfair can also cause resentment between those working from home those and those who can't do so (Bailyn et. al., 2001). All these factors can detract employers from considering FWAs in their organisations and because of these problems, which are partly real and partly perceived, retaining the status quo may feel as a safe option to both employers and employees.

When studying ICT companies across Europe, in line with Single Agenda values, Valenduc and Vendramin (2004, p.4) note that, in general, companies operating in the ICT field, regard “families as problems that distract employees from their work and see families as the specific problem of individual female employees.” In such companies, family-friendly policies are unusual and their use tends to be restricted to situations where the organisation wants to attract and retain more women when there is a shortage of employees. Research in other sectors shows that FWAs “are often subject to management discretion” and are often “based on beliefs about potential disruption, substitutability of employees, notions of fairness and respect, perception of employees, record of work and commitment, perceived long-term impact, or perceived gender appropriateness” (Lewis, 2003b, p.17). So what are the factors that affect the uptake of FWAs and how does gender affect this process?

### **2.2.2. Factors that Impact on the Uptake and Use of FWAs and their Link to Gender**

Lewis and Smithson (2001, p.1457) use the notion of 'sense of entitlement', which derives from social justice theory in order to highlight the different uptake of FWAs between women and men. This concept suggests that workers differentiate between 'entitlements' which are perceived as rights, and others which need to be negotiated and/or reciprocated in that they are considered as 'favours'. Consistent with more recent research e.g. (Russell & O'Leary, 2012, CIPD, 2012; McDonald & Jeanes, 2012), Lewis and Smithson (2001) found that the sense of entitlement is highly gendered and, in the seven EU countries which they studied, men had a lower sense of entitlement than women to use FWAs. The low uptake was also noted in Malta through a quantitative study on the demand of FWAs in the public sector in Malta (Debono & Borg, 2011). This revealed that nearly 27% of women and just 6% of men made use of some type of alternative work arrangement which fall under the umbrella of family friendly measures (FFMs). As an exception to the low uptake by European men, Lewis & Smithson (2001) note that Norwegian and Swedish fathers are more likely to use parental leave which is reserved for them exclusively through a quota than in countries without such policies. This suggests that the importance of FWAs may differ amongst other things, according to the country, its welfare regime and family-related policies, the lack or the availability of childcare, the extent of the gendered division of household tasks and the prevalence of the long hour culture (Eurofound, 2007). These important issues will all be tackled in a separate chapter which focuses on the context of this study (See Chapter 3).

Gendered assumptions play a significant role in the uptake of FWAs and men, are less inclined to use FWAs for family reasons when compared to women (McDonald & Jeanes, 2012; Lewis & Smithson, 2001). Qualitative research suggests that men may be more willing to do so in order to study, in the run-up phase to opening up their business or during their pre-retirement years (Pini & McDonald, 2008). In times of economic crisis, which often bring increased job insecurity and heavier workloads, workers, especially those on fixed term contracts, may be more reluctant to use FWAs, as this may threaten their job stability or add problems to their overworked colleagues (Lewis and Smithson, 2001). In their breadwinning role, men are less likely to risk their job and hence are more likely to operate within the ideal worker norms of full-time work rather than opt for reduced workloads or part time work (McDonald & Jeanes, 2012).

Whilst part-time work and reduced work-loads are often seen as way of achieving some form of work-life balance, research suggests that reduced workloads, can also lead to work intensification and a lower income (Kelliher and Anderson, 2009; Lewis and Taylor, 1996). A qualitative study by Lewis & Humbert (2010) which was conducted with French scientists, revealed that women in the organisation were often ready to trade off their wages (20% wage cut) in favour of more flexibility (working a four day week). In spite of a shorter work week, to a large extent, the workers in this study had to assume the same workload. Whilst this arrangement made many of the women scientists happy, men in this organisation were not ready to consider the compressed week option. The implications of such decisions show that men may be less willing to

cut down on the number of hours they work because this affects their wages negatively. At the same time, such reasoning suggests that on the organisational side, rather than measuring output and productivity, wages are still directly linked to the number of hours worked in-situ.

The reluctance of men to work in flexible ways that reduce their income becomes clearer when one looks at the issue of part-time work. Quantitative research from the UK (CIPD study, 2012) shows that part-time work is the most commonly used FWA arrangement amongst employees whose organisations provide some form of flexible working. Yet only 9% of men use this option when compared to 49% of women who do so. Eurostat Data (2013) confirms this trend across Europe where 32% of women employed in the EU-27 work on a part-time basis, which is a much higher proportion than the corresponding share for men at 9%. Malta follows the same trend, and for every three women working part-time, there is just one man doing so (LFS, 2013). One can assume that some of those working on a part-time basis may be doing so in order to supplement their income whilst studying, rather than as a long term choice (Broughton, Biletta, & Kullander, 2010).

Another possible reason for the low uptake of part-time work by men lays in the fact that FWAs do not all carry the same consequences for workers in terms of career prospects (Rau, 2003). FWAs which result in absences from the workplace (like part-time work or reduced hours) tend to bring more negative consequences with regards to career progression. In line with Single Agenda reasoning, some link this to the belief that the “bodily presence at the office is

commensurate with organisational commitment and a necessary precursor to career progression” (Pini & Mc Donald, 2008, p.604). Various studies suggest that this underlying assumption seems prevalent not only amongst men but also amongst women who also believe that flexible work can have a negative effect on their career progression (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Pini & Mc Donald, 2008). However, it is vital to note that FWAs go beyond part-time work and whilst men may be less interested to reduce their working hours, they may be interested in other forms of flexible work (CIPD, 2012, Debono & Borg, 2011). Finding out which flexible ways of work are more likely to be used by men to integrate paid work with life is of relevance to this study. Recent indicators are showing that there are more men working from home on a regular basis (25%) when compared to women (15%) (CIPD, 2012). A similar pattern was noted in Malta (Debono & Borg, 2011) where the demand for telework from men working in the public sector at 44.1% was higher than the requests made by women (33.2%) to work from home. In spite of this trend, the same study showed that requests from women to work from home through telework were more likely to be approved than when a similar request was put forward by men, in this context (Debono & Borg, 2011).

In order to draw conclusions from this section, it is pertinent to note that whilst FWAs are often presented as a quick fix to the work-life challenge, on their own these do not seem to be sufficient to challenge the “deeply entrenched but outdated assumptions and practices” about ideal worker norms and women’s and men’s roles in the family, at work and in society (Lewis, Rapoport & Gambles, 2007, p.10). Conscious of the multifaceted and complicated

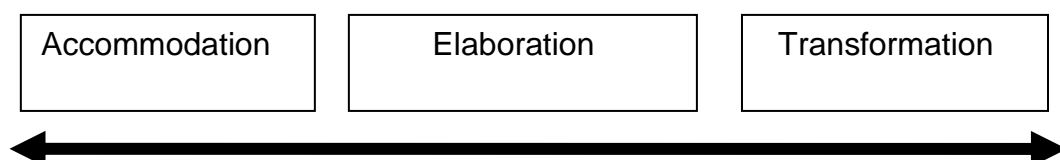


relationships between gender, work and organisations, it is pertinent to ask how organisations typically react to demands for FWAs. This study uses the CIAR approach in order to look into the possibilities of organisational change. However, Lee, Mac Dermid & Buck (2000) provide a framework based on Organisational Learning theory, through which the readiness or barriers to change in organisations can be measured and assessed. This framework is useful for this study and will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

### **2.3. Assessing the Readiness or Barriers to Change in Gendered Organisations**

Whilst acknowledging the need for well-defined procedures and stability in order to maximise efficiency, Lee et al., (2000) argue that in order to remain relevant, companies must also take risks and experiment with innovative ideas. These seemingly conflicting demands of stability and risk often bring up tensions and trade-offs that companies have to face when workers make demands for FWAs, like reduced workloads. By examining 82 cases of reduced work-load in 42 different organisations, Lee et al., (2000) were able to measure the variability in response to an opportunity for change. This allowed them to come up with a theoretical framework where they grouped the reactions for change under three broad categories of 'accommodation', 'elaboration', and 'transformation'

**Figure 2.1 Response to change stimuli - Adapted from Lee et al. (2000)**



Seen along a continuous line (See figure 2.1 above) 'accommodation' depicts limited organisational learning which occurs in companies choosing to maintain the status quo and preferring routine and procedure in order to increase efficiency and productivity. In such companies, new learning is not promoted and may actually be kept a secret for fear that it may cause logistical problems. Progress in such companies is likely to be measured through the recruitment and retention of workers (Lee et al., 2000).

At the opposite end, 'transformation' shows organisations which are most willing to explore and experiment. Companies so grouped operate in a culture which welcomes experimentation, change and learning, and the drive is towards short and long term spontaneity. These type of organisations are aware that innovation can be disruptive especially at the beginning and that non-routine behaviours can challenge the status quo. Progress in such companies is measured through organisational effectiveness and output (Lee et al., 2000).

Those companies which fall neither under the 'accommodation' nor the 'transformation' group are clustered under 'elaboration'. While representing organisations which take the middle of the road approach and allow for some innovation, such companies also try to contain change and innovation. Organisations grouped here are likely to seek a balance of 'exploration' for new processes but at the same time established clear procedures of 'exploitation'. This means that the organisation would formally and officially allow new work processes that however, over time, will become regularised. This may hamper organisations from seeking real change and further innovation, because instead

of opting for an on-going cycle of experimentation, such companies would lose opportunities to fine-tune or to customise new processes and to disseminate them to the rest of the organisation.

Whilst the Lee et al.'s (2000) framework allows researchers to assess the readiness for organisational change at a more superficial level, when it comes to challenging deeply held invisible assumptions about work and life and gender issues, many questions remain unanswered. A pertinent one to ask is how do organisation shift from the 'accommodation' to the 'transformation stage when it comes to looking at work-life issues? More specifically, how can organisations change from looking at work-life in conflict mode (Single Agenda logic) to work-life in integration mode (Dual Agenda logic)? What is the role of CIAR in all this? Have any projects been undertaken where this perception has been turned around successfully? Much can be learnt from past CIAR projects which will be discussed in detail in the next part of this chapter. Here I look at the potential of CIAR and the Dual Agenda to answer some of these questions.

#### **2.4. An In-depth Look at Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR) and the Dual Agenda**

Profitability and efficiency are the ultimate aims of many organisations. Hence, in the ruthless world of business, workers who have commitments and other interests outside paid work are often conceived to be a liability to the organisation (Rapoport et al., 2002). In the Single Agenda logic, workers quickly learn to keep work and personal life separate, and managers assume

that this is best way of doing business (Bailyn & Fletcher, 2005). In a bid to combine paid work with care, some workers (mostly mothers) make use of family friendly policies or use FWAs to cope with the demands of work and life. However, those who do so risk falling out of the favoured circle of committed workers, and this stops many (especially men) from using certain types of FWAs, because of what Bailyn (2011, p.9) calls a “self-defeating negative feedback loop.”

Researchers in the work-life area query this either/or dichotomy of work or life. They claim that it is possible to move on from this rigid mindset by challenging the gendered assumptions on which many work practices are built (Bailyn, 2011; Rapoport et al., 2002; Bailyn, Drago & Kochan, 2001). The starting point of such a change process is a logic that assumes that all employees (men and women) have a private life and personal interests, and that work and life should not be considered as being mutually exclusive. On the contrary, this logic assumes that it is possible to find creative solutions that work for the business but not at the expense of the personal needs of the employees. Rapoport et al., (2002) call this the ‘Dual Agenda’ and they suggest the use of Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR) as a way to explore the gendered values that lead to work processes in Single Agenda mode. CIAR creates the potential to open up discussion on personal and family needs which are often considered to be a taboo subject in organisations. Through the CIAR process, it becomes possible to evaluate old work practices and to envision new ones - that not only make business sense, but which could also improve the personal life of the workers (Bailyn, 2011). This is no small feat, and entails the re-design of work

and the re-evaluation of old ideal worker assumptions that may no longer be valid. In other words, CIAR projects can act as an incubator for change where collaborative Dual Agenda solutions are encouraged to take root and through which they can possibly develop.

The seminal work of a team of American academic researchers co-led by Rhona Rapoport and Lotte Bailyn at the Xerox Corporation in 1991 is often brought forward as a case study example of how responsiveness to personal needs and organisational effectiveness need not conflict with each other. Through the use of CIAR, the Xerox project, (which was funded by the Ford Foundation), led to “impressive results” with a “good Dual Agenda outcome” (Bailyn, 2011, p.10). This had a positive effect on both the employees’ lives and on the organisation and led to a reduction of 30% in absenteeism. However, the success of the project went beyond this “seemingly superficial change” and the real accomplishment was linked to the fact that this opened up the discussion about work processes and led to “more profound changes” that challenged some of the ideal worker assumptions (Bailyn, 2011 p.10). As a result of this project, flexibility was granted to everyone without the need for lengthy one-to-one negotiations with their supervisors. Furthermore, it led to a more open style of management where less policing was necessary because the control was passed on to the workers - as long as this made business sense and brought benefits to both the workers and the organisation (Bailyn, 2011).

The CIAR project at Xerox seemed to have created a “Eureka” moment when it dawned on the researchers that workers could integrate work and life without

having to choose one over the other. In terms of the extent and the significance of this finding, this has been compared to a shift in thinking around the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) which, in the 1980s challenged the taken-for-granted concept that low-cost and quality were mutually exclusive choices (Rapoport et al., 2002). Whilst the TQM concept has become a buzz-word in the business realm (for example a Google search for TQM raised 1,200,000 hits in less than one second), less evidence abounds on the CIAR and Dual Agenda approach. More than twenty years have passed since the first CIAR experiment took place at Xerox and since then, various projects have been carried out. Looking back on these CIAR projects, what evidence do we have to support the Dual Agenda claim as a solution to gendered organisations? What are the strengths and limitations of these studies and what should we look for when striving for systemic change in gendered values?

#### **2.4.1. Looking for Systemic Change**

In order to try to answer some of the questions raised above I draw on Kolb et al.'s work (1998), which outlines the different approaches adopted over the years in order to make the work-place more equitable. Initially, these efforts focused on equipping the women for the world of work through training (Frame One); removing structural barriers through family friendly policies and fairer recruiting procedures (Frame Two); or celebrating diversity and appreciating skills normally associated with women (Frame Three). However, they claim, that only by re-visioning the work culture (Frame Four) can there be a move

away from the gendered assumptions that regulate work processes. Fletcher and Bailyn (2005, p. 72) claim that redesigning work for work-life integration in line with the fourth frame approach will bring systemic changes to the “structure, culture, and practice of work that reflect the reality of people’s lives.” The fourth approach clearly suggests deeper changes at the organisational, the personal and the group level and a re-thinking about ideal worker values and the roles of women and men in the family, at work and in society. To this, Bailyn (2011, p.23) adds that the ultimate aim of CIAR projects is to move from individual entitlements and to “redesign work arrangements so that they better meet the multiple goals of effectiveness, equity, and healthy satisfying and caring environments at work, in the family and in the community.” Using Kolb et al.’s (1998) and Bailyn’s yardstick, I shall now use the next part of this chapter to analyse a number of CIAR projects from around the world. Here, my main concern is to assess whether the outcome of these projects brought systemic or cosmetic changes to the underlying ideal worker assumptions. This process will allow me to assess the strengths and limitations of this approach and to draw learning points from these past projects which can enhance my research. This will enable me to avoid replicating past mistakes and to build and extend the literature on the CIAR approach and to theorise about it. (More details on the step-by-step CIAR process used for this study are provided in the Research Methods Chapter).

## 2.4.2. CIAR Projects – Key Learning Points from Past Projects

In order to try to answer the concern raised above, I have reviewed 22 CIAR projects from across the world (USA; Australia; Chile; Greece; UK, France; Bulgaria, Bahrain, Korea, Netherlands). Nine of these projects were carried out in the USA. The CIAR projects were discussed during a workshop called “*Action-Research in the Workplace: Learning from the Past, Planning the Future*”, which was held in the USA in April, 2006 (Action Learning in the workplace, 2006). I have also sourced additional material through academic papers which were published subsequent to the CIAR conference (Kornberger, Carter & Ross–Smith, 2010; Bailyn, 2011; Charlesworth, & Baird, 2007).

The projects presented during the workshop on ‘Action-Research in the Workplace’ (2006) provide interesting insights about the CIAR approach. All studies reviewed, followed the CIAR method of surfacing and challenging gendered assumptions in organisations with the aim of increasing gender equity. Overall, these CIAR and Dual Agenda interventions highlight the complexities and the difficulties that can arise in projects which deal with gendered perceptions that are ingrained in people’s minds. Commenting on an unrealised CIAR project in South Korea, the researchers describe the Dual Agenda as a “very political process” which raises many issues and is likely to meet with a lot of resistance from those in power (Kim, Koo, Park, Park & Kang, 2006, p.4). Resistance can take various forms and can be “passive, overt, and covert” (Baird & Charlesworth 2006, p.5). Passive resistance can arise when the participants do not feel there is a real problem to solve. For example,



Lewis, Rapoport, Brennan & Smithson, (2006, p.6) note that 'not having a clear identified problem' may instil the feeling that the researchers are trying to fix something which does not appear to be problematic – at least on the surface. More overt resistance was met by Bourke and Russell (2006, p.5) who conducted a CIAR project in a Sydney Law Firm who remarked that, "even with the most comprehensive data, key stakeholders still resisted change and questioned research findings which did not comply with their world view."

Other suggestions are brought forward for this resistance. For example researchers who conducted an Action Research project in a network of mental health and family service programmes in the USA (Broznick, Silverman, Goldenhar & Mahrer Kaplan, 2006b, p.4) claim that in general, those in power "are not inclined to change their own system or change their own behaviours." They add that people in management are "consumed with their own survival" and are "besieged by competing demands" that leaves them little energy or motivation to engage in this type of protracted projects (Broznick, Silverman, Goldenhar & Mahrer Kaplan, 2006b, p.4). In organisations that are more renowned, like for example multinational firms, resistance may rise from concerns that the research will produce negative results about the company practices (Ross-Smith, Kornberger & Stilin, 2006). In their original work on CIAR projects, Rapoport et al., (2002, p.109) also encountered resistance and warn that in such projects - it is to be anticipated. This is because the Dual Agenda logic "challenges the most staunchly defended boundary in organizational life" - that which maintains the separation of the private and public life. However, rather than shying away from it, they claim that resistance

plays a constructive role in CIAR projects, and instead of dismissing concerns that arise during the process, one should 'honour' resistance by dealing and addressing the issues raised (Rapoport et al., 2002, p.109).

Engaging with senior management from the outset is essential in order to overcome some of the challenges that are likely to emerge in CIAR projects (Abarca, 2006a, 2006b; Bookman & Harrington, 2006, Lewis et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2006; Blake-Beard et al., 2006). Whilst some claim that having "one determined change agent" can make a difference (Fletcher & Holvino, 2006), others suggest that for CIAR projects to succeed "full organizational backing is essential" (Bookman & Harrington, p.6). Apart from the issue of resistance, CIAR and Dual Agenda projects raise other concerns because they are time consuming and may prove to be more challenging to implement in specific sectors. For example researchers who were involved in two projects in Greece describe the CIAR process as being fussy, experimental and longitudinal (Karassavidou & Chatziioannidou, 2006). When CIAR projects are implemented in public entities, more time may be needed because of additional bureaucracy in such organisations (Montgomery, Panagopoulou & Lemonis, 2006). Specific sectors like the health care sector may also present additional challenges, because workers providing 24/7 care normally have little time on their hands to "engage in the kind of intensive collaboration called for in CIAR projects" (Bookman & Harrington, 2006; p.6).

Since CIAR projects cannot provide quick fix solutions (Lewis et al., 2006) and do not come with an upfront guarantee on tangible outcomes (Bourke &

Russell, 2006) employers may block these projects from the outset. In order to resolve the problem of intangible outcomes, some claim that “it is crucial to set numerical goals and then develop creative strategies to achieve those goals” (Bronznick, Berg, Cohen, Goldenhar, Israel & Kelner, 2006b, p.4). However in setting specific goals, there is a risk that researchers may promise more than they can deliver (Montgomery et al., 2006). Furthermore, goal setting diverges from the iterative research approach suggested by Rapoport et.al. (2002). In action research projects like CIAR, it is generally difficult, if not impossible to anticipate the findings - although in some cases these “can stimulate change beyond the initial project plan” (Bourke & Russell, 2006, p.5). Adding to all these challenges several researchers also bring up the issue of the financial and human resources required to implement such projects and to see them through (Blake-Beard et al., Fletcher & Holvino, 2006; Bronznick et. al., 2006a, Bronznick et al., 2006b; Lewis et al., 2006).

Last but not least, CIAR and Dual Agenda projects are closely linked to gender issues. Gender equality issues can raise different reactions and these are not always positive. For example, Ross Smith et al., (2006) when carrying out a CIAR project in a professional services company in Australia, were specifically asked to drop the word gender from the project. Hence, if gender equality is not high on the company’s agenda such projects are unlikely to be supported (Bookman & Harrington, 2006). The link between gender and Dual Agenda projects is discussed in more detail in the next section. Here I will take an in depth look at ten CIAR projects on which there are more details. These originated in Chile, Australia and the USA (Action Learning in the Workplace,

2006) and will ask what was achieved through these projects. Did these projects manage to challenge and change the underlying ideal worker assumptions and bring about systemic change to gendered values? And how did these CIAR projects impact on men?

### **2.4.3. Systemic Change or Women Centric CIAR Projects?**

An immediate concern that arises on reviewing these ten CIAR projects, is that all these seem to revolve around women's needs. Some had the aim of addressing the conflicts experienced by working mothers (Abarca, 2006a; Baird & Charlesworth, 2006; Ross-Smith, 2006); whilst others tried to address the issue of lack of women in decision-making positions (Bronznick et al., 2006a, Bronznick et al., 2006b; Harrington & Hsi, 2006; Bourke & Russell, 2006; Blake-Beard et al., Fletcher & Holvino, 2006). Thus it becomes immediately clear that men did not focus much in these projects.

Projects which focused on working mothers' experience include the interventions carried out in two Chilean organisations, the *El Mercurio* newspaper and the *Santander Bank* (Abarca 2006a, 2006b). Following the CIAR process, interventions at *El Mercurio* led to the granting of flexitime arrangements following maternity leave and a free afternoon each month to mothers. Working mothers were also allowed to attend to their sick children's needs and could make use of unpaid leave in more pressing situations (Abarca, 2006a, p.1). In the other known case from Chile (the *Santander Bank*), the

interventions, in theory, looked as though they were more open to both women and men and the flexitime arrangements could be used by all employees - as long as these were approved by the supervisors (Abarca, 2006b). These were however limited to Fridays (called Super Fridays). This suggests that control was still left in the hands of supervisors and unlike the 'Xerox' experiment, workers were not trusted to make the final decisions regarding their work schedules. Furthermore, the idea that workers could only adjust their starting and finishing times on Fridays, gives a rather limited definition to flexibility. In hindsight, it is difficult to assess how such interventions could have brought systemic changes to the underlying values about work and life (Kolb et. al, 1998). Rather than challenging the gendered assumptions about women's and men's role in work and life, these interventions seem to reinforce women's caring and mothering roles.

In two Australian CIAR projects carried out by the same researchers at UtilityCo (pseudonym-public organisation) and at ManuCo (pseudonym-manufacturing company), the focus of the project was also related to "women's experience at work and to their ability to combine work and family" (Baird & Charlesworth, 2006, p4). At ManuCo, the focus was on "maternity leave policies, incorporating the before, during and after maternity leave experience." Here, the CIAR interventions included the development of a policy around quality part-time work, and how to address "cultural issues in engineering and manufacturing" (Baird & Charlesworth, 2006 p.4). Although some men were involved in the research process, most of the interactions during this study were with women in the organisation. It was noted that many male managers

resisted the findings that came out of the CIAR project, whilst employees (mostly females), welcomed the research (Baird & Charlesworth 2006). In both cases, evaluations on the impact of these CIAR projects on the workers or the organisation were not available.

A third Australian CIAR project carried out in a company operating in the Legal Services was also woman centric and interventions there led to the establishment of family-friendly policies (parental leave, flexibility guidelines childcare pilot programmes) and to coaching, mentoring and training programmes for women who were under-represented at partnership level (Bourke & Russell, 2006). Commenting on another study in one of the Big Four accounting firms in Australia which had the aim of “creating the best professional workplace for women” (Kornberger, Carter, & Ross-Smith, 2010, p.1), the researchers describe the ‘Dual Agenda’ as an “utopia” which takes a “neo-liberal” approach in order to resolve some of the contradictions that capitalism brings with it (Kornberger, et al., 2010, p.14). Here, they found that rather than bringing the desired changes, this “in practice, translated into a mechanism that actually reinforced gender barriers.” This project was still underway in 2006 (see Ross-Smith, Kornberger & Stilin, 2006) but a paper was subsequently published by Kornberger, et al., in 2010 following this CIAR project.

The four CIAR projects carried out in the USA (Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services - JBFCS; United Jewish Communities - UJC; Legal firm in Massachusetts; Teaching hospital in Boston) likewise, all focused around

women's problems in reaching leadership position, although in the JBFCS case it was later extended to workplace flexibility (Bronznick et al., 2006a; Bronznick et al., 2006b). In the UJC case, the representation of women rose and 50% of candidates were women, however, it was noted that progress on work-life integration was slow and there was still resistance to institutionalising flexible work arrangements (Bronznick et al., 2006a, p. 4 Bourke & Russell, 2006; Blake-Beard et al., Fletcher & Holvino, 2006).

Without exception, the ten projects reviewed above are more in line with Kolb et. al's (1998) first, second and third frames and there is less evidence that these brought fundamental or systemic changes in line with the fourth approach. This is because, whilst in most cases women were given help to cope with their dual roles or to progress in their career, there was little tangible evidence that ideal worker norms were challenged or changed. Considering that men generally occupy top posts in most organisations and considering their role as gate keepers or as potential facilitators of change (Connell, 2003) it is pertinent to ask where men fit in the dual agenda process.

#### **2.4.4. Where do Men Fit into the 'Dual Agenda' Equation?**

Ideal worker values are largely built around men's roles and stereotypical male values (Acker, 1990) although these may differ according to time and place and not all men will hold the same values (Khan, 2009). Being key stakeholders in many organisations (Connell, 2003) it is legitimate to ask whether men can ever

feel part of change processes if the focus of many CIAR projects revolves mostly around women's problems. Some theorists, rather pessimistically, warn that "gender and change do not go together" and that in a change process there are no simple answers but many hurdles and impediments (Benschop, Helms-Mills and Tiernari, 2012, p.2).

The lesson learnt from these CIAR projects shows that if gender equality is automatically linked to women's issues, these are likely to leave the underlying ideal worker assumptions and the Single Agenda logic intact. Consequently if FWAs are presented as a solution to stressed-out mothers, does this not imply that men who use them are departing from the blueprints of manhood and ideal worker norms? The automatic question that arises is how can men integrate paid work with their personal lives without getting punished or labelled negatively for doing so? What can make them transcend the safe but restricting ideal worker parameters in order to integrate work and life? This question is tackled in this research and is a legitimate question to ask if we are truly looking for systemic change that goes beyond the normal rhetoric of gender equality at work. Interestingly, researchers in the Xerox project were "specifically asked not to talk about gender equity" as this was seen as too provocative. Instead the focus was on "redesigning work to make it easier for employees to integrate their work with their personal lives" (Bailyn, 2011 pg. 6). All this suggests that CIAR projects where gender equity was over emphasised or was linked exclusively to women, the results were rather limiting.



A similar approach to CIAR and Dual Agenda projects which promotes work-life integration without overtly emphasising the gender focus, are interventions which are based on the Results Only Work Environment (ROWE). ROWE projects are “strategically framed as a smart business move” for fear that “gender or work-family framing would lead to the initiative’s marginalisation” (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010, p.285). This concept was developed by Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson in the United States in 2003. The idea behind ROWE is to challenge traditional concepts about the organisation of work, like the long hour culture and the “visible busyness.....as signs of commitment and productivity” (Ressler, & Thompson, 2008, p.3). Instead ROWE interventions promote the idea that workers can do “whatever they want, whenever they want, as long as the work gets done” (Ressler, & Thompson, 2008, p.3). Here the focus is on output rather than time spent at work.

There are considerable differences in the implementation time-frames and the expediency with which ROWE projects can be implemented when compared to CIAR projects, which tend to be lengthy and complicated (Ross-Smith et al., 2006; Montgomery, Panagopoulou & Lemonis, 2006). By contrast, at the team level, ROWE can be implemented “with four participatory sessions and a manager’s orientation session lasting about six hours” (Kelly, et al., 2010, p. 284). However, when probed further about the short time frames, Shelly Sorenson who is a Manager at ROWE, claimed that the length on interventions depends on the size of the company, and interventions can vary from three months for smaller companies to two years plus for larger companies (personal communication, November 12, 2012). This suggests that things are not always

clear cut and that implementing change offers many challenges even when using ROWE.

Concerning the success rate of ROWE projects, Moen, Kelly and Hill (2011) claim that regardless of the employees' gender, age, or their stage in the life course, ROWE reduces work-family conflict and time pressure. It also reduces turnover and slows down the turnover rate. In spite of this, Kelly et al., (2010) sadly note that the response to ROWE is gendered, with women, but especially mothers, embracing the ROWE flexible work options, whilst men tend to remain more hesitant to do so. Theorists argue that in order to bring about change in people's assumptions regarding gender and work-life issues, there is a need to create "new stories and metaphors" (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005, p.151). So, whilst the ROWE approach may give more instant results, the iterative nature of CIAR and Dual Agenda projects, is more likely to allow new stories and metaphors to develop. This can happen during the face-to-face interviews and the feedback sessions, where participants will not only have time to speak out, but where their underlying assumptions can be challenged and discussed in more detail. This close interaction between the researcher and participants across all levels of the hierarchy has more potential to bring about change in gendered organisations (Leinonen, 2012). Furthermore, the CIAR approach allows one to understand the complex micro-dynamic processes at play in gendered organisations and to theorise about them.

Hence, this action research project offers an excellent opportunity to look at the issue of gendered organisations in a different and rather extreme context. This

study is different because women will not be the focus of this study, and the aim is not improve gender equity for them. Here the focus is on systemic change that has the potential of challenging the Single Agenda logic and replacing it with a different logic that promotes work-life integration (Dual Agenda logic) in a very specific context (that of Malta which can be considered as an extreme case in terms of gender inequality at work).

Understanding the multiple layers of context is fundamental for recognising the various interlinking forces that are at play when discussing gender related matters and work (Lewis & Den Dulk, 2008; Kamenou, 2008). When doing action research, Coghlan and Brannick, (2010) specifically suggest that we also look at the internal context (the cultural and structural forces) as well as the external context (for example the economic, political and social forces) at play. In line with these suggestions, in the next chapter I amplify on the internal and external context of this study. Here I look at the relation between gender and work in Malta and analyse the ICT sector through the gender lens. I also take note of the economic uncertainty surrounding the world of business and explore how the current recession may affect work-life issues.

## **Chapter 3      The Context of the Study**

### **Introduction**

The ten CIAR projects reviewed in Chapter two, were held in four different continents (USA, Europe, Australia, and South America) where the context is very different to that in which this study is located. This does not exclude a number of similarities when it comes to gendered assumptions about men's and women's roles at work and in the family. To date, there are no indications that a CIAR project has been carried out in the Maltese Islands. Hence, it is essential to consider the macro and micro context of this study and to ask how the prevailing culture and social perceptions about gender roles and work may affect its outcome. Here, I deliberate on the welfare regime and existing social policies related to family and work and how these may affect work-life decisions that women and men take (Lewis & Haas 2005; Sundström, 2003; Lewis & Smithson, 2001; Esping Andersen, 1993). Hence, I use the next part of this chapter to provide some rich contextual detail about Malta, its values, its economy and its labour market. I also briefly explain Malta's welfare regime and touch upon the issue of supporting structures like childcare and the availability of family-related leaves for working parents. Whilst providing a background for this study, I also reflect on the links between the Maltese context and the Single Agenda logic that propels work and life in conflict mode.

### **3.1. Background Information on Malta, its Economy and its Welfare Regime**

Malta is a small island state with limited natural resources, covering an area of 316 sq.km of land, located south of Sicily in the Mediterranean Sea. It consists of mainland Malta - which is the key commercial and political hub; the sister island of Gozo; and a third, the barely inhabited island of Comino. Family, work, and religion are the three most cherished values of the Maltese (Calleja, 2011). In Malta, abortion is illegal, and divorce was only introduced in 2011.

Malta became a member of the European Union in 2004. Its economy is described as an 'open economy' - which is "highly sensitive to external events and sector specific shocks" (Bonello, 2010, p.1). 97% of operating firms fall in the category of micro enterprises, which means that they employ fewer than ten employees (Caruana & Borg, 2011). The country has undergone a phase of considerable economic restructuring in the last decade. This has led to the decline of the traditional manufacturing sector and a huge expansion in the services industry - especially in new value-added sectors linked to Financial Intermediation and Online Gaming, amongst others (Borg & Debono, 2008).

On many fronts, Malta is one of the few small states that have made a successful shift to modernity with quite envious standards of living and a good quality of life (Prasad, 2007). The country has a high-income economy and ranks high in the Human Development Index (HDI) issued by the United Nations. For example in 2011, Malta was placed in the 36<sup>th</sup> place out of 187 countries (Human Development Index, 2011). How is it possible for such a

minute island to thrive and succeed on many fronts? Zammit (2009) suggests that within the living memory of the older workers, “there was a lot of poverty” and this has since led many Maltese to adopt a strong tradition of work, which assumes that if work decreases, their standard of living will decrease too. On the issue of working long hours, Malta is the only European state where trade unions, employers and government all agree that the EU should not impose the ‘Working Time Directive’ and that the country should stick to the opt-out clause. This means that all social partners consent that workers (but many assume, male workers) should not be hampered in any way from continuing to work as many hours as they wish on top of their normal working hours (Borg, 2010). This value, which is a male value linked to the ideal worker norms (Rapoport et al., 2002) seems to be a national value in Malta, over which there is little discussion.

Due to its history of foreign domination and two hundred years of colonialism under British rule, Malta’s welfare regime can be best described as a patchwork of different welfare systems which render it unique (Pace, 2009). This makes it difficult to insert in the Welfare regime typology as classified for example by Esping Andersen’s (1990). The Maltese welfare system, which can be traced back to the Knights of St John (1530 to 1798), has elements of conservative regimes. These typically help retain the traditional gendered roles and contribute in part to the low female employment rates (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1993). These are in line with Southern European traits (Ferrera, 1996) which typically have a family centred culture, strong and religious traditional values and a propensity to homeownership. In contrast, there are also elements of the

social democratic regime - which include free schooling, free health care, and a universal pension system. For example, in Malta, not only is education, from kindergarten to university, provided free of charge but students pursuing post-secondary and tertiary education are even paid a stipend for attending (Briguglio & Bugeja, 2011). In spite of these generous welfare provisions, there is less thought and fewer discussions about how best to support families who need to combine care with paid work. This situation may be depriving the country from having a bigger work-force. In fact, the total employment rate currently stands at 61% and the workforce is made-up of a mere 179,476 persons (NSO, 2014), the majority of whom are males. The male employment rate at 79% exceeds the EU 27 average of 75%, whilst on the other hand, the female employment rate at 47% is much lower than the EU 27 average of 62% (Eurostat, 2014). As a result, the World Economic Forum ranked Malta in the last quartile (109<sup>th</sup> place out of 135) when compared to other countries when it comes to women's economic participation (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2012).

NSO data (2014) shows that 19% of women work part time, but only 9% of men do so as their main occupation. A substantial amount of men, however have a part time job on top of their full time (Eurostat, 2012a). This may be necessary in order to supplement their main income, given the low female employment rate. When looking at the overall unemployment rates, at 6.7%, these are on the low side (NSO, 2014) when compared to the average unemployment rates in Europe which stand at 12% (Eurostat, 2014). These mask a large cohort of inactive persons, made up of older workers, but principally women aged 35+ who are not active in the labour market (Caruana & Theuma, 2012). This

means the family income of a substantial portion of the Maltese population is still largely dependent on the male breadwinner (Caruana et al., 2011). This is likely to shape the work-life choices not only of women, but also that of men, who may be under more pressure to fulfil their breadwinning roles and to stay within ideal worker boundaries in order to make a living.

Since the female employment rate is so low in Malta (47%), conventional logic may lead some to assume that mothers would thus be free to have more children. However, a quick glance at demographic statistics shows that 56% of Maltese families have only one child (Department of Social Security, 2011) and the fertility rate at 1.4 births per woman, is amongst the lowest in the EU (Eurostat, 2011). The reasons for this situation are not straightforward, but one can speculate that when mothers leave paid work for care reasons, the family income derived from the sole male breadwinner, may be too low to increase its family members. On the other hand, when better-educated mothers continue to work, the opportunity cost to leave work may be too high, possibly due to a number of factors, which make it difficult to combine paid work with care. A similar trend is noted in other Mediterranean countries like Italy and Spain, which also have a combination of low female employment rates and low fertility rates (Kohler, Billari & Ortega, 2006). Various theorists argue that the combination of low female employment rates and low fertility rates suggest a low compatibility between women's paid work and childbearing (Bettio & Villa, 1998; Del Boca, 2002). So what gives rise to this conflict? Is it only due to ideological values that sustain traditional breadwinning and caring roles? What other factors can lead to it? In the section below, I look at both the Ideological



factors and structural factors which sustain gendered roles in Malta and ask how these tie in with the issue of ideal worker values.

### **3.1.1. Looking at the Ideological Factors Relating to Gender, Paid Work and Care - Links to Ideal Worker Norms**

A survey on the Maltese family, carried out in 2007 by the largest circulating Sunday newspaper, shows that 62% of respondents believe that if wives go out to work, this could result in more problems for the family. Only 38% disagree with this statement. More women (63%) than men (61%) believe that married women's employment threatens family stability (Maltese Family Survey Conclusions, 2007). A more recent Special Eurobarometer Survey carried out on the occasion of International Women's Day (2010), confirms that the majority of Maltese still believe that a woman's main job is to stay at home and raise the family. Even in so called 'abnormal circumstances' where the mother earns more than the father, the majority (60%) still disagree with the suggestion that the father stays at home and the mother goes out to work. Furthermore, 60% of respondents believe that it is normal for men to participate less than women in household tasks (Eurobarometer Survey, 2010). In such a context, the prevailing values and assumptions around women's and men's roles in the family and at work seem even more extreme and in line with Acker's (1990) idea of an unencumbered male worker who relies on a female care giver for unpaid care related work.

A recent study with economically inactive women (NCPE, 2012) shows that, the majority of women in this survey (73%) believe that ideally, a woman with caring responsibilities should work on flexi-time/part-time/reduced hours or through teleworking. A higher percentage (81%) of economically inactive women said that they want to work from home if possible (NCPE, 2012). Such preferences may be linked to the concept of intensive mothering (Lewis & Humbert, 2010; Herman & Lewis, 2012; Hays, 1996), where it is assumed that the mother must put the children before her work and her personal needs in order to provide ideal child rearing. Considering the high percentage (60.5%) of Maltese women who are inactive in the labour market (LFS, 2014) and the large number of women who want to work part time or work from home (NCPE, 2012) what impact do these choices have on men? Such choices suggest that the majority of Maltese women happily accept what Webber and Williams (2008) call a 'motherhood penalty' for choosing to combine care with paid work, whilst men, in line with ideal worker norms, tend to continue to work full time, as is expected of them.

This shows that cultural ideologies about parenting roles intersect with other more practical aspects relating to childcare and family leave. This brings in the issue of supporting structures for families who need to combine paid work with care and raises many questions when analysing the issue of gendered organisations. In a context where supporting structures like childcare and after school services are few and far between, what options do mothers and fathers have? And if the options for women are limited, does this not also restrict men from moving away from ideal worker notions?

### **3.1.2. Analysing Structural Problems that can Perpetuate Gendered Divisions in the Labour Market**

When looking at the work patterns of women in the Maltese labour market between 2000 and 2009, nearly half (49%) of Maltese mothers, unlike fathers, were drifting in-and-out of the labour market around the needs of their family. During this period, a large majority of Maltese mothers (79.7%) actually gave up work before giving birth (Caruana et al., 2011). Mothers working in specific sectors of the economy such as the manufacturing, hospitality and the retail sector seemed to face more problems in reconciling work with care because of the working hours amongst other things (Caruana et al., 2011).

As argued above, several factors can lead to work-life conflicts experienced by mothers in the southern Mediterranean rim (Kohler & Billari, 2006; Bettio & Villa, 1999; Del Boca, 2002). Malta has a number of shortcomings that make it very difficult for both parents to be engaged in full-time work when their children are young. For example when it comes to school opening hours, Malta has one of the shortest school days in the EU (Chetcuti, 2011), and some church schools finish as early as 1.00 pm. Schools are also closed for very long periods during the summer holidays (three months) and this causes many problems for working parents (Borg & Debono, 2009). The provision of before-and-after school services is limited as is the provision of childcare provided by the state for the under-threes. For example a European Commission Report (2008) shows that Malta has a much lower proportion (8%) of children up to three years of age cared-for by formal arrangements, when compared to the EU-average (26%). Furthermore, Malta's expenditure on family benefits in kind

(that is, all non-monetary benefits, such as childcare benefits) as a percentage of GDP at 0.15% is still negligible when compared to the EU-27 average of 0.71% (Eurostat, 2011c). On a more positive note, it must be noted that as from April 2014, free childcare is being provided to children under three whose mother is in employment or education.

For a country which attaches such strong values to the family (Abela, 2011), one would expect that family related leaves would be generous. Yet, when compared to other EU states, Malta has one of the shortest family leaves. For example, up until 2011, Maltese mothers, were only allowed 14 weeks of maternity leave. Government only conceded that maternity leave be increased to 16 weeks in 2012, and up to 18 weeks in 2013 (Laiviera, 2010, par.3). It is interesting to note that maternity leave in Malta is paid by the employer in the first 14 weeks and employers are not refunded for this leave (European Women's Lobby, 2010). This means that employers do not only have to do without the employee for 14 weeks, but if they employ someone else to do the job, they would also have to pay double to get the job done. This extra burden on employers may act as a deterrent when choosing between female and male job applicants and in the eyes of employers, women, may be placed even further away from ideal worker norms, because of cost and practical factors.

Parental leave in the private sector amounts to four months, but extends to twelve months in the public sector (Family Friendly Report, 2010). However, all parental leave is unpaid in Malta (European Alliance for Families, 2012) and the uptake is highly gendered. In fact, a report on the uptake of family friendly

measures in the public service shows that this is rarely ever taken by the father (Family Friendly Report, 2010). For example in 2009 there were 461 women (99%) who had taken this leave and only 9 men (1%) who had done so across all the public sector. A similar report carried out in 2003 by the Department for Women in Society had showed a similar trend. This signifies a slow change in men's attitude to parental leave. This skewed uptake suggests that Maltese fathers largely conform to ideal worker norms of uninterrupted career patterns.

So whilst we cannot negate that women and men are still affected by ideological values on gender roles, structural barriers too may be contributing to the gendered choices Maltese couples make. A large proportion of Maltese mothers, especially those with a lower level of education working in specific sectors, seem obliged to choose between paid work and family, but few seem able to do both (Caruana et al., 2011). In such a context, till now, Maltese men seem to have few options or incentives to distance themselves from ideal worker norms. However, as gender values evolve and change, in a few years' time the work-family scenario may be very different from what it is now.

### **3.1.3. Gendered Values in Transition?**

In spite of the traditional values and restricted choices discussed above, there are important signs about shifts in values about gender and work which should not be overlooked. For example, a study by Caruana, Borg & Debono (2011) shows, that whilst in 1996, 51.3% of mothers had never engaged in paid work,

this figure had decreased to 20.4% by 2009. The percentage of career mothers, who remain in employment after having children in a span of 13 years, has nearly tripled from 11.8% in 1996 to 30.6% in 2009. Furthermore, the share of Maltese 21-year-old females enrolled in tertiary education has increased substantially from 22% (of all 21-year old females) in 2000 to 32% in 2009 (Eurostat, 2011a). In the last years, there have consistently been more female than male graduates, and in 2012, 59% of graduates were females (University of Malta, 2012).

More positive signs are emerging from the public sector, where more women working there are able to hold on to their career whilst having a family (Caruana et al., 2011). Here it is important to note that the conditions of work in the public service are much more generous than in the private sector when it comes to work-life measures. For example, workers in the public service can enjoy a twelve-month career break, a one-off five year career break, an option to work on a reduced time table until the child reaches 16 years of age and the possibility to work from home through telework (Family friendly measures in the public service, 2012). Research shows that because of better work-life policies in the Maltese public service, mothers working in the sector, and mothers working as professionals, are able to keep their jobs in bigger numbers and have more children overall (Caruana, et al., 2011). As noted in other countries (Lyonette, Kaufman & Crompton, 2011) this suggests, those as more Maltese women further their education and remain active in the labour market, the demands on men to collaborate with their partners vis-à-vis unpaid work is likely to increase.

When looking at the cohorts of younger workers (under 39 years) things are changing at a much faster pace. In fact the share of Maltese women aged 25-29 who are in employment is 8% higher than the EU average, and in the next cohort of women aged 30 to 39, the employment rate goes up to 68% (which is just 3% below EU average) (Eurostat, 2013; Caruana & Theuma, 2012). All this suggests that in a few years' time, the sole male breadwinner model may be gradually replaced by a dual earner model.

Considering the gendered labour market, the low female employment rate, the lack of supporting structures (childcare, after school care, short school opening hours) and a culture that values long hours – how much does all this impinge on the values of managers and workers in organisations? Are ideal worker values more extreme in Malta because of the strong gendered values? Does this make it more difficult to contemplate Dual Agenda change in such a context? Some of these questions will be explored in this research. However, in order to get a more complete picture of the dynamics of work and gender it is also pertinent to look at the sectoral layer of context. Therefore, in the next section I will take a closer look at the ICT sector in order to assess how the complex dynamics of gender are played out in this specific sector.

### **3.2. A Focused Look at the ICT Sector**

ICT is changing the world and its economy in ways which steam power and electricity did in the previous eras (The Linked World, 2011). The sector which is constantly evolving, is relatively young, but has gained a lot of importance in the last two decades. However, it was only in 1998 that OECD member states agreed to define it as a mixture of services and manufacturing industries that “capture, transmit and display data and information electronically.” The ICT sector is very broad and workers should be immediately split into two categories: those working in the manufacturing side of the sector (production of computing/accounting machinery, electronic components, transmitter apparatus, navigating equipment, etc); and those who operate in the services side of the field (OECD, 2002). The conditions of work in the manufacturing and the services side of the business tend to be different. The services side of the industry can be further split into another two categories. The first involves the sales side of the business (sales of computers, peripheral equipment, software, electronic and telecommunications parts and equipment). The second is related to the servicing side provided by knowledge workers. These are the jobs which are closely related to this study and include workers involved in: Hardware Consultancy (Nace:72.1), Software Consultancy (Nace:72.2); Data Processing (Nace:72.3) and Database activities (Nace:72.4). What are the working conditions of knowledge workers involved in this sector? And which values guide work practices in the ICT world?



### **3.2.1. Work Practices in the ICT Sector**

The ICT sector is often linked to innovation and change, and at least in theory, the services side of the business can offer many possibilities to knowledge-based workers to deviate from the standard 9-to-5 job at the office. Work at the high end of ICT is “regularly seen as the flagship of the new economy and is emblematic for the new working life, as it shows the new employment conditions like flexible work and self–management” (Kelan, 2005 p.15). Whilst this may seem obvious, it does not always happen. In reality, research shows that the sector is often linked to full-time work with long working hours (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2004). Furthermore, apart from their regular work, employees in the ICT sector are often also expected to update their knowledge and skills on a regular basis in order to keep abreast of changes happening in their field (Kelan, 2009; Webster, 2004).

Young, male ICT professionals predominate in this industry across Europe (Eurostat, 2012a; Valenduc & Vendramin, 2004). Largely free from domestic and family commitments and responsibilities, they often willingly work long hours and carry their work into their leisure time. In these organisations, readiness to work long hours and showing the ability to work under pressure indicates a sense of commitment to the job (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2004). Furthermore, where senior managers themselves work very long hours, they send “implicit messages through their organisations that this kind of work is necessary for career advancement” (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2004, p.3).

Work in the ICT sector is generally project-based and often involves tight deadlines and at times, especially towards the end of the project, it can also entail evening and sometimes weekend work (Griffiths & Moore, 2010; Gill, 2002; Henwood, 1993). However, the long hours culture tends to be linked to specific jobs rather than to all roles within the sector. For example consultants who work directly with clients, tend to face more pressure to work long hours. On the other hand, programmers and research and development staff are less prone to do so (Whitehouse & Preston, 2005). Hence, it is important to distinguish what roles knowledge-based workers occupy, rather than see them as a homogenous group with the same working conditions.

Work in the ICT sector often conjures up images of a solitary, male computer geek writing computer codes or hacking computers (Hapnes, 1996). Research based on case studies across the EU, have shown that the image of the ICT sector and its stereotypes is not always correct (Women and ICT Status Report, 2009). For example, contrary to the idea of working in solitude, ICT workers often work in teams. This must be kept in mind when discussing ideal worker values in that individual work-life related decisions are likely to affect the group and the outcome of the project. Through her research with elite ICT workers in Switzerland, Kelan (2005) found that the image of the ICT worker is changing and apart from core technical skills, knowledge based workers, are also expected to have social and emotional skills which are normally more linked to women. The issue of gender and ICT demands further attention and is discussed in more detail in the next part of this chapter.

### **3.2.2. The Gender Link to ICT**

Theorists tend to agree that the concept of technology is not gender neutral and that the ICT industry is traditionally associated with masculinity (Truss et al., 2012; Whitehouse, 2006; Gill & Grint, 1995). It is ironic to note that the earliest computer programmers were women, possibly because programming work was linked to their roles as clerks (Perry & Gerber, 1990). However, with time and when computer programming rose in importance, things changed and men took over this field (Kelan, 2009). A quick look at education statistics confirms this. For example, in Malta, in 2011 there were twice as many male ICT graduates (n.84) as there were females (n.37) (University of Malta, 2011). When it comes to persons employed in ICT related activities in Malta, the gap between women and men is even bigger with 84% of knowledge workers being males and 16% females (National Statistics Office, LFS, 2012).

Many researchers have been noticing that in some countries, women's presence in specific areas of computing work has been diminishing (Misa, 2010; Kirkup, Zalevski, & Maruyama & Batool, 2010; Griffiths & Moore, 2010) and that women tend to leave the ICT sector in bigger numbers than men (Panteli, Stack, Atkinson & Ramsay, 1999). There are several reasons why girls shy away from the ICT world. These may be linked to cultural barriers and to sector specific problems that can block the access and promotion of women in the ICT field (Simard, Henderson, Gilmartin, Schiebinger & Whitney, 2008; Webster, 2005; Margolis & Fisher, 2002; Woodfield, 2002; Wajcman, 1991). Women may also keep away from the ICT sector because of the working conditions where

the long hour's culture, tight deadlines and the need for constant updates, are deemed to be in conflict with combining work and family (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2004). However researchers in Australia found out, that whilst computer professionals were "under considerable pressure to maintain ideal worker profiles", some women across different ages managed to remain in the sector and retain "average parenthood rates" (Whitehouse & Preston, 2005, p.278). These women managed to do so by selecting certain roles within the profession and by avoiding others, which could possibly conflict with the demands of parenting (Whitehouse & Preston, 2005). Does this mean that the conflicting roles are left to men (and some unencumbered women) in the organisation, thus leaving gendered ideal worker values intact?

ICT workers do not operate in a vacuum, and the decisions they take are influenced by the national and organisational cultural they operate in. In addition, the current economic crisis adds another dimension to the context of this study. Heeding to Coghlan and Brannick's (2010) call to consider the economic forces at play when conducting case studies, it becomes essential to ask how the economic recession is affecting the organisation of work and life.

### **3.3. Employment in Recession and the Work-life Interface**

The 2008-2009 global economic downturn has been labelled the 'Great Recession' (Eurofound, 2011c). This has had a powerful impact on jobs and on the labour market and it is considered to be the "deepest and most widespread

recession since the end of the Second World War in 1945.” In many EU states unemployment rates were up and nearly 25 million people were unemployed by April 2012 (Eurostat, 2012b). During the recession, part-time work increased and from 2009 onwards most of the jobs created were of a temporary nature and tended to be in lower paying jobs (Eurofound, 2011c). In the case of men, the majority of those working part-time did so due to a lack of full time jobs (Broughton, 2011).

As expected, during the economic crisis, in many EU states attention has focused on how to avoid job losses rather than on the quality of work. For example in 2011, workers in Malta’s largest private employer organisation which operates in the manufacturing side of the ICT Sector accepted a pay cut in order to safeguard their jobs. This was done with the blessing of their union (Caruana & Borg, 2011). As clients’ budgets decline, some researchers are assuming that cost-cutting will be used by employers in the ICT sector in Malta as a way to win larger contracts (Malta Employers Association, 2009). Could this mean more pressure on workers to do more with less? And what are the implications for work-life integration when workers have to cope with these additional work related demands?

In spite of the recession, across the EU, on paper there are indications that the number of hours worked per week have on average continued to decrease and stabilise when compared with the previous two decades. However, in practice this may not be happening everywhere (Eurofound, 2011). For example whilst in the EU 27, the average collectively agreed normal annual working time in

2010, was of 38 hours, that of the new members states like Malta, was higher at 39.7 hours (Eurofound, 2011b). There could also be marked discrepancies between declared and the actual hours worked. For example in the UK, workers managed to clock in 2 billion hours of unpaid overtime last year. These amount to the equivalent of one million extra full-time jobs (Coote, Franklin & Simms, 2010). One of the reason for this discrepancy could be due to the economic crisis which adds on more pressure on the workers who in order to protect their jobs, tend to work harder and may feel obliged to do more with less (Lewis, Brannen & Nilsen, 2009; Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2010b). The intensification of work adds force to assumptions about ideal worker values (Van Echtelt, Glebbeek, & Lindenberg, 2006).

The recession is about the survival of the fittest and organisations are likely to become more mean and lean in difficult times. In such a scenario, demands for better working conditions are likely to be viewed as being in conflict with the needs of the business. Such assumptions are likely to intensity and worsen work-life related conflicts, and reinforce the Single Agenda logic. Research from across the globe suggests that because employees are feeling the pressure, large numbers are hoping for a better work-life balance in the future and some may even contemplate going into self-employment in order to do so (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2010b). This claim is confirmed by American research on the retention of workers, which shows that earnings and benefits have a 2% impact on job satisfaction. On the other hand, job quality and support at the workplace (which includes work-life integration) have a combined 70% impact (Family and Work Institute, 2011). Closer to home, Maltese

workers in the ICT sector have consistently chosen flexible working hours, over a good financial bonus, as the most popular incentive in the last years (Castille Resources, 2008, Hughes, 2010). However, indicating a preference for flexible working hours does not automatically imply that workers will be able to integrate work and life. In between the wish to do so and actually being in a position to do so, cultural, sectoral and economic factors interplay with complex issues related to gender and work.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined various elements that built up the context of this study. I opened this chapter by showing that the Maltese labour market is still largely organised around traditional gender roles, where men work full-time and the majority of women drift in-and-out of the labour market around the birth of their children in a bid to combine family and paid work. Here I used various studies to show how the gendered labour market is being sustained by a number of ideological values that do not seem to challenge ideal worker myths. I also pointed to a number of structural deficits (limited childcare, short school opening hours, long school holidays) which make it very difficult for working parents (but especially to mothers) to combine family with work. All these factors seem to sustain traditional gendered roles and gendered choices.

After looking at the factors which interplay with gender and work at the macro layer of context, I focused on the ICT sector with its fast paced work and

frequent deadlines. Here I showed that this sector is not gender neutral and that men unencumbered by family responsibilities, often willingly work long hours for career advancement. I argued that the small cohort of women who manage to remain in the ICT industry, normally do so by selecting certain roles and by avoiding others which conflict with their parenting roles. I ended this section by focusing on the economic crisis which is leading to work intensification. This may exacerbate assumptions about work-life conflict and reinforce the Single Agenda logic of work and life in conflict mode.

Throughout this review, I raised a number of questions to which we have no clear replies till now. These will be addressed through this research which aims to look at how gendered workplace assumptions around ideal worker values are manifested and reinforced in the Maltese and ICT Context. Furthermore, I will explore the potential for Action Research to challenge the gendered order of work in the case study organisation. These aims will be fulfilled by asking the following questions:

1. How is the ideal worker defined in a specific male dominated company which operates in a traditional national gendered context?
2. How are ideal worker assumptions manifested and reinforced in practice?
3. How can men integrate paid work with their personal lives without being punished or labelled negatively for doing so?



4. What is the potential for Dual Agenda change at Tech Co.?
5. What are the barriers to change at the organisational level and at the individual level?
6. How can the findings inform theory and practice?

I will discuss these questions in more detail in the next chapter on the Methods and Methodology.

## **Chapter 4      Methodology and Method**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is divided into three main parts. I open this chapter by summarising the main aims of this study and by discussing the research questions in more detail. I then justify the research approach adopted and reflect on the epistemological and ontological considerations surrounding this study. Here I include some personal reflexivity and discuss quality and authenticity in research. The second part of the chapter introduces the Case Study approach and Participatory Action Research, with a special focus on the CIAR process. In the third part of the chapter I give a detailed account of the methods adopted to answers the research questions. I conclude this chapter by discussing the potential limitations and strengths of the method and the methodology adopted and examine the ethical issues surrounding the study.

### **4.1. Looking at Gender and Work in a Male Dominated and a Gendered Context Organisation – Research Aim and Key Research Questions**

The issue of gendered organisations (Acker, 1990 , Kanter 1977) is often discussed in terms of the advantages this brings to men, and the disadvantages it brings to women. Yet, as argued in the Literature Review many projects which had the aim of challenging the notion of gendered organisation were women centric and did not give sufficient attention to men's role in this process.

This research strives to fill parts of this lacuna by giving due attention to men's role in gendered organisations. This will be done by examining how gendered assumptions around the ideal worker are manifested and reinforced in a male-dominated organisation and in a gendered national context. It also explores the potential for Action Research to challenge the gendered order of work in this organisation. The following are the research questions in more detail:

**First Research Question – How is the ideal worker defined in a specific male dominated company which operates in a traditional national gendered context?**

This research assumes that organisations are not gender neutral (Acker, 1990). Hence, the first question will allow us to understand how the ideal worker is conceptualised at the case study organisation (*Tech Co.*). This will permit the examination of underlying implicit assumptions and values surrounding this notion in a male dominated sector (ICT) and in a country (Malta) with strong gendered values.

**Second Research Question - How are ideal worker assumptions manifested and reinforced in practice?**

The second question focuses on work practices. Work practices bridge the world of assumptions with the day-to-day realities playing out at the work place. Hence, the second question will contribute to better understanding how values around the ideal worker shape work practices in this context.

**Third Research Question: How can men integrate paid work with their personal lives without being punished or labelled negatively for doing so?**

This question delves into the issue of men, masculinity, and potential change that enables male workers to integrate work and life without negative consequences. This is an important question which strives to look at how we can modify our current understanding of work-life in conflict mode, based on male ideal worker values

**Fourth Research Question - What is the potential for Dual Agenda change at Tech Co.?**

This question focuses on potential for change and has the aim of exploring the processes for challenging assumptions and values around the ideal worker.

**Fifth Research Question: What are the barriers to change at the organisational level and at the individual level?**

This question looks at the potential barriers to change both at the individual and organisational level (The implementation part of the CIAR process is beyond the scope of this research).

**Sixth Research Question: How can the findings inform theory and practice?**

This question has the aim of examining the implications of the findings from this study on theory and practice around work-life issues and related theories.

Having established the research questions, in the next section I look into the inquiry paradigm and philosophical commitments surrounding this research.

## **4.2. Inquiry Paradigm and Philosophical Commitments – The Pragmatic Approach**

Before discussing the inquiry paradigm surrounding this research, it is important ask how and to what extent our philosophical predispositions regarding reality and truth affect the methodological choices we make in research. It is also essential to ask whether our philosophical principles are constant and whether it is sufficient to discuss them at the more abstract level of philosophy.

There are various debates on how our beliefs and our world views shape the research choices we make. Theorists do not agree between them on this and for example, Lincoln and Guba (2000) argue that our world views (paradigm) about reality and truth influence every step of the research inquiry. Yet others like Patton (1982, p. 190) see the possibility of making “mind shifts back and forth between paradigms.” Morgan (2007, p.52) makes an important contribution to the discussion on how to address the issue of paradigms. He claims that we “should not think of paradigms as worldviews that include virtually *everything* someone thinks or believes” without specifying “the elements that are contained in that worldview”. Hence, whilst acknowledging the valuable contributions of existing paradigms about truth and reality, Morgan (2007, p. 69) suggests that the “metaphysical paradigm approach” should be substituted by a more pragmatic one that attempts “to gain knowledge in the

pursuit of desired ends.” Whilst the pragmatic approach often centres around discussions on mixed methods and whether the different paradigms are incommensurable (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005), it also permits us to approach our research with a more open mind. Hence rather than overemphasizing or pre-selecting one particular paradigm in all situations, pragmatism allows us adopt the paradigm best suited for the particular research. Hence taking a pragmatic approach, in the section below I elaborate on the philosophical and practical choices made in order to fulfil the aims of this research before going on to discuss ontological and epistemological issues at a later stage.

#### **4.2.1. Finding a Suitable Methodology to Fulfil the Research Aims and to Answer the Key Questions**

The research questions introduced above can be divided into distinct categories. The first three questions have an exploratory nature and focus on the ideal worker, whilst questions four and five have a more action-oriented slant related to the CIAR and Dual Agenda approach. Question six is a theory related question which asks how the findings of this study can inform theory and practice. In order to analyse which is the best methodology to fulfil these research questions, I will start with the first three questions which focus on the conceptualisation of the ideal worker in this context. Here, the search is for invisible assumptions and values and ways in which these are manifested and reinforced in practice in the organisation. Schein (2009) describes the process of unearthing values in organisations as a ‘cultural analysis’.

Culture theories, especially those that look at cross-national values, are normally derived out of quantitative research (Bamberger, 2008; Hofstede, 2001, 1983, 1980). However, an in-depth qualitative approach can enrich our understandings of the processes whereby assumptions inform practices in particular contexts. In specific work-life research projects similar to this research, Rapoport et al., (2002) suggest that data is best captured through qualitative, one-to-one interviews with workers at the different levels of the hierarchy and through group discussions and work observation. In fact, at the beginning of the CIAR projects, Bailyn, Bookman, Harrington and Kochan (2005) assert that quantitative data is of limited value in diagnosing the underlying problems. Since the first set of questions open up the CIAR inquiry, it becomes clear that these are best tackled through a qualitative approach that focuses on depth and context rather than quantity and comparability.

The second group of questions relate to the Dual Agenda and these are directly linked to the action-oriented part of the research. In her meta-analysis on the best method to adopt when looking at work-life issues in organisations, Scheibl (1999) asserts that the action research approach provides an excellent avenue to follow because it allows a more inter-disciplinary understanding of the complex issues at stake and a better appreciation of the micro-dynamics at play in the particular context. This can happen because action research is not a linear process of data gathering and analysis, but is an iterative and cyclical research process that entails reflection and moving back and forth between steps during the different stages of the research process (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Riel & Lepori, 2011). All this helps refine the research process.

Generally, qualitative interviewing is often associated with feminist research in that it gives a voice to vulnerable women (Bryman, 2008; Heyl, 2002; Maynard, 1994). In this case study, the majority of my informants are not disadvantaged women, but graduate male ICT professionals who operate in one of the top paying sectors of the Maltese economy (LFS, 2013). Understanding the potential and barriers to Dual Agenda change is likely to be enhanced if I make face-to-face contact with my participants during the action research process. This will allow me to challenge some of their taken-for-granted values regarding work and life and ideal worker assumptions which may be leading them to adopt the Single Agenda logic. The probing and challenging process within interviews can in itself act as a catalyst for change (Bailyn, 2010; Rapoport et al., 2002). This would not be possible through typical quantitative questioning, because in this method, the questions would generally be sequential and close ended and would hardly afford any spontaneity to the participants and the researcher (Bryman, 2008). Hence, the type of probing also points towards the importance of a qualitative research approach that allows in situ, in-depth, and flexible interviewing and subsequent discussions with the participants across the hierarchy. Giving workers a voice through qualitative interviewing is useful for this research in that they may have the opportunity to assess their work-life needs and to explore alternative scenarios where work and life take an integrative, rather than a conflicting approach.

In summing up, it becomes clear that the questions for this research are best answered through an action research study which adopts a qualitative stand. In



the next part I discuss the ontological and epistemological considerations surrounding this choice.

#### **4.2.2. Ontological Considerations**

Discussions on ontological considerations normally revolve around issues related to the objectivity and subjectivity of research. These stem from fundamental philosophical questions about whether “the social world is regarded as something external to social actors or as something that people are in the process of fashioning” (Bryman, 2008, p. 4). Positivists tend to object to the interpretative and constructionist stance taken by qualitative researchers on grounds that such research is not objective. As a result, positivists believe that the researcher should be value free so as not to influence or contaminate the subject under study (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The idea of value free research is rejected by Parker (1994, p.13) who argues that “research is always carried out from a particular standpoint, and the pretence of neutrality in many quantitative studies...is disingenuous.” On a similar note, Guba and Lincoln, (1998, p. 110) add that Critical theorists, reject the idea of the ‘disinterested scientist’ whose main mission is to arrive at the ‘truth’ and to established facts or laws (positivism) and they also deny the idea of non-falsified hypotheses (post positivism). When considering that this research is about people in organisations, I tend to agree with Parker (1994) and with Cassell and Symon (1994) who argue that this type of research can never be objective and value free.

In the constructionist paradigm, interpretations depend on the “social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender factors that differentiate the interpreters” (Guba and Lincoln, 1998, p. 113). This gives indications on the many internal and external factors that may possibly influence the findings. The researcher’s role in this paradigm is that of an active participant engaged in capturing and “facilitating the multi-voice reconstructions of his or her own constructions, as well as those of all other participants. Whilst acknowledging that as qualitative researcher it is impossible to remain ‘outside of one’s subject matter while conducting research,’ in order to analyse my work scientifically, I will use reflexivity to become more aware of my involvement in it (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p.228).

#### **4.2.3. Epistemological Considerations**

When discussing epistemological issues, we are essentially asking knowledge-related questions about what can be considered as “acceptable knowledge” (Bryman, 2008, p.13). Reflecting on the “theory of knowledge”, should thus help us to distinguish between what can be considered as “justified belief and opinion” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2012). It also entails looking at the limits and validity of research (Merriam-Webster, 2012). When adopting a qualitative stance, a number of questions immediately arise regarding the ‘acceptable knowledge’ this generates. To some extent, this depends on what the researcher is trying to find. Fundamentally, as a qualitative researcher, I am

trying to “discover the meaning that people award to their social worlds and to understand the meaning of their social behaviour” (Boeije, 2010, p.2). This means that, I am not interested in capturing numbers or trends or to answer “how often” and “how many” type of questions (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Instead, I am seeking the participants’ accounts, their thoughts and what shapes their values (Bryman, 2008) regarding work and their personal life. I am also interested in seeing the context in which my participants operate and to see things through their eyes in order to be in a better position to interpret it. Overall as a qualitative researcher, I am particularly interested in observing how the gendered processes are played out in the case study organisation (Cassell & Symon, 1994).

It is interesting to note that organisational and management studies, normally adopt positivistic paradigms (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Johnson & Duberley, 2000) and when qualitative methods are used, they may meet with scepticism due to their small sample sizes which do not lend themselves to generalisation of findings (Baird et al., 2006; Charlesworth & Baird, 2007). Whilst generalisations are valued by those who take a positivist approach, it is important to note that generalisation can obscure variation whilst qualitative research can lead to the development of theory that can be extended to other cases (Halkier, 2011; Becker, 1991). Furthermore, whilst generalisations through quantitative research can be considered as being statistically meaningful, quantification alone does not provide complete information on the participants and it often lacks rich contextual information which is necessary to answer the rather complex questions related to this study. Guba and Lincoln

(1998) call this 'context stripping'. They argue that unlike physical objects, human beings cannot be understood unless one also understands the meanings and the reasons behind their decision in a given context. In qualitative research, the detailed process and thick descriptions compensate in different ways by allowing the readers to understand the context in which the research is immersed and the meanings and purpose behind some of the actions adopted by the participants (Ponterotto, 2006; Lincoln, 1995; Patton, 1990).

For this research, I will adopt elements of the Critical Theory approach which evolved through the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School (Bohman, 2010). The epistemology of Critical Theory blends with some of the elements of Constructionism in that the findings are considered to be "transactional and subjectivist" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 109). Burr (2003, p.45) invites us to reflect on the utility of a Constructionist approach in that "a lot of things we take for granted and which we assume to be fixed and immutable, whether in ourselves or in the phenomena we experience, can upon inspection be found to be socially derived and socially maintained." In such an approach, where persons and situations are in a state of flux, there can be different and valid interpretations of reality and hence there is no one 'truth' since reality is "ultimately unknowable" (Lather, 2006) and we can only try to understand actors' perspectives. Whilst Social Constructionism is normally criticized on grounds that this paradigm may appear shaky in terms of its reliability, Stam (2001, p.295) claims that the constructionist approach "is no less scientific for all its cultural content" and "reflexive impact".

What distinguishes a “critical” approach from other research paradigms is that the critical approach seeks human emancipation and to “liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer, 1982, 244). Whilst this may sound exaggerated when applied to the context of work and organisations, it is important to note that workers, unknowingly, often get caught in work practices and routines based on gendered assumptions (Acker, 1990; Rapoport et al., 2002; Bailyn, 2006). These values and assumptions ultimately affect how they work, where they work from and, for how long they have to work for most of their adult life (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010).

Now, taking heed of the various suggestions for reflexivity (Willig, 2008; Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999), I will amplify on this in the next section.

#### **4.2.4. Personal Reflexivity and Epistemological Reflexivity**

When doing reflexivity, Willig (2008) suggests that we consider both the personal and the epistemological factors that may have affected the research. This dual reflexivity allows us to reflect on the assumptions we made about knowledge in the course of our research and to assess the implications that such positions may have had on our findings.

Tackling the personal side of reflexivity entails looking at how our own “values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research” (Willig, 2008, p.10). When it comes to personal reflexivity, I felt it natural to ask how and to what extent my feminist values have influenced my choice of subject and the research process in its entirety.

At present, I lecture at the University of Malta on issues related to gender equality and act as the coordinator of a Gender and Development diploma course, amongst other things. I have also been active in women’s non-governmental organisations promoting women’s rights for a very long time. Hence in many ways I am immersed in the topic of gender and may be more sensitive to issues related to inequalities between women and men. But this does not mean that I am desperately seeking differences (of the essentialist kind), or striving to paint women as being better than men. However, it may be interesting to note, that whilst I have approached this research from the standpoint of a feminist researcher, when I introduced myself to my informants, I did not present myself as such. Instead, I opted to present myself as a researcher who is doing research on work-life issues. I feared that positioning myself as a feminist researcher could create a barrier between me and my informants, especially with the male respondents - since being a feminist is often equated with being anti-men. By focus on work-life issues I assumed that I would be in a ‘safer’ territory to carry out my research.

Stacey (1998, p.26) calls for feminist researchers to be “rigorously self-aware” in order to assess how gender is interwoven along the study. When reflecting on the dynamics between the researcher and the informants, it becomes essential to ask how and in what ways being a female interviewer could have affected the research, especially when considering the fact that most of my informants were males. Some argue that when the informant and the researcher are of the same sex, they are in a better position to understand each other because they share the same lived experience, which is highly gendered (De Vault, 1986). So where does this leave me? How does being a female (and not a male) researcher affect the research?

The topic of women interviewing men, or men interviewing women has not received much attention, and text books about qualitative research generally ignore this important issue (Williams & Heikes, 1993). Yet there is some evidence which suggests that the dynamics are different when the researcher and the informant are of a different sex. When doing research with male informants in the nursing industry, Williams and Heikes (1993) noted that their male informants typically tried to adjust their answers so that they will look good in the eyes of the researchers, a phenomenon known as *social desirability bias*. They did so by avoiding potentially offensive or controversial subjects when the interviewer was a woman. On the other hand, they noted that when the interviewer was a man, the male respondents were more direct and their answers were articulated in a more derogatory fashion towards female nurses (Williams & Heikes, 1993, p.285). This suggests that responses are generally

developed within a gendered context depending on the interviewer's values, orientations and opinions.

My research did not discuss women-men issues in a clear-cut manner as the Williams and Heike (1993) study on male nurses did. Furthermore, my male respondents worked in an environment considered to be masculine, unlike the male nurses who worked in a female-dominated occupation and in an environment considered to be feminine. However, noting the gendered differences in responses and keeping in mind the *social desirability bias*, I wonder whether being a female interviewer, could have led my male respondents to show some initial interest in flexible working in order to look good in my eyes, when in reality they would not consider taking up such options (I discuss this in more detail in Section 8.2.1. in that typically, when I asked my male informants whether they would like to work in a more flexible manner in order to integrate work and life following the Dual Agenda Logic, their initial response would typically be “yes” followed by an explanation why they would rather not do so).

As a woman researcher interviewing men who had undergone a divorce, Arendell (1997) notes that the men she interviewed, tended to reinforce their masculine identities in their interactions with her as the interviewer. In fact, she noted significant differences as to how divorced women (whom she had studied earlier) reacted during the interviews, in that the men seemed more keen to define their identities and their manhood instead of discussing post-divorce parenting. This was also noted in a different context by Schwalbe & Wolkomir,



2002, p. 206) who implied that men typically prefer to portray themselves as being “in control autonomous” and “rational”. This is important for my study because challenging the dichotomy between paid work and family may be perceived as a threat to masculinity and hence is likely to be met with resistance (Rapoport et al., 1990).

On the other hand, Arendell (1997) highlights the advantages of being a female researcher with male respondents. For example the divorced men in her study seemed more keen to open up their feelings and to share their problems with her in that they assumed that other men would be more critical if they exposed their vulnerability and their problems openly with them. In my case, I did not sense any special wish on the part of the male respondents to open up with me on any possible work-life conflicts they may have. On the contrary as far as their work-life choices were concerned, most of the male workers seemed more keen to show me that they were in control of both their work and in their personal life. In fact in general they tended to display behaviours and choices which they perceived to be appropriate for men and in keeping with hegemonic values.

Behson (personal communication, July 7, 2014), a Professor of Management at Fairleigh Dickinson University in the United States who also runs the Fathers, Work and Family online blog (<http://fathersworkandfamily.com>), believes that both younger and older men may not feel comfortable talking about work-family issues with women. He hypothesises that “older men may have overly internalised ‘masculine culture’ and “may be stuck in their own gender jails”,

whilst young men may be reluctant to speak about these issues with women, having been brought up in an era in which “an overly PC mindset” made many young men uncomfortable to debate and discuss gender issues openly with women during their high school and college years. However, in both cases he believes that the major problem lies with the fact that many men “incorrectly” assume that work-family issues, which “have been ignored for too long”, are women’s issue. When working with corporate fathers and those in the communities, Behson claims that for many men it is imperative that conversations on work and family *are not* perceived as “touchy-feely” and pointed out one of the groups he leads is informally called “beer fire” and is “wrapped in a fun-male-bonding experience”. This suggests that when men discuss work-life issues men may be more willing to open up with male researchers in an informal setting. Furthermore it gives strong indications that men still try to distance themselves from anything that may challenge their hegemonic masculine values. However, more research is required to explore the gender dynamics between female/male researchers with male/female informants on the subject of work-life issues and how the setting and the subject in focus can make a difference.

An aspect of feminist research is that this frequently endeavours to develop an ethics of care and to establish special relations with the informants (Oakley, 1981). Whilst an ethics of care is fundamental to ensure that the informants are not exploited or abused, it is unclear what special relations means. Reinharz (1993) argues against a ‘love model’ suggested by Oakley (1981) and she remarks that the idea of building a rapport and special relations with the

informants may fall within the realm of excessive demands on the part of the researcher. In my case, I noted that most of the male informants were not keen to establish a rapport beyond the interview and no special bonds developed between us. The same happened with the few female informants I interviewed, although they seemed more open to discuss work-life issues than the men did, possibly because they experienced more work-life conflicts than the male informants in the organisation. Overall, there was not enough time for a special relation to develop and considering how busy everyone was this seemed rather far-fetched. However, in all cases I approached my informants with a lot of respect and strived to establish an open channel of communication in order to see things from their point of view depending on their gender and their experiences. In all this, I tried to position myself as credible and competent professional without sounding paternalistic or aggressive. On their part, the informants were also professional in their approach - although there were times when for example discussing issues with the company directors, I felt under siege and vulnerable. This was possibly due to my transient position in relation to their established position of power within the hierarchy

Hence, as a female researcher who is also feminist, I hold no illusions that I am free from biases. I am conscious that I operate in a gendered world that is immersed in gendered assumptions. In many ways, being sensitive to gender issues means that the way I assess things may be different to how things are gauged by those who take a gender blind position. However, I see my feminist understandings as offering what Arendell (1997, pg. 349) calls "sensitising concepts". I am also aware that gender is one out of many other factors such

as race, class, sexual orientation, age, disability etc. that can influence research. So while gender equality is a positive value and a priority for me as a person and as a researcher I did not assume that it will have the same value for my informants.

Having reflected on some of the personal factors which may have affected this research, I now deal with epistemological reflexivity. Amongst other things this entails reflecting on the questions asked, how they were asked, and how the method of analysis constructed the findings (Willig, 2008). When reflecting on the type of questions I asked and whether these could have been investigated differently, I am conscious that there was a marked effort on my part to put them in such a way so as not to influence my participants. However, since qualitative interviewing was used, the process took the shape of a conversation (Kvale, 2006; Heyl, 2002) and at times when further probing was necessary (Rapoport et al., 2002), I inserted new questions on the spur of the moment. When this happens it becomes difficult to assess whether my questions remained open ended and value free. Furthermore, at times I was deliberately challenging some of the assertions that my informants made, and this too could have steered the conversation in some way. This is crucial to the CIAR method – i.e. action research. Hence, in line with the Critical Theorists and Constructionist approach, I acknowledge that my personal values may have influenced the inquiry and that the findings I present remain “transactional and subjectivist” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 109; Bohman, 2010).

Adopting the concept from ethnographic studies, Headland, Pike and Harris (1990) discuss the researcher's role as an insider (emic) or outsider (etic). For example, being a Maltese researcher brings some advantages in that as an insider I am in a better position to understand the perspective of my participants since I grew up in the same country with its particular value systems (Naaeke, Kurylo, Grabowski, Linton & Radford, 2011). On the other hand, since I do not operate in the ICT sector, I am less fluent with the technical jargon that the participants use and hence, in this sense, I can be considered to be an 'outsider'. However, being an outsider to the organisation also has its benefits since it allows me to take a fresh perspective on how work gets done and allows me the liberty to challenge their assumptions and values, which may be taken for granted otherwise. I shall now discuss issues related to the quality and authenticity in qualitative research (Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Lincoln, 1995).

### **4.3. Quality and Authenticity in Qualitative Research**

When it comes to qualitative research, Miles and Huberman (2004, p.11) claim that "words, especially when organised into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to a reader....than pages of summarized numbers." As a qualitative researcher who has adopted an interpretative and constructionist stance, I hope to present a picture, analysed from various angles so as to capture the perspectives and behaviours of the participants in their context. Thus, whilst striving to offer trustworthy qualitative research, as reiterated earlier, I am conscious that my

study will offer a “partial and provisional truth” rather than the truth as conceptualised by the positivists (Boeije, 2010, p. 172). This position may raise some concern regarding the reliability and authenticity of the research. This may be especially relevant to my research approach based on a Case Study (Yin, 2009) and the use of Action Research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Rappoport et al., 2002) which will be discussed in more detail below. As a qualitative researcher, I am aware that I should not only be able to weave an interesting story from my findings, but also ensure that quality permeates throughout the research process in order that the research is subject to scientific scrutiny and rigour (Lincoln, 1995).

On the issue of quality, Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 23) warn that when doing research it is unlikely that one is “attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible all the time” and so there is the risk of diminished quality in research if one turns a blind eye, ignores the evidence or if the probing is insufficient. However, there are several practical measures that help the qualitative researcher to check on the quality of the research process (Bergman & Coxon, 2005, Shenton, 2004; Silverman, 2001; Lincoln, 1995; Guba, 1981). One of these suggestions is related to methodological accountability, wherein the researcher is expected to clearly document the research process and to give clear explanations on the choices made during the process (Bryman, 2008; Miles and Humberman, 2004). The detailed, step-by-step process which will be provided later on in this chapter is in line with these suggestions.

Boeije (2010) claims that the recording and transcription of interviews, adequate purposeful sampling, and systematic computer-aided analysis of the data also help ensure quality. Furthermore, in order to reduce potential bias, there should be multiple investigators from different disciplines during the data collection and during the coding and analysis process (Boeije, 2010). Whilst this may be possible in certain circumstances, this was not possible for this study since it is a solitary academic exercise for a PhD. The lack of multiple investigators was, however amply compensated for through the feedback sessions with the participants on various occasions. This feedback is useful as it refines the thinking process and highlights problems of interpretation (Van Maanen, 1983). In addition, in order to ensure quality in this case study (Yin, 2009) I utilised multiple sources of data including interviews, focus groups, discussion with PhD supervisors as well as data from meetings and other documents.

In addition to the reflexivity on the researcher's role and biases and how the personal make-up of the researcher may have impacted on the research, throughout the research period I kept a research diary. McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, (2003) claim that a research diary or journal can have various functions. I used my diary to record my thoughts and my concerns along the way. When the going was tough, I used the research diary to write about my apprehensions and my concerns over the matters that were bothering me at the time. I also put down relevant observations or reflections that randomly crossed my mind throughout the study period. Reflections captured in the research diary help improve the quality of qualitative researchers (Ortlipp, 2008).

Now that I have declared which research approach has been adopted and also discussed the epistemological and ontological considerations surrounding it, I shall proceed to discuss the underlying concepts related to the Case Study and the Participatory Action Research approach used in this study.

#### **4.4. Design - Case Study Approach and Participatory Action Research Approach**

In this section I briefly discuss the principles and overall approach that guide this research and argue why a case study approach was adopted to fulfil the aims of the research. I then introduce the concept of Participatory Action Research and discuss why this approach is best suited to explore and challenge the concept of the 'Ideal Worker' in gendered organisations.

##### **4.4.1. The Research Design - The Case Study Approach**

A case study approach was adopted to examine how gendered organisations play out in a particular context. Case studies are useful to answer complex "why" and "how" questions and this approach is especially useful as it allows researchers to explore how the context affects the phenomenon which is being studied (Yin, 2009; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

Most of the research on gendered organisations comes through the study of American organisations. Furthermore, as stated earlier, many of the CIAR and



Dual Agenda projects focused on women rather than men. In contrast, this study is set in a Maltese ICT organisation where the majority of workers are men operating in a sector linked to masculinity (Gill & Grint 1995) and where the national setting is also highly gendered (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2012; NCPE, 2012; Special Eurobarometer Survey, 2010). In combination, these elements offer a distinctive backdrop to study this phenomenon of gendered organisations from a different angle and in a different context to that studied so far. Consequently, the case study approach allows a better focus on the linkages between gender and context through one 'bounded' organisation (Stake, 2008, p.120). This will allow me to gain a more holistic understanding of the issues at stake by raising questions and looking at the micro processes indicated in my research aims.

Whilst many consider case studies as a complete approach or a method in its own right (Yin, 2009, Stake 2008; Sjoberg; Williams, Vaughan, & Sjoberg 1991), concern was raised, especially in the past, about the lack of reliability (Campbell and Stanley, 1966, pp. 6–7) and generalisability that case studies afford (Abercombie, Hill & Turner, 2006). However, there is much evidence that when case studies are well planned and properly executed, they can yield excellent theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Siggelkow, 2007; Flyvberg, 2006; Ruddin, 2006; Walton, 1992). It is essential to note that the aim in such an approach is not theory testing and generalisation, but inductive theory building from rich qualitative case data that allows the researcher to identify patterns and relationships and to understand the underlying reasoning behind them

(Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). This renders it as the best approach to adopt in conjunction with participatory action research, which will be discussed next.

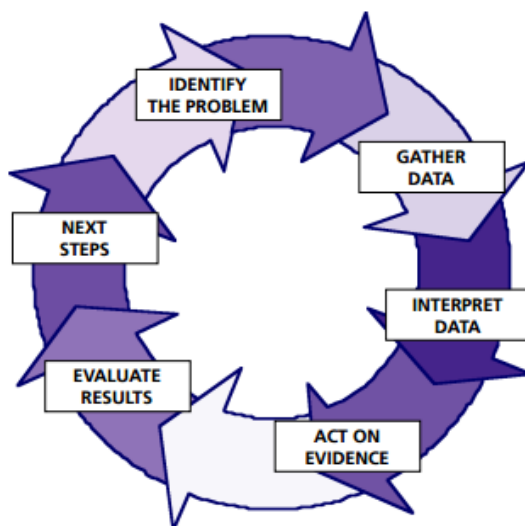
#### **4.4.2. Participatory Action Research**

Participatory action research plays a very important role in this study. In fact, one of the overall aims of the research is to explore the potential of action research to challenge gendered workplace assumptions in an ICT organisation. Action research is considered to be a “most demanding and far-reaching method which always involves two goals: “that of solving a problem and of contributing to knowledge and science” (Gummesson, 2006, p.16). Rather than defining it as a method, Kagan, Burton & Siddiquee (2008) put it forward as an orientation to research. Participative action-oriented research can be branded under several names (Dick, 2010), however the underlying principles imply that all steps need to be taken collaboratively and that the process should empower the participants (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Boog, Keune & Tromp, 2003; Bradbury & Reason 2002; Ferrance, 2000). Typically, in action research projects, participants are involved in a democratic and reflective process that can address problems and bring about positive change in various settings (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; McIntyre, 2008; Greenwood, & Levin, 2007).

Whilst there seems to be a consensus on the main tenets of action research, (Greenwood, & Levin, 2007; Chisholm, Rupert & Elden, 1993; Stringer, 1999; Lewin, 1946), there are various interpretations on the steps that need to be

followed when conducting this type of research (Herman, 1993; Elden & Chisholm, 1993). For example, some speak of four stages of inquiry (McFarland & Stansell, 1993) whilst others (Ferrance, 2000; Susman & Evered, 1978) suggest that this is done in five stages. It is important to note that whilst in typical action research diagrams, the cyclical process appears to be consistent and orderly (for example, see Figure 4.1. below from Ferrance, 2000), in reality, action research can be 'messy' (Goodnough, 2008) and has an element of uncertainty about it (Cook, 1998).

**Figure 4.1 The cyclical process of action research**



(Ferrance, 2010)

My research too had elements of uncertainty and messiness. In my case, the gaps between one cycle of research and another were inconsistent as they depended on a number of factors. These included periods when I could not continue my research because I was waiting for formal approvals by the company directors before I could go ahead, to other times when the process of transcripts and data analysis took me longer to finish than anticipated. At other

times, I simply needed time to reflect and to make sense of the process. All this detracted from the apparent orderly process that seems to typify action research cycles at first glance.

Action research brings with it a number of threats and amongst these, Kock (2007) brings up the issues of uncontrollability over the research. He argues that organisations are unlikely to cede full authority to the researcher and as a result, the researcher's control is never complete. Furthermore, the outcome is sometimes different to that planned by the researcher and in the worst-case scenario, this may mean that the researcher is forced to abandon the research (Kock, 2007).

I shall now move to give more details about the specific type of action research used for this research.

#### **4.4.3. Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR)**

In this study, I use a particular form of action research called Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR), which was developed in the USA in 1990 by Lotte Bailyn and Rhona Rappoport with other colleagues (Bailyn et al., 2005). As reiterated earlier in academic literature, CIAR has been referred to intermittently as both a method (Bailyn, 2009; Bookman & Lewis, 2007) and as a methodology (Baird, Charlesworth, Beck & Cartwright; Baird, 2006; Bailyn & Fletcher, 2007). CIAR evolved after it was felt that a new approach was needed

to address the work-family challenge (Rappoport et al., 2002). The new approach was suggested as a means to “identify the barriers in organisational structures and culture that were keeping people from using existing work-family policies” (Rapoport et al., 2002, p.xii). Furthermore, the researchers wanted to see whether the structures of work could be changed in such a way as to make it possible for people to better integrate their work with their personal lives and to hence enhance gender equity without hurting the effectiveness of work (Bailyn, 2011; 2009; 2006b).

The characteristics of CIAR are similar to other forms of participatory action research in that the aim behind such research is to improve situations or to implement change through reflection and action. The process normally involves the active collaboration of the participants with the researcher (Rapoport et al., 2002; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Lewin, 1951, 1958). What sets the CIAR method apart from typical action research approaches is the “cohesive set of underlying principles” which stems from theories about gendered organisations (Baird, Charlesworth, Beck & Cartwright, 2006, p.40). Baird et al. (2006, p.40) suggest that CIAR is “more akin to feminist methodological styles.” Hence, what differentiates CIAR projects from conventional action research studies is that, the external researcher is normally expected to bring expertise on gender issues, whilst the participants are roped-in because they can offer valuable expertise that emanates from their experience at work. It is believed that through the increased awareness about gender issues on the part of the researcher, and the heightened awareness of the informants about work-life issues, new knowledge can be created through these interactions.

In work-life research projects, CIAR is used to unearth the underlying hidden gendered assumptions from which work practices normally evolve (Rapoport, et al., 2002). This approach uses methods which involve interviews that not only explore perspective but which also challenge gendered assumptions about the nature of work and work-life issues (Rappoport et al., 2002; Bailyn et al., 2005). CIAR also involves feedback sessions and discussions, which allow the participants to analyse, reflect, and possibly propose ways on how work practices could be improved in order to meet both sides of the Dual Agenda (Bailyn & Fletcher, 2007; Rapoport et al., 2002). The aim behind this approach is very close to the objectives of this study and hence, it was logical to adopt this particular branch of action research. I will amplify about the work carried out in the next sections.

#### **4.4.4. Clarifying the Aims of the Dual Agenda and how it is Used in the Case Study Organisation**

Having a clear aim is fundamental for Action Research projects (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p.8). Hence it is important to understand the aims behind the notion of the Dual Agenda for change. When discussing the Dual Agenda and the CIAR approach, one part of the agenda focuses on the *organisation* and the other part focuses on the *personal*. In terms of the personal, this is about the quality of life of the workers in the organisation (Bailyn, 2005; Rapoport et al., 2002).

In this particular project, because I am dealing with practical issues of resistance in a male dominated organisation, I gained access through focusing on the issue of quality of life (rather than gender). However, I still apply the gender lens throughout the process. Whilst the aim of this study is broad the “desired future state” envisaged for this part of the Action Research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) can best be described as involving a search for innovative work practices wherein workers may be in a better position to integrate their work with their personal life whilst increasing organisational effectiveness in line with Dual Agenda values. I shall now move to give a detailed account of the research process.

## **4.5. The Methods**

### **4.5.1. The Research Process**

As reiterated at the beginning of this chapter, the overall aim of this Action Research study is to examine how gendered workplace assumptions are manifested and reinforced in a male-dominated organisation and in a gendered national context and to explore the potential for Action Research to challenge these assumptions in this context. In the following sections I give a detailed step-by-step account of the research process adopted in order to meet the research objectives and will start first by giving an overview of the data captured and its source.

#### 4.5.2. The Participants and the Data Collection Process

The study is based on data retrieved through:

- **25 interviews** carried out throughout the study period with workers from across the hierarchy of the case study organisation. Interviewees included the top three company directors, seven managers and workers in two different sections of the organisation. Some persons, notably the HR manager and one of the directors, were interviewed on more than one occasion and there was more contact with them than with the rest of the informants. This is because these had the function of what Bailyn and Fletcher (2007, p.4) call the “liaison committee.” This means that they were involved in each step of the CIAR process and I coordinated my research from the company side with them. For example, they were responsible for reviewing and approving my interview guides and for choosing the research teams.
- **three feedback sessions** were organised in order to present the findings emanating from the research. During these feedback sessions I discussed the implications of the prevailing work practices, their underlying values and the impact they have on organisational effectiveness and on work-life issues.
- **four meetings** were carried out with the directors, HR manager and various managers in different sections of the organisations in order to plan and discuss the research process during the various stages of the research course.



I shall now explain how I gained access to the organisation and discuss the data collection and analysis process in detail.

#### **4.5.3. The Location of the Study**

This research was carried out at *Tech Co.* which is a prominent, medium-sized company operating in the Information Communication Technology (ICT) sector in Malta. It offers bespoke software solutions and applications to local and international clients functioning across various economic sectors. These include the banking and financial services sector, airlines, the gaming industry, hospitality, oil and gas and clients from the real estate sector, amongst others.

The company employs 83 highly trained and specialised ICT workers. The vast majority of the workers are male (69 men, 14 women). Their average age is 32, but some of the older workers who have been with the company since its inception are nearing retirement age. The majority (60%) are still single, but some of the participants are married and have children of varying ages whilst others are studying whilst working.

#### **4.5.4. Access and Recruitment**

The recruitment process was carried out in different stages. My first contact at Tech Co. was made through the HR manager, who I knew personally. I contacted her at the beginning of my studies in late 2008, explained the aim of my research, and asked her whether it would be possible to carry out my research in the ICT Company she worked for. She asked me to make a formal request so that she could forward it to the three Company directors for their reaction. After formalising my request, I was asked to meet the director of Corporate Services, who at the time was responsible for Human Resources.

An introductory meeting between the director of Corporate Services and the HR manager was set for November 2008. Whilst this meeting was useful to establish formal contact with one of the company directors, I was informed that the final decision regarding my access had to be taken by all three company directors and not by just one. So, I was asked to prepare a formal presentation for the other two company directors in order to give them an idea of what I was planning to do in the organisation. For this reason, a formal meeting was held on December 16, 2008 wherein I gave the directors an overview of the research I was planning and the aims behind it. During the meeting, many questions were asked and it was evident that the directors were concerned about any possible negative impact that this research could have on the organisation. During the face-to-face meeting, I had the opportunity to clarify queries they had about the research and to explain in more detail the aim behind the Dual Agenda. At the end of the meeting, they told me that they needed to discuss

this further before I could start my interviews. Permission was eventually granted after two months and this meant that I could finally start my interviews.

#### **4.5.5. The Development of the Interview Guide and Pilot**

Before conducting my interviews, I had to develop and pilot the interview guides. Three different interview guides have been developed (See Appendix 1, 2 and 3). The interview guide is best described as a semi-structured interview that contains a list of questions to be covered. It serves as a checklist of the topics for discussion with the participants (Bryman, 2008).

The first interview guide (Appendix 1) was used exclusively with Tech Co.'s HR manager. This had specific questions relating to the organisation, its employees, its history, and its organisational structure. Once this information was captured, this set of questions was not repeated in the other interviews. Apart from questions about the organisation and its work practices, other questions focused on how the ideal worker is defined and about the personal needs of the workers.

The second interview guide (Appendix 2) was devised for the company directors and the managers. These had identical guides which focused on five main areas, namely: getting to know the participants; understanding the nature of their work and the challenges they are facing; drawing up definitions of the ideal worker; understanding the personal needs of the workers and making

suggestions for change including specific suggestions intended to increase organisational effectiveness.

The workers had a modified interview guide (Appendix 3). This was similar to the one used with the directors and the managers, except that it had more questions focusing on the personal needs of the workers. It also had more detailed questions on recommended changes that could increase organisational effectiveness and at the same time bring benefits to the workers (the Dual Agenda). Finally, I had a set of questions that had the aim of capturing and understanding the work processes at Tech Co. with a view to identifying ineffective work processes that may cause stumbling blocks and bottlenecks.

The interview guides were submitted to the HR manager of Tech Co. who reviewed them with the liaison team. During the process of negotiating access into the organisation, I had agreed to submit my interview guides for their consideration and eventual approval before I could use them. During this process, minor changes were made to the order of questions, whilst some questions were amended in order to ensure that the process did not raise high expectations for change. All interview guides were piloted in order to ensure that the questions were clearly worded and would draw responses that fulfil the aim of the question. This process enabled me to fine-tune my interview guide before starting my interviews.

#### **4.5.6. Qualitative Interviewing**

In line with qualitative interviewing (Heyl, 2002; Kvale, 1996; Quinn Patton, 1990) a flexible approach was retained during the interviewing process. This means that the interview took the shape of a conversation rather than a question and answer format. For example, the order of the questions was changed around according to how the conversation evolved. Furthermore, when a topic was useful, I added supplementary questions to clarify matters or to explore the subject further (Silverman, 2000). As Boeijie (2010) suggests, I tried to avoid jargon in order to make the questions as clear as possible and used examples when the participants wanted clarifications. I also tried to listen attentively to what was being said and did my best to keep interruptions from my end to a minimum (Bryman, 2008). In line with the Dual Agenda approach, during the interviews I challenged the informants to reflect on the taken-for-granted assumptions that underpinned the day-to-day working practices tied to the ideal worker norms (Bailyn & Fletcher, 2007; Rapoport et al., 2002).

#### **4.5.7. Capturing the Data and Transcription of the Interviews**

All interviews were taped through a digital recorder and saved in digital form onto a computer. Subsequently, all interviews, meetings and feedback sessions were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and a research assistant.

All transcripts are, in some way or another, selective for it is difficult to capture all the interactions from the recording (Davidson, 2009). Whilst some researchers try to capture as much detail as possible by, for example, taking note of “stutters, pauses, nonverbal, involuntary vocalizations” and opt for the ‘naturalism approach’ (Oliver et al., 2005, pp. 1273-1274) it was not felt that these were necessary for my research. In my case, the approach I took for my transcripts can be described as being ‘de-naturalised’. This is because I was less interested in the mechanisms of speech that are normally of more interest to those who use Discourse Analysis (D.A.) or Conversation Analysis (C.A.). Therefore, for example I did not record the length of the pauses between speech and other sounds like coughing or laughter.

Since in Malta most people are bi-lingual, some of the interviews were carried out in the Maltese language, others in English, and some in a mixture of the two languages. In all cases, I went along according to the wishes of the participants. The interviews or parts of the interviews which were in Maltese, were first transcribed verbatim in the Maltese language and were later translated into English to achieve a uniform language in all the transcripts. Translation adds another layer of complication to transcription and renders the process even longer (Pirjo, 2008). Finally, transcripts were checked for accuracy by going through the recording while matching it to the transcript. Minor spelling corrections were also done at this stage. Any words that, after several attempts to decode remained not understood were in the transcript, marked with dots (Bryman, 2008). The corrected transcripts were subsequently

uploaded into the computer for analysis through NVivo 8, which is an analysis software programme.

## **4.6. The Process of Analysis**

### **4.6.1. Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) - Using NVivo 8**

Computer Assisted Qualitative Analysis Software (CAQDAS) allows deep level analysis of rich text-based information resulting from interviews, open-ended questionnaires, notes, emails, photos, as well as videos. More specifically, CAQDAS allows users to classify, sort and arrange information and to examine relationships within the data. It makes the analysis process easier through a search facility for words, codes, and frequencies and enables researchers to display the information through models, tables and charts (QSR International, 2011). Free Nodes and Tree nodes in NVivo act like a repository for all the pieces of transcript related to the subject. The software records the source of the code according to how the interview is saved in the first place (QSR International, 2011). In spite of freeing the researcher of many manual and mechanical tasks, the software cannot replace the analytical work done by the researcher (Boeije, 2010, p. 142).

I found the classifying, sorting, and examining possibilities of NVivo useful when looking at my data during the analysis process. This software gave me the opportunity to view relevant data about a specific topic in one place, instead of

having to go through the separate interviews one by one. Seeing my data in this way allowed me to make connections between the themes and to continue refining them in order to consolidate my findings. From my transcripts and my analysis process, I generated 28 Tree Nodes. The analysis process was carried out on the principles of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which is discussed in more detail below.

#### **4.6.2. Thematic Analysis**

Thematic Analysis is a method of identifying, sorting, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.77) argue that Thematic Analysis offers a “rigorous” yet “accessible and theoretically-flexible approach” to analyse qualitative data.

During the analysis process, I worked on one transcript at a time. I first re-read the transcript in order to familiarise myself with the content and proceeded to do line-by-line coding. This meant picking up small chunks of data which, in my opinion, described something interesting and relevant to the overall research and which could in some way help answer the research questions. Some of the initial nodes I generated fitted into what Braun and Clarke (2006) call ‘semantic themes’. These themes captured descriptive elements, which I thought were useful for the study. However, as I went along I moved on to ‘latent themes’ which in line with the constructionist approach (Burr, 2003), entail further probing and looking beyond what was happening on the surface (Braun &



Clarke, 2006). Throughout this process, I was reviewing my themes and grouping them under more specific Tree Nodes in order to get a clearer picture derived from the data. As the coding process evolved, ideas changed and developed until a clearer picture emerged from the data. This allowed me to identify key themes, which developed through a significant amount of codes. Towards the end of the analysis process, I made use of tables to clarify my ideas and finally translated the themes into a thematic map as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The analysis process was carried out in various stages of the research. For example, after the first batch of interviews with the directors, managers and employees, I carried out the first analysis process in order to be in a position to go back to the organisation with my analysis and feedback. However, as explained earlier, unlike the typical action research, I did not take action after each feedback session, but in most cases decided to capture more data in order to get a clearer picture of the situation as it was evolving. I shall move to explain the various stages of the CIAR process in more detail below.

## **4.7. The Collaborative Interactive Action Research Process (CIAR)**

### **4.7.1. First Cycle of Interviews**

The first interview was held with the HR manager who was the only woman out of seven in the management team. Subsequently, I interviewed the three

company directors occupying the posts of director of Corporate Services, director of Software Solutions, and director of Technology Solutions. All three directors were male and had been working with the organisation since its inception.

All interviews were carried out at the premises of Tech Co. These varied in length but, on average, lasted around 60 minutes. The interviews were carried out in a meeting room away from the office noise, which provided the participants with some sense of privacy during the interviewing process. The longest interviews were with the HR manager who provided essential information on how the company evolved over time and spoke at length about the values and the work practices of the organisation.

Subsequently, between March and May 2009, I interviewed the seven managers at Tech Co. These included the manager of the Software Development unit, the Marketing manager, the Network Systems manager, the Finance manager, the Business Applications manager, the manager of Enterprise Platform, and the HR manager (who I had already interviewed earlier). During this exploratory phase, I held conversational style, in depth qualitative interviews as described earlier (Bryman, 2008).

#### **4.7.2. The First Feedback Session to the Company Directors**

Following the analysis of the first batch of interviews, in June 2009, I organised the first feedback session with the company directors. Here I gave a

presentation (See Appendix 2) wherein I discussed amongst other things, matters relating to work-life issues and questions relating to temporal and spatial flexibility. Following my presentation, a long discussion evolved on my findings. This was extremely useful as it enabled the directors to discuss and challenge the findings that had emerged. Furthermore, it provided a good platform to clarify important concepts (for example on what the term 'flexibility' means) which were subject to different interpretations. It also enabled me to reflect on my own assumptions and made me aware that for example, when discussing things which to me had positive connotations, these same beliefs were a cause of concern to the directors.

There were moments during the feedback session when the atmosphere became slightly tense and I was worried that they might actually block my access to the workers who I still needed to interview. They were possibly seeing me as a threat especially because, during the interview, I was challenging some of their basic assumptions about work and life. Rapoport et al. (2002 p.109) argue that resistance plays an important part in the CIAR process and is very relevant when discussing issues which threaten "the most staunchly defended boundary...that maintains the separation of public and private spheres". They caution that researchers should be prepared to work through the "layers of resistance" which often make change negotiation difficult (Rapoport et al., p. 119). However, they add that in Dual Agenda projects, rather than avoiding resistance, researchers should "engage and work" with it in order to challenge basic assumptions about gendered organisations. Following this unnerving feedback session, I had to wait for four months (June to October

2009) before I was given the go-ahead by the Company directors to continue my research with the workers at Tech Co. During the waiting time, I reflected on what had happened and continued my discussions with the liaison team.

#### **4.7.3. Second Cycle of Interviews with the Workers**

In October 2009, I began my second cycle of interviews with the workers. A decision was taken to interview employees in two different units, namely the Business Application Unit (BAU) and the Software Development Unit (SDU). This decision was taken after a discussion with the liaison committee. This means, that in line with the qualitative research approach, the sample was not selected on a random basis but a purposive (non-probability) sampling method was used to recruit the participants. Purposive sampling should not be confused with a 'convenience sample', since this is generally derived simply by chance and not through any specific goals in mind on the part of the researcher (Bryman, 2008).

For this cycle of interviews, the two units chosen were suggested for a number of reasons. First of all, the workers chosen represented two of the largest departments at Tech Co. and both teams were involved on the software side of the business. They both dealt with foreign clients, but whilst the Business Application unit dealt mostly with Maltese and North African clients who are in the same time zone, the Software Development team dealt with UK clients who are in a different time zone. The issue of servicing the clients in different time

zones brings more challenges since it entails working during hours, which are different to office hours in the host country. Most of the Business Application team members were consultants who have a lot of contact with clients and in fact carry out most of their work on-site. The Software Development team work mostly at the office with little direct contact with clients. These differences were considered important when looking at issues related to working time and working space.

Furthermore, the two units were led by two different managers with very different management styles and with different attitudes regarding working time and space. For example, the manager of the Software Development unit was very strict and rigid with time and he instilled these values in his team. The other manager was more flexible with time. Since managers can have a considerable impact on the organisation of work, these factors were considered important and added another dimension to the study.

#### **4.7.4. The Second Feedback Session**

Following the analysis of the second batch of interviews, on January 5, 2012, I organised the second feedback session. The Director (Software Solutions) and the HR manager attended the meeting. Amongst other things, the presentation focused on issues relating to ideal worker values and concerns about temporal and spatial flexibility (See Appendix 3). This second feedback session felt less intimidating, possibly because the number of participants was smaller and so it

was easier to deal with resistance and work on it. Furthermore, I may have become more politically astute (Buchanan & Badham, 2008) after gaining some experience on how best to engage with the participants.

#### **4.7.5. The Third Feedback Session**

Following the second feedback session, a third feedback session was organised on March 21, 2012 with the head of Software Solutions. He is responsible for three teams, namely, the Business Applications team, the Software Development team and the Business Intelligence and Collaboration team. The HR manager also attended the meeting. The presentation and feedback were similar to the one given in the second feedback session, however, this time I captured the feedback from the perspective of the management rather than that of the directors. See Table 4.2. below for a summary of the CIAR process.

**Table 4.2 Summary of the research process**

<b>Exploratory Stage</b>	<b>Feedback and reflection</b>	<b>Exploratory Stage</b>	<b>Feedback and reflection</b>	<b>Exploratory Stage</b>	<b>Feedback and reflection</b>
<b>Cycle 1</b>	<b>Cycle 1</b>	<b>Cycle 2</b>	<b>Cycle 2</b>	<b>Cycle 3</b>	<b>Cycle 3</b>
<p>Data gathering through interviews with the:</p> <p><b>HR manager</b></p> <p><b>Three directors</b></p> <p><b>Seven managers.</b></p> <p><b>Challenging assumptions</b></p> <p>Verbatim transcripts</p> <p>Analysis of data</p> <p>Reflection</p>	<p>Clarifying concepts and discussing the findings with the <b>company directors</b></p> <p>Reflection</p> <p>Discussion of next phase of research</p>	<p>Data gathering through interviews with the <b>workers and the manager</b> in the:</p> <p>Business Application Unit (<b>BAU</b>) and the Software Development Unit (<b>SDU</b>)</p> <p><b>Challenging assumptions</b></p> <p>Verbatim transcripts</p> <p>Analysis of the data</p> <p>Reflection</p>	<p>Clarifying concepts and discussing the findings with the <b>Director</b> (Software Solutions) and the <b>HR manager</b></p> <p>Discussion of next phase of research</p>	<p>Data gathering through a focus group meeting with the <b>HR manager</b> and team members of the Business Application Unit (<b>BAU</b>)</p> <p><b>Challenging assumptions</b></p> <p>Verbatim transcripts</p> <p>Analysis of the data</p> <p>Reflection</p>	<p>Clarifying concepts and discussing the findings with informants from the BAU team</p> <p>Reflection and conclusion</p>

#### **4.8. Limitations and Strengths of the Methodology and Methods**

To conclude this part of the chapter it is important to reflect on the strengths and potential limitations of the methodology and methods. The strengths of this research have already been discussed at length in section 4.4 above when I

discussed the case study and the action research approach. It is relevant to point out the forte of these two approaches especially when combined with qualitative probing. This combination can provide much understanding and rich contextual detail of phenomena, which may otherwise be overlooked or lost (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

As with all qualitative studies, one cannot generalise the findings but only generalise the theory. The findings of this research are localised and contextualised in that they were carried out in two particular units of the organisation. This means that there were other team which were not involved in the research and so, one should also be careful not to generalise the findings to the other units of the organisations. This also applies to generalisation of the findings in other ICT companies in different contexts. However, it is important to clarify that the aim of CIAR is not to generalise the findings but to develop theories about processes which can then be explored in other specific contexts and to try out such interventions elsewhere (Rapoport, et al., 2002).

When discussing the limitations of qualitative research, the subjective nature of the approach is often raised (Boeije, 2010; Bryman, 2008). When applied to this study, one can mention the nature of data that was sourced through in-situ, face to face, interviewing. Typically, this can create a “knee-jerk reaction” that the data is subjective (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 28). In this case, because interviewees operate in a hierarchical setting where they depend on their superiors to move on in their jobs, one wonders on the extent of information which was withheld and the amount of freedom they felt in



expressing their feelings about their superiors and the organisation. Such concerns could arise from fear of being identified. Hence, participants could have played things down so as not to appear in a bad light or they may have stressed or exaggerated other factors for other reasons. However, this does not imply that the participants were in any way coerced to do so and the issue of anonymity and confidentiality was made clear to all from the beginning, so as to put their mind at rest.

#### **4.9. Ethical Issues Surrounding this Research**

Social research can be invasive and exploitative and researchers should ensure that the participants are protected from harm all along the research process. There are several ethical issues which the qualitative researcher needs to take into consideration in order to protect the participants (Flick, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Bryman, 2008). These can be broadly grouped into four areas of concern which would entail: avoiding harm to participants; ensuring that participants are informed about their rights before giving consent; seeing that the informants' right to privacy is respected and checking that participants are not deceived in any way. I shall discuss these in more detail as follows:

#### **4.9.1. Avoiding Harm to Participants**

The first concern of researchers should be about the protection of participants in order to ensure their safety and protection from potential or real physical or psychological harm (Flick, 201; Bryman, 2008). Whilst physical harm in the Milgram Experiment style (Milgram, 1974) can be immediately ruled out in this research, I was aware that through what I was doing, I could possibly inflict psychological or other harm to the participants who operate in a hierarchy. Hence, by obtaining a formal permission from the company directors and managers to conduct my research in the organisation, I had decreased the probability of harm to my participants, who were given the green light by their superiors to speak with me about their work and their personal life.

#### **4.9.2. Informed Consent**

Another fundamental ethical concern revolves around the issue of obtaining consent from the informants prior to the collection of the data (Boeijie, 2010). Whilst as I reiterated earlier, I had already obtained the consent of the directors to carry out my research, I felt duty bound to make participants aware of their individual rights before each interview. Each time, I explained the aims and scope of the research and made them aware of their rights to refuse both answering specific questions and having their conversation recorded. I also informed them regarding who would have access to the data and that this would

only be seen by the researcher, the tutor and by the research assistant who was involved in some of the transcripts.

### **4.9.3. Invasion of Privacy**

Bryman (2008) claims that the issue of privacy is closely linked to the issue of anonymity and confidentiality in the research process, especially when dealing with sensitive issues. He argues that by giving consent, the participant does not automatically give up the right to privacy and hence it is the researcher's role to ensure that the latter does not violate this privacy. Since my research involved discussions and feedback sessions with the Directors and the Managers (especially the HR Manager, who is my friend) I had to be extremely careful not to expose individual participants. I was aware that in their position of power, they could use the information I gathered to get insights on workers. As a result, I was constantly deliberating on how much I should divulge when discussing certain matters. For example, when writing up my findings I was worried that if I quoted anything that was negative about the company or its management, there was the risk that the person could be identified from the way he or she spoke and/or by their designation. Hence, besides removing the designation of the person, I selected my quotes cautiously and whilst remaining faithful to what had been said, I kept the well-being of my participants in mind in order to avoid any repercussions for them.

#### **4.9.4. Deception**

Deception occurs when the researcher is not completely honest about the aims and the scope of the research and presents the study as something other than what it really is (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Sometimes researchers justify this by arguing that they have done so in order that the respondents are not influenced and react more naturally in their environment (Bryman, 2008). In this research, this was not done. On the contrary, since I was conducting a form of participatory action research, the participants had to be fully aware of the aims of the research so that they could collaborate and become co-participants in the study (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007).

#### **4.9.5. Other Ethical Considerations Related to the Local Context of the Study**

Apart from ethical issues that could impact on the workers and affect their relationships with their superiors, I was also concerned about protecting the organisation itself from any harm. This is because Malta being such a small island state, ICT companies all know each other and are normally in competition with each other. Hence, I felt the need to change the name of the company I was focusing upon and keep the description of the organisation generic so as to avoid its identification. Considering the steps taken to protect the participants, it seems that sufficient measures were taken to ensure the protection of the participants and their privacy.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed why I adopted a pragmatist approach and chose a qualitative research approach which takes a constructionist and interpretivist stance. Here I examined the epistemological and ontological considerations surrounding this choice and reflected on my role as a researcher and its possible impact on the research. I then introduced the overall case study approach and the participatory action research approach. Here I gave more details on how CIAR was used to explore the concept of the ideal worker in the context of gendered organisations. In the subsequent section of the chapter I focused on the specific methods and procedures wherein I gave information about the location of the study, and how I gained access and recruited my informants. In the last part of the chapter, following the demands for rigour in qualitative research, I gave a transparent and detailed account of the research process. I concluded this chapter by discussing the limitations and strengths of the methodology and examined some of the ethical issues surrounding my research.

The table below summarises the key research questions, the data collection method and the method of analysis which have been adopted for this research. In the next chapter, I will present and discuss the findings that emerged from this study based on the research process as described below:

**Table 4.3 Research aims and objectives and the research process**

Research aims and objective	Data Collection Method	Participants	Data Analysis Method	CIAR
<p><b>A. Exploratory Questions</b></p> <p>1. How is the ideal worker defined in a specific male dominated company in a traditional national gendered context?</p> <p>2. How are ideal worker assumptions manifested and reinforced in practice?</p> <p>3. How can men integrate paid work with their personal lives without being punished or labelled negatively for doing so?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p>Semi-structured, conversational type, in-depth qualitative interviews with an element of intervention</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p>Company directors, managers and workers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p>Thematic Analysis using gender and context specific lens</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p>Meetings and feedback sessions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
<p><b>B. Action Oriented Questions</b></p> <p>4. What is the potential Dual Agenda for change at Tech Co.?</p> <p>5. What are the barriers to change at the organisational and individual level?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
<p><b>C. Theory oriented question</b></p> <p>6. How can the findings inform theory and practice?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">← An iterative process of reflection and analysis →</p>			

## **Chapter 5      Examining how Gendered Assumptions and the Single Agenda Logic are Manifested and Reinforced in a Case Study in the ICT Sector and in a Traditional National Context**

### **Introduction**

As discussed in Chapter 4, where I presented the method and methodology in detail, the data for this case study was captured through a multi-stage, iterative action research process which spanned over five years. Qualitative interviewing and focus group sessions were held with the company directors, all the managers and selected employees working in the Software Development and the Business Application Unit. The data were analysed on the principles of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within a paradigm that takes-on a constructionist and an interpretivist approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Bryman, 2008; Burr, 2003). Whilst giving particular attention to the impact of the context on the study (Nilsen, Brannen & Lewis, 2012; Bamberger, 2008), theories of Gendered Organisations (Bailyn, 2010; Rapoport, et al., 2002; Acker, 1990), theories of Hegemonic Masculinities (Kimmel, 2010; Khan, 2009; Connell 2005; Beynon, 2002; David & Brannon, 1976) and Sense of Entitlement theories (Lewis & Smithson, 2001; Lewis & Haas 2005) provided the main theoretical framework for the analysis of these findings.

This research seeks to get a better understanding of how gendered values around the ideal worker shape work practices in this particular context (Willig, 2008). It also explores the potential for action research, or more specifically

CIAR (Rapoport et.al, 2007) to challenge gendered assumptions. In fact, whilst conducting my face-to-face interviews or the focus group meetings, at times I deliberately challenged and discussed my participants' underlying values in relation to work-life issues. Hence, since CIAR plays a crucial role in this study, an additional layer of analysis is interweaved throughout my findings, where through the Dual Agenda lens I was able to reflect on how the participants' underlying assumptions were impacting on organisational effectiveness and on their personal lives.

The findings derived through the six research questions elicited in the previous chapter are discussed around three broad themes, namely: the ideal worker; the issue of time; and the issue of space. These are examined in three separate Chapters (Chapters six, seven and eight); however, these are preceded by a separate chapter (Chapter five) that contextualises the findings in the case study organisation (Tech Co.) and in the national context (Malta).

The chapters and relevant themes can be seen at a glance in Table 5.1 below:



Figure 5.1 Division of chapters and emergent themes

Chapter	Findings, Analysis and Discussion – Content	Theme – seeing the bigger picture through the dual agenda lens
Chapter 5	Scene setting and contextualisation- Flexibility, autonomy and work-life issues during the financial crisis and beyond	Tighter controls, increased bureaucracy, and work intensification in an environment which does not promote work-life integration
Chapter 6	Defining the <b>ideal worker</b> and the work-life interface in an ICT and gendered context	A self-reliant (male) hard core techie
Chapter 7	<b>The use of time</b> and the intersection with work-life issues analysed through the gender and masculinity lens	The good, the bad,(the not so good) and the ugly workers in relation to time generosity and ideal worker norms
Chapter 8	<b>The use of space</b> and the intersection with work-life issues analysed through the gender and the masculinity lens	The categorisation of workers according to the use of space into: mothers, managers and the others

### 5.1. Scene Setting and Contextualisation – Flexibility, Autonomy and Work-life Issues in the ICT world – Single or Dual Agenda Logic?

I start this chapter by first providing some rich contextual detail surrounding this case study. This is useful in order to capture the intersecting layers of context which allow us to recognise some of the interlinking forces at play when discussing gendered values and work-life issues (Nilsen, Brannen & Lewis, 2012; Bamberger, 2008). Furthermore, in learning more about the context, we may be in a better position to understand some of the processes that are adopted by the organisation and how they affect the participants at work and in their personal life (Boeijje, 2010; Ponterotto, 2006; Cassell & Symon, 1994).

The eighty plus workers at Tech Co. occupy a large, open plan office on a busy road in a central zone of the island of Malta. The modern façade of the building is built in glass but has no actual windows opening onto that side of the road. The workers, in their vast majority young males dressed in smart casual clothes, work in close physical proximity to each other in the central part of the building. On the other hand, the directors and some of the managers work in glass cubicles close to the façade thus having a little more privacy, more space and light and less noise than the rest of the workers. At the another end of the building, several separate small rooms serve as meeting rooms and it was in these rooms that I conducted the various interviews, feedback sessions and discussions with my participants in the last five years.

At the time when I started my research, the company was run by a chairman and an executive board made up of three directors. These were jointly responsible for managing the company on a day-to-day basis. The three directors; Alex, Mark and Philip, managed different sections of the organisation. The company also had a separate Sales and Marketing unit which was responsible for corporate marketing and sales in North Africa and Europe.

When meeting and interviewing the Company Directors individually it slowly became clear that they had differing approaches to managing workers and in dealing with work-life issues. For example, the director in charge of Corporate Services (Mark), a soft-spoken man on the verge of retirement, remarked that he “would like to believe” that workers at Tech Co. were “very free” and they could work in a “friendly and relaxed environment”. He portrayed the company

as being “very flexible” and said that he expected “people to understand that they have to work well, they have to work as a team” and that they must “help each other.” When probed about his preferred management style, he remarked that tensions and extra discipline were not part of his culture, and he added that “frankly, I wouldn't be comfortable in that sort of situation.”

The Director of Software Solutions (Alex) similarly said that at Tech Co.: “I think we like to recognise more talent and ability rather than time.” He said that workers might get congratulated for writing a good report, or a good proposal or a good tender document or for managing to get a good order; however, he stressed that there was absolutely no emphasis on time, because: “the emphasis is on what are you producing. These are our values.”

At face value this sounded very positive to me as a researcher who was trying to decipher which values prevailed in the organisation in relation to work-life issues. However, it did not take me long to realise that ‘flexibility’ and ‘freedom’ are rather broad words with multiple meanings. In fact, in stark contrast to this seemingly easy-going drift of the first two directors, Philip (Director), a middle-aged man with an engineering background, had a very different attitude towards time keeping and flexibility. In fact during a focus group meeting with all the directors, he complained that with regards to working time, things were: “very lax here” and he said that on this issue things were “at an extreme situation.” He said that workers were abusing the ‘generosity’ of the company by coming in at quarter to nine, having breakfast at work, taking a longer lunch break and then leaving the office at five. This contrasted sharply with the earlier claims

made by the other two directors about time flexibly and how workers could manage their own time without any problems. It was interesting that when the issue of time was discussed during a focus group with all the directors and the HR Manager, I noted a shift in attitude, and for example Mark (Director) told me that he too was 'bothered' and 'irritated' by people who were not working as expected and who "... leave exactly at the stroke of five." The focus on time was also picked up by the HR Manager (Liz) who likewise confirmed that the issue of time-keeping was "bothering the directors, full stop."

Apart from the issue of time, during the focus group meetings with the directors in the early phase of the study, I also picked up other perplexing comments with regards to the autonomy of the workers. In fact, the same director who was earlier quoted as saying that things at Tech Co. were very lax, also lamented about the fact that on certain processes he was giving instructions directly to his staff, but workers were not doing what they were being asked to do. Resultantly, at the expense of "not appearing modern" and "not wanting to sound extreme", he reiterated that:

Philip:                There is a value, all right, there is a value in military discipline. I am not saying... but, when you have an army of soldiers, all right, to be effective, if you have an army, what do you do? You give them a rule, and everyone has to obey, you know?

Here the director was linking military discipline to effectiveness and was implying that workers should simply follow the rules blindly without raising objections. Military discipline typically conjures up images of soldiers at war and not bright ICT graduates writing sophisticated computer codes and

resolving complex technical challenges. Yet, such an important claim cannot be ignored, especially since work-life integration or the Dual Agenda Logic implies challenging some of the most fundamental and basic norms relating to temporal and spatial work-life boundaries. In such a context, where military discipline is being promoted as a value and where time-keeping is being emphasised by the directors, what are the chances of challenging the status quo at work? In such an environment, can work-life integration be conceptualised and implemented at the practical level or will workers simply opt to conform to the status quo in order to conform to the ideal worker values?

In normal circumstances, computer professionals in general are already under considerable pressure to maintain ideal worker profiles,” (Whitehouse & Preston, 2005, p.278). This pressure is unlikely to abate in times of economic crisis and in such a context, workers will probably be less willing to rock the boat in order to improve their work-life balance. Hence, in order to continue building on the multiple layers of context, in the next section I discuss the financial crisis with particular reference to how it was affecting Malta. Furthermore, I will analyse how it was being perceived by the informants at the different levels of the hierarchy and assess its impact on the organisation using the Dual Agenda lens.

### **5.1.1. Scene Setting and Contextualisation: The Economic Crisis and Work-life Issues**

When I did the first round of interviews with the directors and the managers I

could sense that there was a clear move to tighten controls especially around working time and working hours. This could have been due to the fact that during the first feedback session with the company directors held in June 2009, they were noticing that the company was becoming less profitable. I started my research at the height of the economic crisis (2008) and although the economic crisis on the whole did not affect Malta as negatively as the rest of the European Union, the company was at the time suffering because most of the Software Development clients were UK customers. On this, the Software Solutions director (Alex) remarked:

Alex: Over quarter four last year (2008) and quarter one this year (2009) business slowed down considerably, because the UK has been hit very badly and the first thing our customers were doing, was that any new IT projects...are being shelved....And that of course had an effect on us.

The directors argued that whilst previously it was cheaper for UK firms to contract Maltese ICT workers, during the economic crisis the situation was reversed, and this was negatively affecting the order book of the organisation. When I asked the HR Manager (Liz) how the economic crisis was affecting work in her department she replied:

Liz: Because, sales have gone down..... when that happens, we start looking at people, you know? .....So, when that happens, usually HR comes a bit in the limelight again, because they start looking at individuals, and looking at who are the people that are really performing, that are really giving their utmost, and those who are not, and what are we going to do about them, basically.

This was one of the indicators that workers were being more closely monitored and controlled. The workers themselves too were becoming conscious of the

economic crisis and when I asked them to give me clues on how they were experiencing the financial crisis at Tech Co., Zoe (Implementation Specialist) said:

Zoe: I don't know, it's....from work you see little things which change every day, for example I don't know, like for example basic stuff, like we used to get fizzy water or towels or tissues or anything.....and then slowly slowly they start reducing this and that...it's like everybody's contributing somehow. But you tend to feel the changes, so the credit crunch is affecting everyone.

Her colleague in the team, Clara (Senior Implementation Consultant) added that:

Clara: Before we were provided with free fruit...but they stopped it. And now, instead, once a month they provide a meal, a baguette or a burger and a dress down day.

Through these symbolic cuts, workers at Tech Co. were being made aware that the economic crisis was having a negative impact on the company and so moves were being made to cut down on spending and maximise output.

During the crisis, keeping key people engaged with the company was seen as an important challenge because there was a shortage of trained ICT workers and it was pointed out that experienced ICT workers were often headhunted and poached by competitors operating in the field. During this period there was a lot of talk on change and an outside expert had been engaged to restructure the company. Yet, in this process, little was being mentioned on how the proposed changes could affect the workers. Keeping in mind this fluid situation, how was the economic crisis impacting on the business and how was it

affecting the workers and their personal side of life?

### **5.1.2. The Economic Crisis - Work Intensification and Work-life Conflict**

The directors at Tech Co. were hoping that the company would survive the negative phase it was going through and would become more resilient in the process. They were aiming to do so by keeping costs down, diversifying the markets and finding new ones so that they would not have to make anyone redundant. Furthermore, they were planning to restructure the company in order to improve customers' expectations and amongst other things they were hoping that workers would start delivering more in shorter periods of time. On this, the Manager in the Business Application Unit (George) said:

George: Increasingly we have pressure from all directions...

Anna: And how do you resolve that?

George: We have to keep finding ways to deliver the same amount of quality in a shorter amount of time...

Anna: If ... you have a job and you need to finish it, are people expected to, I don't know, to stay on? Is that paid time?

George: It's not quite defined to be honest, but in general, ermm, people get paid, for instance when some customer requires that the work has to be done specifically at the weekend ... But in general the staff have a good package, and when there's a deadline approaching, people after all are called, sort of, to put in extra effort to meet it.

Whilst confirming that ICT workers in general are expected to put in extra effort because they tend to be well paid (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2004), here it



becomes clearer that because of increased pressure brought by the financial crisis, workers at Tech Co. were now expected to do even more with less and to make an extra effort because of the difficult financial situation. Here, it is pertinent to point out that several studies show (Griffith & More, 2010; Gill, 2002; Henwood, 1993) that workers operating in the ICT sector are conscious that their work is not like an eight-to-five job, but can often spill over into their personal time during the evening and sometimes the weekend.

The pressure around working time in ICT companies may be cyclical and tied to specific jobs (Whitehouse & Preston, 2005), and according to the Manager of the Software Development Department (David), at Tech Co., in practice this could mean:

David: Working till seven for practically six months, including weekends sometimes...

The Implementation Consultants who worked in the Business Application Unit faced different challenges due to the fact that they had to travel regularly and typically worked abroad in Libya, the UK and in other parts of the EU. Some workers spent long periods abroad and, for example, George (Manager), said that workers who operate with the oil and gas industry generally work for:

George: twenty four hours, so we have someone who practically spends his life in the desert. So, he spends a month there - not his life, he spends a month there and a month at home.

Although this did not affect all the team members, regular travelling and working abroad is challenging and has a bigger impact on the personal side of life.

When workers spend periods away from home, on their return they generally have to cram all their errands in the little time they have left, thus reducing their free time even further. It is interesting to note that out of the seven original team members working in the Business Application Unit that I had interviewed in the early stage of this research (2008-2009), only two remained with the team by 2013. Of the current team (2013) made up of three women and ten men (including the manager), only one male member of staff has children (and these are grown up). The others, who are younger in age, do not have children and hence it is important to assess the sustainability of work in such a demanding environment over the long run, especially for men and women who want to have a family or those who have other commitments outside work.

The work-life conflict seemed more acute for workers who worked directly with clients. This typically brings more pressures to deliver on time, especially when systems crash or when urgent maintenance is needed and can mean that work has to be done at night, during the weekend and even during holiday periods. For example, some of Tech Co.'s clients operate in the health, finance and the security world and so, immediate attention must be given by the Implementation Consultants when malfunctions develop. Being on call to attend urgent calls can disrupt their personal time and raise more challenges for workers in such situations (Bailyn, 2006a; Bailyn et al., 2005).

During a focus group session held in 2013, members of the Business Application Team complained that in the last years, since the economic crisis, workers who left the unit were not being replaced and hence they had to take

on jobs previously done by their colleagues on top of their already substantial workload. This meant that some workers had multiple projects running simultaneously. For example, Kevin (Senior Implementation Consultant) remarked:

Kevin: I am working on overseeing seven maximum projects. I am seeing them one at a time ... so at the moment, if I work one hour a day on each project, my time is full.

Apart from handling multiple projects, Kevin's work also entailed travelling to the north of Europe on a regular basis to work on site. The combination of handling multiple projects and regular travelling may give an indication of the commitment required and how this could possibly exacerbate the work-life conflict. In fact, when I asked Kevin, who is married, whether he would want to continue travelling as he was doing now if he had a young family, he replied:

Kevin: Definitely not, because you are travelling so much you have so little time when you come back home ... it will be impossible to do so.

Here Kevin highlights the work-family conflict of workers who work abroad regularly and how such workers anticipate that they may have to choose between family and work in this context (Single Agenda Logic). Clara, who works in the same team as a Senior Implementation Consultant, also spoke about the unreasonable expectations and how these affect work-life issues:

Clara: Because we are quite busy and we lack resources, some of the expectations on the workers are becoming a bit unreasonable, because...like I get emails coming in on the week-end expecting me to, things I choose to do as part of my job, but ... getting an email Thursday night telling me to deliver a report by Sunday is

unreasonable by anything ... I shouldn't even be reachable ... I mean I shouldn't even be on email on the weekend, but because of the pressure of the work, the demands .... it becomes unrealistic, a sign of the times, but it becomes frustrating ... until we get more people, we have to ... it falls on us.

Whilst complaining about the unreasonable expectations, Clara here seems resigned about work pressure and dismisses it as a sign of the times (Lewis, Brannen & Nilsen, 2009; Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2010b). Yet, she also makes it clear that its effect was not cost-neutral on her.

### **5.1.3. Increased Controls on Time and the Introduction of Bureaucratic Processes that Affect Work-life Issues**

The lack of recruitment to replace staff and the intensification of work were not the only consequences that workers were noticing as a result of the economic downturn. For example, where previously workers could take decisions on their own on matters related to work and life, the company was introducing more controls and increasing bureaucracy. In part, this was happening because the number of workers had increased significantly but whilst most of the participants understood the need for more organisation, some had concerns about the increased bureaucracy and for example, Peter (Finance Manager) lamented that:

Peter: The organisational culture is very much changing to be a more policy driven organisation. I mean, paper work. When I joined the company, ok, it was a small company at that time but I was amazed by the ... sort of culture, now it's much more, it's transforming itself into an organisation which has a lot of policies, a lot of procedures, a lot of paperwork, a lot of bureaucracy ... I think we are stretching things too far ... There are general

policies ... which may be applicable for very large organisations, of 200, 300 people. But we have like 80 not 200 (workers) here.

The same participant recounted an episode about his colleague whom he described as being: “a very very hard worker” and who was: “always having problems with his wife because he worked so hard.” Due to the work pressures he could not take all his annual vacation leave, but because of a newly introduced HR procedure he found out that he could not re-schedule his leave to the following year. As a result he lost all the vacation leave that he had accumulated and this left a negative impact on him and was also noted by his co-worker who was showing his dissatisfaction with the increased bureaucratisation. This episode opens up the debate between informality and the formalisation of work-life policies in SMEs and the extent of flexibility that can be allowed in organisations in specific contexts as they increase in size and the number of workers (Lewis, Stumbitz, Miles & Rouse, 2013).

The episode of the lost annual leave due to more stringent regulations signified that workers at Tech Co. were losing, rather than gaining autonomy at work. When this happens it is likely to affect the personal side of life too. It is interesting to note that Tech Co. has been established for more than three decades and grew gradually over the years as an offshoot of another business. This means that at the beginning, the organisation was run on a very informal basis as most of the workers were friends who had known each other for a long time. This combination of trust and informality worked well for a number of years as the company grew from strength to strength to become one of Malta’s leading ICT companies. However, when six years ago the number of workers exceeded the 50 mark, the directors decided that it was time to recruit an HR

Manager in order to formalise employment relation matters and to streamline HR processes. Till then the company had thrived on a very loose structure with few controls and limited bureaucracy.

Because I was using CIAR, I had the opportunity to engage in a discussion with the directors in order to find out the reasons why they were increasingly feeling the need to intensify controls and to introduce more bureaucracy when the company had been doing so well in a less structured environment. When I challenged them on this issue, Alex (Director) defended the decision to increase bureaucracy and controls by arguing that:

Alex: You have to put in some rules, hence, the rules. This is not even a democracy. It's a system; when you have a community and an organisation which is getting bigger, again, you need to have these rules. You can't just rely only on trust. You have to have trust, but if you have, say, three hundred thousand persons, do you trust everyone? No. And, there's a society in general, you have to have rules, you know this, Anna.

The remark that the organisation was “not even a democracy” begs the question whether it was slowly becoming more authoritarian especially when taken within a context of decreasing trust and a clear move to restrict the work-life boundary.

In order to test the autonomy that workers have in integrating work and life, during a focus group with three senior Implementation Consultants who often work abroad, I asked them what they would do if on the next day they had a dental appointment, or if they had to go to hospital with a relative or if say they needed to get their hair cut before going abroad. These same workers had

earlier told me that when working abroad, they regularly worked very long hours in the evening and during the week-ends and so, in the process, they gave many hours for free to the organisation. However, when asked this question, it did not occur to any one of them to integrate some of their personal needs with work. In fact, Kevin (Senior Implementation Executive) said: “I would fill up a form” and “pass through bureaucracy” and ask for vacation leave. In a similar vein, Charles (Senior Implementation Executive) replied: “I don’t mind taking it off from my vacation leave.”

Giving extra time for free to the organisation was perceived to be fair and just, yet, the workers’ low sense of entitlement (Lewis & Haas, 2005; Lewis & Smithson, 2001) seemed to prohibit them from expecting much back in return. This suggests that the workers’ concept of work and life at Tech Co. was in the Single Agenda Logic (work-life in conflict mode), because whilst workers were being generous with their personal time and gave it for free to the company, conceptually they seemed barred from using any time for their personal use, even if they amply compensated for it in other ways. When during a focus-group discussion on flexibility or the lack of it I pointed out that the only form of temporal flexibility I had noted was in relation to their starting and finishing time, it dawned on the workers that they were not being given a very fair deal and one of the participants (Charles - Senior Implementation Executive) sarcastically noted that at Tech Co.:

Charles:                    We seem happy with small mercies.

The clear separation of work from personal life was enforced by the organisation through clear rules like for example, when and how workers could take time-off from work. In fact, if they did not ask for vacation leave sufficiently early, they risked being chided and Clara said that, at times, when she went to ask for some hours off the day before, she was: “sometimes told off.”

This shows that overall at Tech Co., the management-workers’ relationship resembled an adult-child relationship even though they were high-end ICT graduates occupying senior positions. In fact, it is ironic to note that these senior Implementation Consultants who were usually entrusted to work on their own without much supervision on projects abroad, not only had to make a formal request to run an errand, but they also needed to do it sufficiently early to avoid problems with their manager. When instilling such bureaucratic and rigid work processes, employees are constantly being reminded that work and life must be kept apart if the needs emanate from the workers’ side. Such values do not auger well for the Dual Agenda.

On the issues of management, it is interesting to note that at Tech Co., some of the persons who make it to the top of the hierarchy and who end up taking decisions that also affect work-life issues, have had very little training in HR matters. In fact, one of the Directors remarked that managing people is not his forte and he does so by trial and error:

Director: You muddle here and muddle there, without no confidence at all, because you’re not trained, we’re not trained. You’re trained in other things, do you understand? ... I do play the smart Alec at times ... but in general, let me put it this way ... It’s a technique,



the skill has to be there. Without it you simply muddle on. Now it's the same thing with managing people. We're not properly trained. We're not formally trained because we didn't have the time, we didn't have the aptitude, we were not keen to do so. I don't really enjoy it, managing people. It's an issue. What I'm doing, is because things have progressed that way.

He added that:

Director: It's ironic that you have a person ... I have an engineer who is doing technical work, brilliant technical work, and in order to promote him, you promote him to a management position. It doesn't really make sense. If you have a technical person who is doing a good piece of work, give him more technical work. Do you understand?

Here, the Director is admitting that he had neither the aptitude nor the wish to manage people. Furthermore, he claimed that at Tech Co. employees with a purely technical background are often promoted to managerial posts without any training in human resources. Hence, the work-life debate in this organisation was being conducted with persons who were savvy technically but who seemed less prepared in matters that focus on the human side of work and life. This is important to note because discussing complex work-life issues may prove to be more challenging to face in such a context.

## **Conclusion**

In this section, I touched upon several issues that frame this study in a particular time and place and in a specific micro organisational context. Here, I wanted to show the complexities that arise when discussing work-life issues

and the many factors and voices that have to be considered when doing so. For this reason, I tried to point out some of the personal and collective values and the differing management approaches on matters relating to work flexibility and autonomy. For example, I showed that at Tech Co. one of the directors suggested military discipline as a way of keeping ICT workers under control; and although not exhibiting such extreme values, the other two directors, also indicated that they were annoyed by those who were transgressing the set time boundaries. The fixation on control and time (rather than on the output) is the antithesis of flexibility and autonomy and this may flag some of the hurdles ahead when opening up the debate about work-life integration in such a masculine context.

In this chapter, I also discussed how the financial crisis was impacting on work-life issues. Here, I showed that due to lower profitability the company was trying to keep costs down and for example, workers who were leaving the organisation were not being automatically replaced. This meant that, in spite of the typical cyclical pressure associated with ICT contract work (which can lead to long working hours and even weekend work towards the end of the project), during the financial crisis, the bar was raised even higher, and workers were expected to do even more with less. This was resulting in a lot of work intensification and unreasonable expectations which were generally considered as a sign of the times and accepted without much resistance. In parallel, from a company which had grown and flourished with few formalities and controls in the past, the directors were now feeling the need to introduce more formalities and controls to keep things in check as the company expanded. For example,

this affected when and how workers could apply for and take their vacation leave, and overall this increased bureaucracy and created more work-life restrictions.

Whilst noting these moves which were hampering the conceptualisation of autonomy, I concluded this section by showing that the majority of the directors and managers at Tech Co. had a technical background and were mostly attracted to technology and computing. In this environment, the work-personal life debate did not seem to feature much on the company's agenda and deliberations to improve working conditions to allow better work-life integration felt rather risqué in the given economic scenario and in this organisational setting.

Now that I have woven in some of the internal and external factors that can help build a more robust picture of the micro and macro context in which this study is set, I will move to answer the research questions relating to the ideal worker (Rapoport et. al, 2002) (Questions one, two and three) and questions which look at the potential or barriers of Dual Agenda change through the use of CIAR (Questions four and five). As I go along I also reflect on how my findings can inform theory and practice (Question six).

## **Chapter 6 Defining Ideal (ICT) Workers and the Work-Life Interface as Analysed through the Dual Agenda Lens**

### **Introduction**

Questions around the conceptualisation and the definition of the ideal worker in the case study organisation are useful because they help us unearth and bring up to the surface some of the hidden gendered assumptions (Acker, 1990; Rapoport et al, 2002) on which work practices are built in the male dominated ICT sector (Truss et al., 2012; Whitehouse, 2006; Valenduc & Vendramin, 2004) in which this study is set.

In order to understand how the ideal worker is conceptualised at Tech Co. I asked the participants to define the ideal worker. During the conversation-type interviews, I also inserted questions related to the typical behaviour expected from the ideal worker and how their commitment is gauged. These questions were asked to the three directors, all the managers, and the workers operating in the two selected teams (the Business Application Unit and the Software Development Unit) at Tech Co. Apart from capturing the ideal worker at the conceptual level, I was also interested in seeing how the same values were manifested and reinforced in practice, and because I was using CIAR, I could challenge some of their fundamental assumptions in relation to work-life issues. This allowed me to make a better evaluation of how gendered values were impacting on certain work processes. Simultaneously, I was trying to open-

up the discussion on personal and family needs to enable my informants to reflect about existing work practices and to envision alternative work processes that not only make business sense, but which could also ameliorate the personal side of life - thus fulfilling the Dual Agenda needs (work-life in integration mode). This multi-layered analysis process made me realise how often things are taken for granted and are considered to be static and one dimensional when, in fact, there are a myriad of ways of looking at things if the perspective is altered (Burr, 2003) and if gendered assumptions are questioned and changed (Bailyn, 2011; Bailyn & Harrington, 2004; Rapoport et al., 2002).

Whilst digital technologies are considered to be more egalitarian than industrial technologies which were based on the physical rather than mental abilities (Wajcman, 2006), it is interesting to note that, in the vast majority of cases, the references made to the ideal worker in the ICT case study organisation were in the masculine gender, and many seemed to have a man in mind when talking about such workers. In this context, the issue of military discipline cropped up more than once and for example, one of the Directors (Philip) described ideal workers as “soldiers who can work on their own.” In keeping with masculine norms and traditions as discussed in the previous chapter (chapter five), during a discussion with all the directors about ideal workers, the exceptionally good workers were described as the “Ronaldos and the Peles”, in clear reference to past international male star footballers. All this suggests that the yardstick to measure the ideal worker at Tech Co. was based explicitly on male norms and male values and examples seemed to derive from that perspective (Acker, 1990). Whilst becoming more conscious of these masculine values, in the next

section I focus on how ideal workers were defined at Tech Co. and how these values linked to issues related to gender, masculinity and work.

## 6.1. Defining the Core Skills of the Ideal Worker

When I put across the question on the definition of the ideal worker, as expected, some of the informants could not give me an outright answer, but this does not mean that they did not have a prototype in mind. For example, when I put this question to Kenneth (Implementation Consultant) his first reaction was:

Kenneth: I do not know how to answer you....

This question was also put across to the managers and whilst evidently pondering on a male ideal worker, David (Software Development Manager) replied:

David: Look I'm hesitating, do you know why? Because I am trying to... the ideal worker shouldn't be ... everybody. I aspire to be an ideal worker, do you understand? In my own way. Ideal worker, obviously, as I imagine *him* to be.

Similarly, Alex, who is a Director said:

Alex: It's not an easy question, because there are many different roles in the company, and any one would need different skills and different qualities in different roles.

Alex's remark about how the definition of the ideal worker may alter according to the role one occupies, can help remind us that certain elements of the ideal worker may differ and change in the micro context of the organisation.

When probing about the expected attributes of ideal workers, the respondents eventually came up with a long list of different qualities and characteristics attached to such workers. Some said that the ideal worker at Tech Co. must be an intelligent person who is flexible, gives a lot of attention to quality and is able to provide solutions when challenges arise. Others insisted that ideal workers should show professionalism with the client and ideally be able to understand the sector and the business context which the clients operate in. For example, a worker with an accounting background was deemed to be in a better position to work on projects related to the financial world than someone with a purely technical background. George (Manager Business Application Unit) brought this out clearly when he argued that:

George: It's a combination of specialisation in the product and specialisation in the business behind the product. I mean, although we might find it more difficult now to find people like that, in the past we have always specialised in recruiting people who aren't just IT people; so, if for instance in the case of Maximo which is software for the production environment ... we would employ somebody who has worked in that environment; like now – Navichel is a product we have only taken recently which is retail distribution and so on; we looked for people who have come from that environment; I got somebody, for instance, who has been working in the accounts department at the IT department of a distributor and another before that ...they are able to recognise ... you know so they can relate to the client better.

That's what we consider to be our [ideal workers] ... not just techies and that's it....We have customers who are banks – we

have a banker who's about to retire who has worked in banks twenty five years.

This suggests that those with a broader background were considered better than those who operate exclusively inside the ICT world. Moreover, due to the small size of the island, several participants pointed out that workers at Tech Co. do not have the luxury of specialising in just one area of business as foreign workers in much larger companies do. Instead, they have to extend their knowledge and abilities by learning multiple programmes.

#### **6.1.1. The Hard and Soft Skills of the Ideal Worker**

Whilst the initial question about the attributes of the ideal worker brought different reactions from the participants, there were some common elements which were brought up over and over again. In fact, a dominant theme that was raised consistently in relation to the ideal worker, focused on the need for sound technical competence. For example, Kenneth, (Implementation Consultant) when asked to define the ideal worker at Tech Co. replied:

Kenneth : My feelings are that, ehmm, the more technical you are, ehmm, the more you are considered to be good at your work and you are considered as important.

Anna : Technical, what do you mean?

Kenneth: I mean, ehmm, technical knowledge on the particular product you are supporting ... if a client has a problem six months down the line, ... they phone us for help because they have a problem ... I think that the more you know the product the more you are able to answer the client without having to try it out yourself first.



Apart from the issue of technical competence it also became immediately clear, that in addition, many also mentioned the worker's ability to deal with the customer. For example David (Software Development Manager) said:

David: Ok competence means, there's technical competence, so your knowledge on technology and on the real solutions. That is key to our unit. Then there is the competence on how to tackle a customer. Our customers are very difficult, like every other customer and their requests are going to be this [big] size and they are going to be willing to pay for this [smaller] size. And the ability to manage the customer is key for our projects ... So it's competence of technology but also competence from a customer relations point of view which is critical.

When I probed further on this competence and asked him how he assesses the negotiating process when dealing with a difficult client, he replied:

David: The negotiating process, that is part of pre-sales, so it's not something that is charged for, but it's still required.

David here makes an important point on how these two skills (technical competence and negotiating skills) are evaluated during the billing process. Building a rapport with the clients and understanding their needs is deemed to be part of pre-sales for which no bill can be sent to the client, whilst the pure technical work is billable. So how are these two skills valued and do gendered assumptions play a role in this assessment?

### **6.1.2. A Gendered Evaluation of the Hard and Soft Skills of the Ideal Worker.**

As seen in the previous section respondents emphasised the importance of both technical and interpersonal skills. Yet, whilst confirming this, when I spoke to Liz (HR Manager), she suggested that at Tech Co., technical competence was given a priority over the other skills:

Liz: There is also the client relationship then, which is important. Because you can be a guru in trouble shooting, and then, when it comes to the client, you are not refined enough, you don't have the skills to give an image of the company. Those two are important. I would rather ... we tend to give more importance to the technical aspect, because then we don't emphasise enough the soft, the soft skills of the individual. We may complain about them, or we may not be so happy about them, but we don't ... I think, in practice, the technical aspect is rewarded much more ... We do, and we complain about it when it's not working, but it doesn't become an issue, a big issue, you can get away with it, sort of. It's the technical side that's more of a priority.

Here, Liz categorised the relationship with the client under 'soft skills' and possibly, because this is not considered to be a hard technical skill which can be billed, she implied that at Tech Co. there was a tendency to close an eye if a worker was not competent in both. However, ignoring the 'softer' side may mean not cultivating sufficiently the relationship with the clients, for it is through the 'soft' skills of listening and communicating that workers can understand the clients' needs and act upon them. The Manager of the Business Application (George) was very well aware of this and indicated that:

George: The software mostly works out of the box and you need to configure it by changing parameters. So basically all of the work is about understanding the requirements of the customer and then translating it and adapting it.

Thomas, (Implementation Consultant) also noted that there is a danger that :

Thomas: The client understands it one way, and you understand it in another way, and because some of the clients are foreigners, it becomes more difficult ... to comprehend ... It depends on the project. Right now, yes, there are a lot of foreigners ... but sometimes you spend weeks discussing things with them.

Thomas's observations highlight the importance of listening and communication skills, and how these are fundamental for orientating the project in the right direction. On this issue, Clara (Senior Implementation Consultant), who forms part of a very small minority of women who work on the technical side of the business, complained that the issue of dealing with the clients was not being given the attention it merited. She claimed that at Tech Co. many assumed that projects were successful when they were implemented on time and within budget; however she argued that:

Clara: Those things annoy me a little bit because that is not all a successful project is. You know, it's your relationship with the client, it's the follow-up support, it's the rapport you build with the client...because long term ... long term, I think it's going to have other benefits to the company ... and those are the things that I think we are losing sight of.

She explained that at times, even though the project was delivered on time, on budget and things work, a client might:

Clara: have to ring me fifty times and if the client is not happy you are going to be hearing from him and then you will spend a lot of time rectifying.

All this suggests that building a positive relationship with the client and understanding their needs are fundamental for business in the long run. Yet, at Tech Co., ideal workers were excused by the HR Manager for not having these 'soft skills' as long as they ticked the hard-core techie box. Similar to Perlow's work (1997) with engineers in the American context, these findings indicate that the soft skills were under evaluated even though these were deemed to be essential for the smooth running of this service-oriented organisation.

### **6.1.3. Dual Agenda Analysis of the Skills Related to the Ideal Worker.**

The overvaluation of the hard technical skills raises a number of questions and it becomes essential to ask why these were given more importance when compared to the softer skills (like negotiating, listening, and interpreting skills). In line with other studies in this sector (Truss et al., 2012; Whitehouse, 2006; Gill & Grint, 1995), the focus on the technological skills seems to contribute to the idea that the ICT industry is built on masculine values and that the benchmark for quality also seems to emanate from their masculine perspective. Technology in its broad sense is a powerful symbol of Hegemonic Masculinity (Wajcman, 1991; Cockburn, 1983) and it is often assumed that men have a natural flair for it, to the point that till today the ICT world is, to a great extent, still dominated by men. Even in developed countries, men still account to around 80% of ICT specialists (Roggemann, 2013).

By implication, one may erroneously conclude that women do not possess an innate disposition towards technology like men do and hence they are “technologically ignorant” (Wajcman, 2006, p.2). On the other hand, soft skills which are sometimes expressed in terms like ‘patience’ and ‘emotional intelligence’, are stereotypically linked to women and not men (Kelan, 2005). Using this false gendered logic, were men at Tech Co. excused from possessing these ‘soft skills’ because it was (mistakenly) assumed that they lack the natural disposition towards them? Whilst a definite answer does not emanate from this research, it is interesting to note that throughout the study none of the workers mentioned that they were being pushed to cultivate their soft skills, whilst there was a very strong push for workers to continue building on their technical acumen. Whilst at first this may appear as a harmless decision taken by various actors within the organisation, neglecting the relationship with the client (as discussed above) and accepting lower interpersonal skills may prove detrimental to the organisation in the long run. This is likely to affect the workers’ output and the client’s satisfaction with the work done during the project. It is interesting to note, that at Tech Co., what lacks on the soft-skills side seems to be amply compensated for on the technical side, in that there is a constant emphasis that workers should keep abreast with technological change because this happens fast and it happens regularly.

After discussing the issue of hard and soft skills, in the next section I bring up the subject of self-reliance in relation to keeping abreast with technological changes. Here I argue that at Tech Co., being a hard-core techie is not a state

of fact but a process and a struggle. This is because updating one's skills has to be done on a regular basis, often on-top of regular work. Here I show how keeping abreast with technological changes comes at a cost for both employer and employees and this has an impact on the work-life interface.

## **6.2. Self Reliance – The Willingness to Keep Abreast with Technology and its Cost**

As I have shown in the previous section, the need to keep abreast with technological advancement and change was high at Tech Co. Many saw this as a challenge and a commitment and for example David (Manager Software Development) remarked:

David: For our unit, the challenges ahead are, first of all it's the technology. As you know IT is constantly evolving, changing, improving and we also have to constantly evolve, change.

Likewise, in the context of a discussion with the HR Manager, (Liz), about the concerns and challenges that workers were facing, she replied:

Liz: Concerns, I don't know. I think, mainly it would be keeping up with the technologies, with the knowledge that is required to be able to do your job properly, in the environment ... learning environment for them. On one hand, it's beneficial, and they like it and probably it's one of the reasons that they stay at Tech Co., because it exposes them to a number of technologies and they're all the time learning, but on the other hand it creates a challenge, it's like you need to keep up to date every day, every single day.

Liz here presents the need to keep up-to-date as something which is beneficial and attractive to workers but yet, as something challenging because it has to be done on a regular basis. Some categorised this under the pretext of willingness to learn and when discussing the ideal worker with one of the managers (Tony, Manager Enterprise Platform) he remarked that:

Tony: It is that willingness (to learn) that makes a difference. The academic background and experience is important ... but willingness to learn is more important.

When discussing the issues of training with my informants, contradictory views emerged about its significance: some perceived training as an investment whilst others saw it as a waste of time. David (Manager Software Development) who perceived training positively argued that as a company they:

David: encourage people doing degrees and people doing courses. As a company we encourage that, although so far there's no financial contribution, we still encourage it. So if people need to take a week study leave we don't find any objections and we also grant half that leave back if it's study leave and the study leave relates to their job. So we encourage training, we encourage certifications, we encourage degrees, etc. and then there's also the research part, so we're constantly, even when new projects come in we're looking at new means, new technologies, new mechanisms.

Likewise, Roderick (Software Developer) told me that certain categories of workers are encouraged to sit for specific exams:

Roderick: because they also, here they push you on certain subjects and exams. Every year they tell me: you have to do these exams to get certain certifications. And they, apart from these being a good thing which helps you at work, they take certain points so that they

can become Microsoft Partners and so on, and things like that...So now, perhaps, I plan, perhaps I do these exams.

The push to study and to sit for exams is here being presented as a win-win situation in that it will bring benefits to him and to the organisation. This is because in passing the exams, workers like Roderick can be accredited for reaching their grade, whilst simultaneously the company improves its chances of becoming a registered Business Partner with big companies like Microsoft. Hence, in this case studying for exams is not entirely for personal gain and this may be one of the reasons why it was encouraged.

In fact, in contrast to this positive attitude towards education and training, during an interview with the HR Manager, she unexpectedly told me that the directors were not allowing her to promote free Masters degrees which were being financed through a European Union programme:

Liz: The training aid programme, you know you can, also includes Masters,... and there is this huge possibility for our employees, those who would like to start a Masters, we can assist them, by just doing an application. We don't issue any money, because funds will come from Employment and Training Corporation, and it goes straight to the individual, and all we do is, as an incentive, we just send in an application ... Do you believe it, that they don't want me to promote it?

When I inquired why this was happening, Liz replied:

Liz: Because when you are doing a Masters, you're distracted, believe it or not my idea was to send them an email, telling them that there is this opportunity, if there someone thinking of doing a Masters, we can give them seventy per cent of their fee, there is money sitting there waiting to be used by companies. I have no trouble at all, just to ask my assistant to process an application. It doesn't



take much time, they give priority to something else, they won't be able to stay after ... to think about work.

In line with other studies (Carter & Silva, 2011, Bailyn, Drago & Kochan, 2001, Acker, 1990), Liz's claim raises a very important point about the workers' commitment to paid work, and how this should take precedence over all other aspects of personal life. This suggests that anything that might detract the attention, the energy, the time and the full dedication of the workers to the organisation is less tolerated. Liz remarked that the workers themselves were aware of this, in fact, she mentioned an anecdote wherein one of the managers, sent an email to the director and told him:

Liz: Listen, as you know I am doing my final step of the Masters, I'm doing my thesis. If you want me to give two hundred per cent to Tech Co., I am ready to postpone my thesis for four months, but you tell me...

Here Liz is speaking about a worker whose "life is Tech Co." and who typically worked: "from seven o'clock in the morning till midnight every day. She was concerned that if he worked on his thesis it meant "his day is going to be shortened" and hence:

Liz: The minute he is going to put in something else, in the same time, and he is going to put in a whole Masters in it, Tech Co. is going to suffer.

Through Liz's claim it becomes clearer how studying, which was earlier presented as something essential and which was being encouraged by some, was also simultaneously seen as something negative by the directors to the point that they did not allow the HR manager to promote free Masters degrees

to their workers. The idea that putting in something else (like studying) is going to conflict with work is worrying, because if studying and keeping up to-date with technological changes are not tolerated, how will other personal matters like family needs be assessed in such an environment? Considering that family and personal needs are often assumed to conflict with the ultimate aims of the organisation to make profits, how can work-life integration be contemplated in such an environment built on the Single Agenda logic?

During an interview with the HR Manager (Liz) in the context of a discussion about male employees who have family responsibilities, I asked her how the company sees such workers and I inquired how they will be judged in the long run:

Liz: I think we understand. There is understanding, you know there is understanding. But then, the minute you don't perform, then, that's the issue, you know? It's either because he's doing a Masters, or because he is tied up with family, and we start using these as excuses to a certain extent. And the expectation would be that: 'if he is available, if he can give more time, maybe he can...develop his performance.'

Whilst Liz here first appears to empathise with male employees trying to integrate work and family, as the conversation evolves, she implies that workers who do so, do it at their own risk. This suggests that at Tech Co. both family commitments and studying come with a warning because 'the minute' these workers don't deliver, then it becomes an issue to the organisation." The assumption that workers can always give more is problematic in itself, for who decides when workers have given enough? And what is considered sufficient or insufficient in terms of time and energy reserved for paid work? Such claims

expose the greedy side of organisations and confirm how it is in the interest of organisations to sow values that honour the supremacy of work over the personal side of life.

### **6.2.1. Focusing on the Discourse of Personal Choice and Conditioned Options in Relation to Keeping Up with Technological Change**

As I have shown above, at Tech Co. studying was deemed to be essential, yet it also appeared to conflict with real work. Since ICT workers constantly need to keep abreast with technological changes, I was interested to find out the *when* (for example, whether it was during normal working hours or not) and the *where* (for example, whether it was at the office or at home after their normal working hours) that workers were expected to do so. These questions did not yield clear cut answers and many implied that there needs to be a combination of formal on the job-training as well as self-training. For example, when I put this question to Roderick (Software Developer), he told me:

Roderick: They give us (time) here, in the sense, when we do something new, they give us time to carry out research, but if you really want to keep up-to-date you also need to work from home, in order to keep up...that means, apart from your work you need to continue at home, like searching for new development, you need to constantly keep yourself up-to-date.

When I put this question to the HR Manager, she gave me a similar reply and said:

Anna: And where does this keeping up-to-date happen, at the place of work, or after?

Liz: Yes, most of the time at the place of work, but to be able to do your job properly, I think, it is expected as well to keep up-to-date personally, you know, at your own time as well. Sometimes, we do mention this, as well, between us, that it shows when people are up-to-date all the time, that when they read a lot, and they are inquisitive in their job, you know, they want to know more, and they do a lot of research. Because it helps them, it helps them a lot. So I think that's one of, I would say, their concern within our environment.

Anna: Keeping up-to-date?

Liz: They have to keep up-to-date, because, otherwise, they stay behind, giving their, trying to cater for the requirements, the job requirements. They have to be up-to-date all the time.

Similarly, Joe (Manager Network Systems) commented that whilst they set up official training and sometimes send workers for specialised training abroad, however he insisted that finally:

Joe : It's up to them that they log in on our partner website, there are webinars, new things, it's up to them...when they do it, it's for their own knowledge at the end of the day.

When I asked him if they were expected to do so after work hours, he replied:

Joe: Yes, that's another problem we are currently facing, but we cannot do much about it – in this case they don't get paid... but it's sort of obligatory; it's up to them. For example sometimes they do it from home because it's online ... they deliver all these things from the States ... when they are doing live webinars they are doing them from the US meaning there is a time gap ... We have to do them after eight. After eight in the evening. Cause they are in Euston and in Euston, six o'clock in our evening is nine o'clock in the morning. It creates a bit of a problem to be honest because ... I don't force them cause it's a bit too much ... but unfortunately these things ... at the end of the day it's training, and we don't oblige, it's not obligatory. I mean it's up to you if you want.

Here the discourse focuses on the issue of choice, but it is well known that choices are generally conditioned options (Herman & Louis, 2012) because if workers truly have their final say, then it should not really matter whether they keep updated or not. When I inquired what would happen if, say a worker did not manage to keep abreast with technology or if they decided not to sit for any exams, Joe (Manager- Network Systems) replied:

Joe: Yeah, no. If totally in one year, he doesn't sit for anything (exams), then I pin- point it. I had a case, to be honest, last year, like, I pointed it to him in the review...

Anna: So they have to?

Joe: Yes, just to ... something. Like, I already told you they're not expected but we just send it to everyone involved in a certain area, then it's up to him to do it or not.

This extract captures the contradictory messages sent by people in management which include opinions that: "it's sort of obligatory" but yet "it's up to them" to keep up-to-date on the latest technological developments.

### **6.2.2. Keeping Up with Technological Change and the Blurring of the Work-life Boundary**

Apart from raising the issue of choice and constraint, the fact that a substantial amount of learning has to happen after normal working hours and during the workers' free time, it is important to point out that this also impinges on the work-life boundary. These assumptions may be specific to workers operating in the ICT world, yet they follow gendered assumptions around the ideal worker

who is typically assumed to be a man who is unencumbered with personal life commitments, and who thus, is able to use his free time for work-related, rather than for family-related matters. In this case, the underlying assumption that ideal workers can keep up-to-date with new technologies in their own free time, means that workers have to do it on top of their work by reading manuals, checking websites, enrolling in webinars or following on-line courses in the evening or during the weekend when they have some free time. Such an assertion is likely to create more problems to those who have family responsibilities or to those who have other commitments outside paid work. Because it is typically mothers who take on largest care-related loads, this may affect them more negatively and hence this assertion is not gender neutral.

The notion that the ideal worker is a man who gives priority to paid work over all other matters (because their wife/partner takes on the family responsibilities) is not the only gendered assumption made when one looks at the work processes at Tech Co. In fact, in the next section I focus on the concept of self-reliance in matters relating to training. Self-reliance is one of the four main tenets of true manhood (David & Brannon, 1976). Here I argue that the lack of proper induction and continuous training, seem to be build around masculine norms and hence they do not have a cost-neutral effect on the workers and on the organisation.

### 6.2.3. Self Reliance: The Ability to Cope without Much Induction Training

It is interesting to note that Workers at Tech Co. were not only expected to keep up with changes in technology, but when they join the company they are also expected to do a lot of self-learning without being given proper induction training. For example, Zoe (Implementation Consultant) remarked that when she joined Tech Co. she encountered many problems:

Zoe: I had a ... not a, a rough start, but it was difficult, but I had just come out of university, I was given a set of manuals, very little training from the very beginning, and I was just supposed to work alone, I had a lot of help from ... and everything, but it took me a while to figure out what I was supposed to do...

Anna: So you were thrown at the deep end?

Zoe: Yes, the baptism of fire they call it here ... so in the beginning ... the first approach to, it was a bit difficult for me, but obviously you either sink or swim, and I swam, so I am very happy.

At the time, Zoe was one of the few women working in the Business Application Unit. Here she frames her action on the concept of bravery because, in spite of the fact that she was not given much induction training, she managed to teach herself and make it through in the early days. As I argued above, one of the main pillars of true manhood (David & Brannon, 1976) is linked to the 'Sturdy Oak' where, like the solitary oak tree, true men are expected to show toughness and be self-reliant. The fact that Zoe felt proud to have made it through the "baptism of fire", suggests that she emulated the men who had been put to the test before her. But what was the real impact of such an underlying masculine value and what was its effect on organisational

effectiveness and on the employees?

#### **6.2.4. Dual Agenda Analysis on the Concept of Self-reliance in Relation to Induction and Training**

The issue of lack of induction and proper lack of training when new products are launched, was brought up over and over again by male workers too. For example, Kenneth (Implementation Consultant) claimed that:

Kenneth: They make us train ourselves, and sometimes I appreciate this and at others time no. You are expected to train yourself, through trial and error, through help, through books.

Whilst Kenneth saw the negative and positive side of self learning, others like Daniel, (Implementation Specialist) showed more concern when I asked him about the challenges he was facing:

Anna: What are the biggest challenges you are facing at the moment?

Daniel: My career, because, everything is new to me at the moment, for example, they gave me this new technology without training ... and I have to implement it. Worst case scenario, server breaks down, I have to go there immediately, so everything is new, everything is ... mistakes ... Personally I find everything as a challenge and I don't say: 'because I have no training I cannot do it'. I get it by the scruff of the neck and I try and go at it with my all...But if I had training I would have, sort of, ermm ... have a more wide knowledge.

Daniel's claim serves to bring out the negative impact that lack of training was having on his career and on the organisation. Likewise, Ray (Senior Software Developer) brought up the issue of output and efficiency and how this is



impacted upon by the lack of training. He argued that:

Ray :            Sometimes we use new technology, and they tell us: now it's in your hands, it's up to you. And that guarantees inefficiency, if you have to do it on your own ... give us at least enough training to enable us to use it...they assume that we can dive into it and find out. Look, if we set on it, we have the Internet, and so if we have a problem we can look it up on the Internet, and you're ready, but very often, if we are not given training we are very inefficient, in our output ... but on the other hand, more training, means that you are using your time training, instead of actually working.

Ray's comments raise a number of important points. First and foremost he asserts that lack of training is having a negative effect on output and efficiency and yet, surprisingly, he also assumes that training conflicts with real work. This claim seems to be in line with an argument I made earlier where I remarked that at Tech Co., studying, family and even training are looked upon as though they conflict with the supremacy of real work. This assertion was also picked up by the HR Manager (Liz) who said that during the first six months of their employment, when workers at Tech Co. are learning:

Liz:            ...they're doing nothing, not productive at all.

Here the HR Manager is equating learning with doing nothing and hence, to a certain extent training is seen as the opposite of real work. Such assertions may further contribute to the notion that ideal workers, being technically savvy resilient males unencumbered with family responsibilities, will always find a way to cope on their own without much induction or follow-up training. Whilst some workers like Zoe seem to manage to get by without proper induction training,

this was not always the case and for example Kenneth (Implementation Consultant) remarked that on the issue of self-training:

Kenneth: I do not see me as doing too well when I am training on my own. I do try, but if it doesn't work on the second or third time round, I tend to get frustrated, I don't give up but I shun it ... I prefer to ask, especially when I know that someone else would know the answer. So, with the pressure that you have during the day and the deadlines ... I find that it makes more sense to ask.

Whilst airing his frustration at not being able to learn on his own, Kenneth is clearly showing that lack of training is not only having a negative impact on him (frustration) but is affecting his co-workers (he asks them to help him out). Charles (Senior Implementation Consultant) too speaks about the lack of induction training and claims that at Tech Co.:

Charles: We are not even trained on products we sell, let alone on other things ... but for the young ones it's important that these do not just enter the track but they have training opportunities ... I am worried that the 90% that I know, I may only be giving them 60% of the knowledge I should be imparting.

When I asked him whether he was able to pass on the experience he gained to the newly recruited members of staff, he lamented that:

Charles: We don't have time to teach. We don't have sessions where we teach. We had conflicts with a particular manager ... For example recently when we had a new member of staff and he asked me to teach him the system of each client - which means if I have ten clients so I have to teach him the system of each particular one and I found it to be wasteful of my time and of everybody's time, I said no. I said I'll give training on the product and then he can adapt. It's then simpler to tell him we've used this and this ... He has to get the foundation right. I tell him what the product can do and then I say we use this product here and that one there.

Because if I have to be too specific it will take too long and we'll never get there.

This discourse highlights the double-edged sword brought by the lack of induction training to the younger workers and how this puts more pressure on the more experienced workers. This means that senior members of staff are frequently disturbed and as Clara (Senior Implementation Consultant) remarked, this means that “bottlenecks are created.” She claimed that this lowered their productivity and put more pressures on them. In turn, this puts an ‘obligation’ on the more experienced workers to be available at the office to help the junior staff members in their teams who get stuck. In fact, when discussing the possibility of teleworking, Kevin said that he felt obliged to come to the office every day because he knew that there were untrained people in his team who would need his assistance.

Hence, assuming that workers can get by with little induction training has implications on both the organisational side (in terms of organisational effectiveness) and on the private side of life (in terms of encroachment on the workers’ free time), with possible detrimental effects on both.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter which develops around the definition of the ideal worker raises a number of interesting points that show the linkages between masculinity and

the conceptualisation and the manifestation of the ideal worker. At Tech Co. the ideal worker can be summed up as a *self-reliant hard core techie*. My arguments for this definition were built around three indicators that emerged through my findings, namely: (1) the masculine gender linked to the ideal worker operating in the ICT context; (2) being a hard core techie; (3) being self-reliant (in terms that the ideal worker is able to get by with little induction and subsequent training).

Linked to the issue of Hegemonic Masculinity and men's assumed superiority in matters related to technology, I opened this chapter by highlighting how most of the references made to the ideal worker at Tech Co. were generally expressed in the masculine gender. Furthermore, the measurements used to define ideal workers were also based on masculine values (for example the reference to the Ronaldos and Peles). These masculine values became more evident when assessing the soft and hard skills of the ideal workers. For example, in spite of a clear consensus that the ideal worker in the case study organisation should ideally have both technical as well as interpersonal skills to be able to deal with the client, it became evident that at Tech Co. there was a disproportionate emphasis on the hard technical skills. As a result of that, little attention was given to how workers could continue developing their soft skills (like listening, communication and negotiating skills) and the comment made by HR Manager that there was a tendency to close one eye when it comes to soft skills, captures the prevailing attitude adopted at Tech Co. on this issue.

Being in an environment where the vast majority of workers were males, I

showed that whilst at first this value appears to be cost neutral, when filtered through the Dual Agenda lens, it becomes apparent that when workers do not manage to build a good rapport with their clients, and when they fail to understand and interpret their needs properly, problems and time delays are likely to follow. Time costs money and hence the under emphasis on soft skills can be counterproductive in the long run for the organisation.

The other main issue that emerged through this chapter is related to the concept of self-reliance, in that ideal workers were expected to find ways to keep abreast with technological change. Whilst amplifying on the challenges that this brings to the workers, I highlighted some of the contradictory stances taken on self-learning and showed how this was put forward as both an obligation and as a choice. Furthermore, I highlighted how learning and training was considered as both essential (since this brought clear benefits to the company) and also as non-productive time (to the point that the HR Manager was not allowed to publicise free Masters degrees to the workers).

The concept of self-reliance was not only expected in the updating aspect of knowledge, but I showed how workers at Tech Co. were at times given little if any induction training. This element of self-reliance is best captured through the quote of Zoe who commented that this process felt like the “baptism of fire” where one “either swims or sinks.” Filtered through the Dual Agenda lens, the sense of bravery and self-reliance expected from the workers (rather than assuming that workers initially may need help and a proper induction course) is closely linked to one of the main tenets of masculinity through which, like the

lone oak tree (The Sturdy Oak), true men are expected to be self-reliant and resilient (David & Brannon, 1976). The impact of this masculine value does not seem to be cost neutral and I showed how the lack of training was lowering productivity; was causing bottlenecks and delays in projects and was increasing the pressure on the more experienced workers (for example in having to solve the problems of the junior staff, caused by lack of training).

Table 6.1 below captures the essence of the ideal worker and gives an overview of the underlying masculine values, their manifestation and the impact they have on organisational effectiveness and on the workers:

**Table 6.1 Defining and looking at the impact of the ideal worker in an ICT and gendered context**

<b>The ideal worker in an ICT and gendered context –                      A (male) self reliant hard core techie                      who can get by with limited induction and limited follow-up training</b>				
<b>Defining the ideal worker</b>	<b>Underlying value and its manifestation</b>	<b>The result of the gendered assumption</b>	<b>Negative impact on Organisational effectiveness</b>	<b>Negative impact on the workers</b>
<b>Man as ideal (ICT) worker</b>	References to the ideal worker mostly expressed in the masculine gender  Ideal workers compared to the Ronaldos and Peles	The vast majority of ICT workers in the case study organisation are men and this is considered as normal	Losing out on the lived experiences of women which are different to those of men	Men are assumed to be unencumbered and to always give priority to work– men are covertly pressured to comply to this assumption
<b>A hard core techie</b>	<b>Being technically savvy</b> as a symbol of Hegemonic Masculinity  (Men) having a natural flair for technology	Over-evaluation of the technical skills  Little attention is given to the development of soft skills  Building a rapport with the client is not considered as real work  Very little induction training	The hours used in building a rapport with the client are not billed  Less effective communication with the client can orient the project in the wrong direction	Difficulties in interpreting the clients' needs  More time to rectify errors which could have been avoided in the first place with better communication
<b>A self-reliant worker who can get by with limited induction and limited follow-up training.</b>	<b>Self reliance- as a means of testing true manhood</b>  <b>Tough workers can learn on their own and mostly during their own free time</b>  <b>Learning is equated with non productive work</b>	Little time is devoted to formal training during office hours  Unless it brings direct benefits to the organisation, learning is not promoted	Bottlenecks in projects  More mistakes due to lack of proper induction training	Pressure on workers to self-learn  A consistent struggle to keep up-to-date  Frustration and Increased pressure on the more experienced workers and those with outside commitments  Chances of Teleworking are reduced as workers continue to depend on each other

In the next chapter, I focus on the issue of time in order to assess how gendered assumptions and the Single Agenda Logic affect the work-life interface of workers in this context.



## **Chapter 7 The Use of Time and the Intersection with Work-life Issues in Gendered Organisations – A Different (masculine) Dual Agenda?**

### **Introduction**

When trying to answer questions related to the definition of the ideal worker and how these principles are reinforced in practice, it becomes essential to expand the focus on the use of time and space. This will allow a better understanding of how people feel about their work and their non-work lives and how their work-life choices will in turn affect them and the organisation.

As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, Temporal and Spatial issues typically fall under the umbrella of Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) and these have a central role in the work-life debate. This is because in many ways integrating work with life is about being able to decide when, where, and how to work. Yet FWAs are not as straightforward as they may first appear to be, because these are directly and indirectly linked to assumptions and established work practices that emanate from ideal worker values and the presumed roles that women and men take-up in the family, at work and in society (Lewis, Gambles & Rapoport, 2007). Although time and space are often interlinked, I will deal with the issue of time in this chapter and discuss the issue of space in the following chapter.

By showing how time generosity impacts on the workers and on the case study organisation, in this chapter I discuss the insight gained on some of the “complex cognitive and social processes” (Lewis, 2007, p.143) that emanate through the use of time. This has led me to theorise and to categorise workers into four distinct categories in relation to time and time generosity namely: *The Good* (those workers who work long hours from the office thus maximising their face time), *the Not So Good* (those who work from the office and then continue working from home thus limiting their face time); *the Bad* (those who refuse to work extracurricular hours); and *the Ugly* (those who do not look good in the eyes of their superiors because they cannot work long hours because of family commitments). This categorisation may be useful in explaining how values around the issue of time and the ideal worker are produced and perpetuated in line with gendered assumptions that are subtle, yet extremely difficult to transcend and overcome. In order to see the main categorisation of workers at a glance see: Figure 7.1 on page 218. I will expand on how I arrived at this categorisation in the sections below.

## **7.1. Long Working Hours and the Ideal Worker**

Before discussing the issue of long working hours and the categorisation of workers on the basis of time and gender, it is pertinent to note that being seen at the office after normal working hours is often equated with commitment (Holt & Lewis, 2011; Bailyn, 2010; Pini & Mc Donald, 2008). Experimental evidence indicates, that even when no information is available on the output or the

productivity of the workers, their mere presence at the office raises the sense of dedication and commitment (Elsbach, Cable & Sherman, 2010). This suggests that people think more highly of workers who are seen at the office both during, but especially after, normal working hours. On the other hand, such assumptions seem to have a negative effect (for example in terms of pay rise and promotion opportunities) on persons who work remotely or those who are not able to stay at the office after normal working hours (Elsbach & Cable, 2012).

Technically speaking, if workers are well aware of their due deliverables, it should not really matter where they work, at what time they work and how long it takes them to do their tasks (Ressler, & Thompson, 2008). On the other hand, if the means of assessing output and productivity are weak, there may be more emphasis on time keeping and on being seen at the office (face time) after normal working hours as the studies discussed above have shown (Bailyn, 2010; Pini & Mc Donald, 2008; Elsbach, Cable & Sherman, 2010; Elsbach & Cable, 2012). For this reason I was interested in seeing whether workers at Tech Co. knew how they were being assessed and what measurements were being used to measure their productivity.

## **7.2. Assessing the Output and Productivity of Ideal Workers**

When during a focus group meeting with three senior Implementation Consultants, I specifically asked whether at Tech Co. there were instruments in

place to measure productivity, it became immediately clear that workers were not aware of them, and for example Charles (Senior Implementation Consultant), replied:

Charles: I don't think we have any measurements.

Likewise, his colleague Clara, (Senior Implementation Consultant) who had been working with the company for many years insisted that she had no clue of how she was being assessed. She claimed that she was under the impression that the managers were assessing them on perceptions more than anything else. In fact, she argued that whilst she was expecting a low efficiency mark because her projects time-wise were over-run, in reality she actually received a positive assessment, whilst others who finished their project on time, got a negative evaluation.

In the hope of getting a clearer answer, I also put the question of output measurement to one of the directors (Mark) who in turn linked good performance to timeliness (contrary to what Clara indicated above). He claimed that through the customers' feedback and their complaints it was possible to identify workers who were not delivering:

Anna: And do you have a method of measuring output?

Mark: Not the most efficient one, it's the feedback we get from the customers, from the quality of the projects, it's very difficult to hide it from Tech Co.; if you are not good it shows up.

Anna: How does it ...?

Mark: If you are working on a project, and we estimate it should take three weeks, and after two months you are still struggling with it, you're still having method problems. It will show up if you are not performing well; the customer will not pay.

Anna: So you have a way of assessing?

Mark: It comes back. So you find somebody who is staying in late, and you see that, and you still have customers complaining...so this one, he's putting in the time, and still not getting there, he's obviously not up to it. Why then if someone else is never around somehow, all his projects, the way people write emails, there are a lot of different things ...

Anna: To judge?

Mark: To judge the quality and how a person is thinking, if he is putting priorities right, the commercial aspect, not just the technical one.

Whilst the customers' feedback may give some indication on the output, in itself this does not resolve the productivity question, and when I asked the HR Manager specifically on how performance is measured in order to distinguish between the efficient and the non-efficient workers, she confirmed that they have a difficulty to do so:

Liz: We don't have this information. We talk about financial numbers. We see numbers, in terms of cost and all that, and assets ... but we don't have the human resources contribution, or rather the human capital is not being measured. So we don't, they don't see results. We work on assumptions, we work on interpretations. It's very subjective. Nothing is objective when it comes to HR ... From an HR perspective, I think, what we need to start doing it, and I'm looking into that, measuring the actual performance, you know? We don't really measure performance, at the moment. We don't have the infrastructure in place to be able to measure the performance ... It's very difficult and it's very subjective.

In order to keep track of time, workers at Tech Co. were obliged to fill in individual time sheets, but this still left workers in the dark regarding their

productivity. Time sheets often gave workers indications of who had worked extra hours exceeding what was originally estimated in the quote. When discussing the issue of estimates, Charles (Senior Implementation Consultant) hinted at their inexact nature (Lewis, 2007) and said that these were often “more like guesstimates than estimates.”

Hence, given that the means of assessing output at Tech Co. remain unclear to the directors, the management and to the workers, it becomes essential to ask how ideal workers were being assessed on issues related to time and how such assumptions affect work practices which intersect with work-life issues.

## **7.2. Time, Temporal Flexibility and the Ideal Worker**

The standard working hours at Tech Co. were eight to five, with a one-hour break for lunch, thus making up a standard 40-hour, five-day week. At face value, workers at Tech Co. had a certain amount of temporal flexibility because they could come in later than eight o'clock in the morning, as long as they then compensated for any time lost in the evenings. Because of this temporal concession, the management and many workers were under the impression that as a company, Tech Co. was very flexible. In fact Liz (HR Manager) insisted that

Liz:           As a company, we're not very fussy, and we don't like fussing people around on time...

The discourse around temporal issues was rarely straightforward and when I discussed the issue of long working hours in more detail with the HR Manager, she initially claimed that at Tech Co.:

Liz: It's not about working long hours, it's about results, that's the priority. No one is going to push you to work more hours, it's up to you.

However, before finishing the sentence she said that during performance reviews sometimes they do bring up the issue of time:

Liz: Basically, but occasionally, it is mentioned, even by the Directors, that they cannot stand people who come in late and at five on the dot, or five minutes before, they start packing up to leave ... they cannot stand it.

Anna: So what do they expect? Typically, what are you expected to do to be seen as a good worker?

Liz: Basically, to be ... to show commitment, but not commitment, because, I mean, I have a bit of a dilemma on this, to be honest. Because for instance, let me give you an example. My assistant, Joanne, she does a good job, and she works hard, but at five, she leaves, you know, every single day, I mean, I start talking to her, she starts looking at her watch, she knows that five is approaching, and she starts preparing. I mean she does a good job ...

Anna: But?

Liz: She irritates me, in a way, I want her to be seen; I might be wrong. Challenge me on this, but I don't want her to take that approach, it's like being at school, the bell rang, and I leave with the bell ringing, if you know what I mean. You have to look at it more, because I want her to become an executive, eventually, I don't want her to remain an assistant, as I want to shift a lot of things on her, but leaving on the spot at five every day, it's not the most important thing, but...

Anna: It's an important element ...?

Liz: Not a very important element, but I would like her to be a bit more concerned about it.

When I inquired whether Joanne ever stayed after work in the case of an emergency, Liz replied:

Liz: Yes, but she doesn't like staying late ... She works, she loves the job, I mean, I realise, she is very motivated, especially at the moment, I am giving her a lot of attention. But they don't like staying, I know, because every Friday at five thirty she has a hair appointment, every Friday, and she wouldn't want to lose that, to miss that, you know?

The HR manager's remarks confirm that whilst workers had an amount of temporal flexibility, the issue around time and working hours is far more complex than first meets the eye. In fact, whilst Liz had earlier claimed that at Tech Co. they were not fussy about time and that it was all about results and not long working hours, her claim about her assistant captures some of the ambivalence that reigned on the issue of time. It seems that motivation and doing a good job were somewhat obscured by the fact that the HR's assistant liked to leave work on time and this suggests that workers who regularly leave the office on time were somewhat transgressing ideal workers' territory and career-wise they risked being penalised for doing so.

When I challenged the HR manager on the inconsistencies around the use of time, Liz remarked that the people who gave them results were those who typically worked 24 hours and she added that it was such people who were eventually considered when a promotion came up. In line with other studies,



such assumptions show that at Tech Co. giving extra personal time for free to the company (I call this 'time generosity') was being used as a means to measure commitment and productivity (Elsbach, Cable & Sherman, 2010; Bailyn, 2010). Furthermore, time was being used, amongst other things, as a means to identify potential leaders and to sift out these from the ordinary workers who did not work long hours.

### **7.2.1. Generosity with Personal Time and the Ideal Worker**

In the context of the discussion about the ideal worker and the issue of time, I specifically asked the participants whether they felt any pressure to stay on at the office after normal working hours:

Anna: In general, are employees expected to stay on after work, generally?

Daniel: Erm, no not in general. I do it because I want to, but if I leave at five no one will come and tell me 'listen, you have to stay till six' ... but then you have to show responsibility for your work.

Daniel, is insisting on the fact that he was not 'obliged' to stay on, yet he linked this voluntary choice as a means to show his sense of responsibility. Many workers stressed the voluntary aspect of being generous with time, and for example Clara (Senior Implementation Consultant) framed this around a discourse of individual choice:

Clara: I work weekends and I go the extra mile, that's me, it's my choice, nobody asks me to do it.

When I probed about this issue with the managers and asked them whether they expected their workers to work over and above their normal working hours, they too emphasised the voluntary factor. For example, George (Manager Business Application) said:

George: In general no, it's a question of the employee realising that it's necessary. We don't need people staying till ten o'clock you know? But you know! I'd say very few people work an eight hour day; they don't just leave the minute ... Some do and I don't judge them. I don't because after all those are the terms, but in general we're quite lucky in that sense.

It is interesting to note that George used the word 'lucky' to explain the fact that few workers at Tech Co. worked a standard eight-hour day. By implication this suggests that, luckily for the organisation, committed workers choose to work longer hours, unlike those who, (unluckily for the organisation and for themselves), 'just' worked an eight-hour day. The automatic links between long working hours and the added bonus it brings to the organisation was brought up several times by various informants. Such assertions raise a number of questions about those workers who for some reason cannot stay on at the office after normal working hours, or those who are not ready to do so.

The demand for personal time after work at Tech Co. resonates with ideal worker values (Rapoport et al., 2002, Acker, 1990; Valenduc & Vendramin, 2004) and is more likely to have a negative impact on categories of workers who have other commitments or interests outside work. These include parents who are responsible for young children, elderly or disabled relatives, those who

are studying, and those who are active in their community (Bailyn, 2010; Lewis, 2010). However, since the majority of directors, managers and workers at Tech Co. were men, I wanted to look into the issue of long working hours and work-life issues using a masculine lens. This allowed me to extend my perspective on the issue of long working hours by looking at things through men's eyes in their roles as fathers and providers first and foremost. I was also interested in looking at how the context which men operate in, (Malta) affects and shapes up their values regarding long working hours, family, life and work. Being role models with a lot of influence in the organisation, I first looked at the values of those who lead the organisation (Directors and Managers) as I tried to decipher what long working hours meant to them.

### **7.2.2. Long Working Hours and Work-life Issues**

Since at face value the discourse on the use of time was incongruous and appeared as paradoxical at times (e.g. no fuss about time, but time generosity seems to separate the committed from the non-committed workers), I wanted to delve deeper into the subject and to look for some of the underlying hidden assumptions and values on which such conclusions were based.

On the issue of long working hours, it is interesting to note that many of the directors (all male) confessed that they themselves work very long hours or have done so in the past. This suggests that they transferred their implicit values about long hours onto their workers even though at the surface they

resisted this idea and still bandied about the idea of time flexibility. Furthermore, it must be noted that they framed the issue of extracurricular hours as both an individual choice and as something inevitable. This came out clearly during a discussion on the links between commitment and the ideal worker. When I asked Mark (Director):

Anna: In terms of their commitment, and their time, what do you expect of the ideal worker?

Mark: Very flexible. As long as they did the job I'm not interested how long it takes. If they can... some people like me ... I try to do too many different things and therefore ... I work late. I stay on till seven, usually.

Anna: Regularly?

Mark: Every day - seven. Occasionally till eight. Very rarely I go early, because I have an appointment outside the office, or meeting, and then, at six might as well go straight home. By the way, I go home, I switch on my laptop, enter the system of the office, and turn on answering emails. So I work weekends from home, evenings, I am always thinking about work, I am not relaxed enough.

Whilst stressing the long working hours and the clear blurring of the work-life boundary at the expense of his personal life, the other director Philip also spoke about the importance of working long hours and how everyone should do so at some stage in their career:

Philip: When we were a lot smaller team, I sometimes used to work till eleven, and whole nights to work on tenders, because it's like, these have to be done, it has to be done, and you do it, and you enjoy doing it. This is the crux of it. I am not suggesting that a person has to work nights here, or work until eleven because he is treated badly, do you understand? But if you really enjoy it, if you, if I have a piece of equipment, ... and am trying to make it work, and I can't, I have a problem, or if the client has a problem, you, you just do it. I mean, you have to enjoy what you do and ... because only like that you can do it well.

When I asked Philip whether workers at Tech Co. are expected to do so on a regular basis, he replied:

Philip: People should spend, a certain period of their time doing it on a regular basis. I did, talking about me personally. I think I spent the best of ten years of my life working from eight, for ten, twelve hours a day every day, at least. I still had my interests, staying with my children, astronomy ... painting, DIYs, so that means I did them all, you just find the time to do them, and you manage your time properly. Do you understand? So, it does not mean because you are doing something you leave out completely ...

Whilst juxtaposing long working hours in a positive light and as something which should be emulated by the workers, Philip too presents long work hours as something natural and 'inevitable' when there are deadlines to be met. The issue of long working hours as being an integral part of the job was also noted by Lewis (2007) in a different sector (accounting) and in a different national context (the UK). This suggests that it may be tied to particular professions operating in particular sectors.

It is interesting to note that unlike the other director (Mark) who said he had to give up his hobbies because of work, Philip's reply implies that workers can manage to put in twelve-hours of paid work and with proper time management they would still be able to maintain their interests. When describing his interests, Philip spoke about 'staying' with his children, rather than caring for his children, and at no time did he mention that he was responsible for any of the chores or duties typically tied to young children, like picking them up from school, ferrying them to religious classes, preparing their meals and so on. In fact, he lists

staying with his children along his other hobbies (astronomy and painting) which he does for pleasure during his own leisure time.

When being with children and working long hours are seen as hobbies, the implication is that men like Philip are likely to get the best of both worlds. This happens because by working late they earn more brownie points for appearing to be committed and loyal workers who operate within ideal worker territory and lead by example. On the other hand, by leaving the caring and house chores to their wife/partner, such men avoid the “sissy stuff” and can concentrate on bringing the money home without distractions. The term “sissy stuff” is mentioned as one of the fundamental pillars of true manhood by David and Brannon, 1976, and can be loosely interpreted as: men figuring out what women typically do, and avoiding it at all costs to sustain their masculinity. Since bringing the money home remains an essential building block of male identity (Kimmel, 2010), this suggests that those men who can shift the caring roles onto the mother may adopt a different perspective to the work-family conflict that we typically assume – especially in Malta - when thinking about flustered working mothers as they try to combine paid work with family.

Hence, seen from the masculinity lens, long working hours and family are not necessarily in conflict. Instead, these can be seen as two complimentary activities that tick many positive boxes, especially for Maltese men. The fact that the vast majority of Maltese mothers either do not work outside the home (30.3%), or else they drift in-and-out of the labour market around the birth of their children (49.2%) implies that till now, nearly 80% of Maltese men have a

partner at home when the children are very young (NSO-CLS, 2011). In practice, this allows men like Philip to work long hours if they so wish, and in the process they are able to operate within the ideal worker framework (hence being seen as the *Good workers*) whilst gaining ideal father status for giving priority to work as real men are expected to do in this context (Eurobarometer Survey, 2010; Maltese Family Survey Conclusions, 2007).

In the next section, I continue my analysis of the issue of long working hours and the work-life interface seen from a director's lens.

### **7.2.3. Long Working Hours, Pleasure and Commitment**

When using the masculine lens to assess the issue of long working hours in relation to work-life issues and the ideal worker, Philip (Director) touched upon an interesting concept where he linked long hours to pleasure and commitment. He explained this seemingly contradictory notion by arguing:

Philip: Let me put it this way, in terms of time and commitment, if you enjoy what you are doing really, it's not a matter of like ... If I'm enjoying something, there's no time limit, I mean: you stop doing it only when you're tired ... I mean, you're enjoying computers no? Do you understand? ... looking back at Tech Co., those who advanced in their careers, at the end are people who are effective.

Since Philip had also brought up the issue of effective workers I probed deeper and asked him to give me more details about such workers:

Philip: Now you ask me how can you be effective? You're effective, by a combination of many things, by discipline, by putting in the effort, putting in the time, make the necessary sacrifices. In many cases, these would not be sacrifices, they would be like: 'I'm doing this, and I'm still enjoying it', do you understand? But, if the company wants to move on, and if it needs to have its own leaders, these are the people.

Here Philip is affirming what Liz had said earlier about those who aspire to make it to the top of the hierarchy and how these typically put in a lot of personal time for the benefit of the organisation. However, keeping in mind Philip's concept of fun, working long hours should not automatically be linked to negative things. In fact, Philip also pulled out the issue of sacrifice and linked it to the issue of fun where he affirmed that working long hours might not feel like a sacrifice at all. Whilst at first this may sound paradoxical it does not necessarily have to be so, especially if one considers that those who occupy the top posts typically get to do the more interesting work and benefit from generous pay packets. Furthermore, because they are trusted workers, they generally have more freedom on how to work and can take many day-to-day decisions which affect their personal life without having to seek permission from their superiors to do so. Hence, by doing what they enjoy most (in this case computing and technology) they earn personal satisfaction and reinforce the idea that long working hours are a necessity to remain within the ideal worker territory. In doing so, they assume that likewise everyone else can do so too.

It is important to remember that in any given organisation the people who make it to the top are few, but the aspirants hoping to make it to the top may be many. Emulating those in the top position may drive the aspirants to try and operate within these boundaries which also perpetuate male values and masculine



norms. Such values may bring many benefits to the people at the very top of the hierarchy, however, one should not assume that these male values are cost neutral to the rest of the workers.

So, whilst until now I have focused on the positive aspect of long working hours as seen through the eyes of men who occupy the decision making posts in the organisation, in the section below, I discuss the implications of these male values, and assess how these may perpetuate gendered processes both at work and at home.

#### **7.2.4. Working Long Hours – Not always easy, but...**

When I took up the issue of long working hours with the Manager of the Software Development Unit (David) and asked him how he feels about staying on late at the office he replied:

David: It's not easy, I know it's not easy, and it happens to me as well, because I work till seven, half six, seven everyday and my wife doesn't really like it.

Anna: How do you deal with that?

David: It's difficult. What I try to do is at least once or twice a week I try to leave on time ...

Anna: Which would be ... what would you consider 'on time'?

David: It would be five, half five, six ... and spend some time with the family, which is only natural that my wife expects that, and obviously we have kids and we need to spend time with the kids.

Here David claimed that he has to make an effort to try and leave work on time at least twice a week in order to pacify his wife (who does not like the fact that he stays late at work); and in order to spend some time with his children. When the presence of men (like David and Philip described above) at home is erratic and irregular, their wives/partners may not have much choice but to take on the lion's share of care and house work on their shoulders. Such decisions sustain the gendered processes at work and in the family. In fact, when continuing the discussion on the issue of commitment and long working hours, David brought up an important point related to promotions and he spoke about the dilemma he faces in having to choose between family and work:

David: Your quality of life depends on how successful you are within your job as well, so the more successful you are, the more rewarded you will be financially, so your quality of life will improve. So you always have to juggle between these two. So if you're the type of person who says: 'no I don't care, I'll work eight till five', you're still going to get through but you're going to remain stuck where you are basically, because you're not giving that extra ... at least that's how I see it, while the people who are trying to give more, trying to give that extra effort, trying to give more commitment, then those are the ones that are going to be rewarded.

David, who is adopting the male breadwinner approach, is focusing on the materialistic side (rather than on his relationship at home) as he points out the clear links between long working hours, financial rewards and promotions. He seems to imply that if workers refuse to work long hours, or if for some reason they can't give their personal time for free to the organisation, they risk losing out on promotions and on a higher pay packet to their detriment and that of their family.

These assumptions serve as an invisible trap that perpetuates the gendered processes based on the single agenda logic which keeps women and men operating within the confines of their traditional roles. As long as women are willing (and are able) to play along to sustain them, the vicious circle of long working hours and promotions may be difficult to break especially in contexts like Malta where gendered values regarding work and family are still very traditional (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2012).

Of course, not all men have a stay-at-home wife/partner to raise the children, and recent qualitative local (Camilleri, 2013) and international research in different contexts (Auman, Galinsky & Matos, 2011) suggests that when both partners are professionals with a demanding job, the pressures on men to give more input in the family increases. When this happens, they become more aware of the work-life conflict as is typically experienced by working mothers (Auman, Galinsky & Matos, 2011). However, such men are still a rare species in the Maltese islands and this shows how ideal worker values may still appeal to the majority of men operating in traditional gendered family arrangements especially in places where working long hours (mostly by men) is defended as a national value (Borg, 2010).

After looking at the seemingly positive (e.g. work as fun and hence it should be unlimited) and yet at times conflicting values (juggling between working long hours to remain eligible for promotion and going home on time) of long working hours, it should not be assumed that all workers at Tech Co. were happy to give up their personal time. Who were those workers who were less willing to work

long hours and what were their thoughts on the issue of time? Did they reason things out differently and why did they do so?

In the next sections I discuss two distinct groups of workers made up of younger workers who were refusing to work long hours (*the bad*), and will highlight the experience of a mother who could not work long hours because of family commitments (*the ugly - because she did not look good in the eyes of her superiors*).

### **7.3. An Analysis of the Bad Workers who were not Generous with their Personal time**

Not all workers linked long working hours to something positive (fun with computers and possible career progression with a better income) and at Tech Co. there was a group of workers who had earned a reputation for being undisciplined with their time and for refusing to work long hours. This group of workers, who all worked in the same section, were known to go home at the stroke of five even though they may have come in a bit late in the morning. There were comments that they took a slightly longer lunch-break and they did not overcompensate to cover for any lost time. Furthermore, when the company tried to implement a system to give a better service to foreign clients, which entailed that they extend their working day till six (twice a week) on a rota basis, they were against this system and the experiment had to be stopped. All this put them in a negative light (hence *the Bad* category of workers) when compared to the workers who were more flexible and much more generous with

their own free time towards the company.

### **7.3.1. An Issue of Constraint rather than a Voluntary Choice**

When I interviewed these groups of workers and asked them whether they were expected to stay on after work when problems crop up, they replied in the positive, however they made it immediately clear that they don't like to stay at work after normal working hours (unlike the directors above who did it regularly either out of need or because they enjoyed computing). For example Richard (Software Developer) lamented that:

Richard: You know it's not enjoyable obviously because everyone ... especially recently ... it was about 5.30 and I had shut down my computer and was about to leave for home. And right when I was going to do so, I received a call from the UK asking me to upload something so that they could continue working on that side. I mean I stayed here till about six or quarter past six. You know, you don't enjoy it, but ...

It is pertinent to point out that because staying after work was perceived as a 'voluntary act' workers like Richard (Software Developer) were bothered because their effort did not seem to be acknowledged and they were expecting some form of acknowledgement or compensation in return:

Richard: Once I stayed here till nine. The next day, ehm ... I typically arrive at 8.30 am maximum. But even, I personally, would like that there is some sort of ... ermm, that it's noted. For example we do remain after work sometimes, and perhaps at the end of the year they acknowledge that by for example, the bonuses at the

end of the year, remuneration ... I mean, I hope that our efforts are picked up by the management.

Richard's team-mates had a similar outlook towards working long hours and when discussing what they find attractive and less attractive at Tech Co., Roderick (Software Developer) brought up the issue of extracurricular working hours:

Anna: And then what bothers you? Is there anything that you don't like at Tech Co., for example? ... Is there something?

Roderick: Perhaps, the fact that sometimes you have to stay on after your normal working hours.

Anna: You don't like it?

Roderick: I think no one likes staying on at work after normal working hours, you have to make a sacrifice sometimes, even, in the sense, there is no overtime, so it means if you are going to stay-on after hours, it's up to you, but sometimes you don't have a choice you have to do it.

The issue of choice and constraint which was already raised earlier, becomes clearer as Roderick implies that at times they simply 'don't have a choice'. This suggests that staying late after work, is not only a matter of conforming to the ideal worker standards or in order to look good in the eyes of their superiors, but it can also be linked to unrealistic workloads and demands imposed on the workers. David (Manager Software Development) picked up on this point and linked it to the issue of reciprocity, when he remarked that in their section:

David: Very often we're faced with tight deadlines, you need to work late, sometimes you need to come in on weekends, so you are working in a field where you have to give to the company. The company at the end of the day is rewarding you financially, so you have to give back.

When I asked David how often this happens that they have to work evenings or during the weekend and whether it occurs frequently he replied:

David: It does occur. Generally within a project, you have a number of milestones, a number of deadlines, and when you're reaching a deadline there is always going to be that extra effort required. The reason being that usually during that period either the estimate was not accurate, the actual estimate, or issues cropped up that you didn't, things you hadn't foreseen before, so there's always the requirement that you're put under pressure to stay within budget and to deliver on time.

Such claims suggests that the demand to stay on after work is likely to be a recurrent one (rather than a one-off demand), is cyclical and tied to project deadlines.

### **7.3.2. Unrealistic Estimates and Unrealistic Demands on the Workers?**

It is interesting to note that David also touched upon the issue of unrealistic estimates and to unforeseen problems that typically crop up during a project. All this puts the workers under pressure to work more for less in order to tackle the problems, thus rendering the need to work long hours as inevitable (Lewis, 2007). When I inquired whether the company would ever consider re-negotiating the price since unforeseen circumstances might have cropped up (rather than expecting workers to stay late at work to make up for the lost time without getting paid) he replied:

David: But if there is a deadline ... sorry, our staff are dependent on the deadline and the client has no control, then it's a bit difficult for him to juggle it, so we need to accommodate them.

This clearly shows that the sense of entitlement (Lewis & Haas, 2005; Lewis & Smithson, 2001) was one sided rather than reciprocal. In fact whilst this group of workers were being policed and checked at what time they come in and go by the minute, they were expected to give up their own free time for the sake of the organisation for which, as indicated above, they were not receiving any form of acknowledgement, remuneration or time in lieu. When I asked David how workers usually deal with such pressure he came up with two categories of workers, the normal workers in the lower ranks who work eight to five and those who occupy the higher places in the hierarchy who enjoy their work and who seemed more willing to work for free:

David: There are different workers. There are those that really enjoy the job so they are prepared to take the extra work.

Anna: Who will these normally be, I mean?

David: It's generally the hierarchy individuals, I mean, the architects, architects I mean in terms of software; the architects, the business analysts, those are the ones who are facing the customers mostly. And then you have the people who are the real workers, let's put it that way, the eight to five and then after five you're not going to see them.

So even when you're planning you have to keep those in mind. On the other hand, you don't blame them. I mean, at the end of the day their job is from eight to five, they are paid to do that and we don't have overtime at Tech Co. We do have overtime for projects where it is accepted, that is, where we communicate to the client and the client accepts to pay extra. Where the client doesn't accept to pay extra, then there's no overtime. But still, it's expected that if there's something that's going to take you longer than eight to five, to remain extra.



Whilst outwardly empathising with those workers who do not stay after hours because they are not paid overtime, David too is linking the committed workers to extracurricular time, who out of a sense of duty can help the organisation to meet its deadlines, keep costs down and to make the clients happy in the process. Hence, it is no wonder that the value of time generosity is so strong in organisations like Tech Co.

Such claims can help us to perceive why the ‘*Refuters*’, or more specifically those who refuse to be generous with their time (*The bad*); or those who cannot do so because of other commitments (*The ugly*) are seen in a less positive light than those who do so. Companies calculate that if they cannot rely on the generosity of some of their workers, their prices would have to go up and the deadlines would need to be extended. All this could make the company less competitive and less attractive thus rendering the workers who refuse to stay on at work as a liability rather than as an asset. In the section below I give more details about the profile of the refuters who are mean with their personal time and are unwilling to give it for free to the organisation.

### **7.3.3. The Profile of the Bad workers who refused to do Extracurricular Hours – Is this Generational or a Short Life-course Stage?**

The workers who most resisted the idea of working long hours were mostly men and none of them said they could not work long hours because of other

personal or family commitments. The majority of these workers were grouped in one department and this seemed to affect their values against working long hours possibly because they did not see the financial or the personal benefits of doing so. These were a team of younger workers who were still single, did not have family responsibilities, and overall had less work experience at Tech Co. Furthermore, these had a lower job status when compared to the workers in the Business Application Unit (who tended to work long hours) and in general they were less trusted and as a result were put under more scrutiny vis-à-vis their working time. All these factors could have made a difference in deciding whether or not to be generous with their free time.

However, one should not assume that their attitude towards long working hours will remain the same once they become the main breadwinners (Mc Donald & Jeanes, 2012; Brannen et al., 2002). With time, and as their aspirations for promotions increase, long working hours may become a necessity as they realise that time generosity is often interchangeable with commitment and promotions. Hence, it remains unclear whether their attitude is generational in that they are less willing to work long hours (Brannen et al., 2002) or whether this is just a short phase in their life course marking the early entry phase into the world of paid work before they settle down and have a family and so strive to earn more.

Hence after reviewing the *Bad Workers* (those who did not want to stay-on at the office after normal working hours), in the next sections I evaluate a small group of diverse workers who *could not*, rather than *would not*, stay on after

normal working hours. I divided this cohort into two groups. The first consisted of a pregnant mother with a young child who had the main caring responsibilities and who had to rush out from work every day at the stroke of five to pick up her son from the nursery. Considering the emphasis on time generosity discussed earlier, this did not make her look good and hence the term: *Ugly Worker*. It also includes a second group made up of young fathers in dual-earner professional households who were involved in some of the child-caring tasks; and an older man who had caring responsibilities related to elderly relatives. This group of men too had time constraints and had to leave the office on time (hence the categorisation of: *The Not So Good Workers*). I deal with these different categories of workers separately below.

#### **7.3.4. An Analysis of the ‘Ugly workers’ - Those who could not be Generous with their Personal Time due to Family Commitments**

When I interviewed the young mother Zoe (Implementation Specialist), she was due to have her second child in less than a month’s time. She told me that she had decided to quit her job because:

Zoe: It’s just that it’s very stressful, and I think that my children won’t get enough attention. When I go home it’s around five thirty or six , and my son has to be asleep at around eight, so, I have just two hours to see him maybe ... this time is precious, it goes and it will not come back ... so ...

Anna : Do you really have to work like that every day? Do you have to?

Zoe: No, not really, I was actually offered to work part-time, but it’s just too stressful for the time being. And I see that my life, my family life is being affected, because I am always tired. I am not really

stressed, because the stress level here at work is manageable, it's just being tired and having to go home and do the cleaning, ehhm, preparing food for the next day, playing with my son, doing the dishes, everything all together at the same time, it's just too tiring to do.

Zoe's replies contrast strongly with those given by the director and the manager I quoted earlier who said that they 'stay with their children' after work and who listed their children with their other leisure activities. Here Zoe (Implementation Consultant) spoke of her daily struggle which becomes unmanageable, not due to paid work itself, but because of the unpaid work she has to do when she gets home (food preparation, cleaning, playing with her son, putting him to bed and so on). She emphasised that it is the combination of all these things happening "together at the same time" within a span of two hours after she gets home that was stressing her out. When I asked her whether her husband shares the unpaid work, she replied:

Zoe: Yes yes, but he is a doctor himself and basically most of the time he is on duty, so ... I decided it was going to be, it would bring more benefits for myself and my family to stay home for a year rather than keep on going ... I know that I would have managed if I wanted to, but it would have been too much pressure and too much stress on my family, and I did not want that ... so basically that's why I am giving up; I am not very happy, because I am not the type of person to stay at home. So, I am trying to arrange some help with the children, and I have enrolled to classes ... just to get out of the house.

Here, Zoe accepts that due to the nature of her husband's work she has to do most of the family-related work herself. She frames her decision to quit her job before her second baby was due to be born, as a rational free choice, rather than as a gendered, and hence constrained choice. She did hint that she was

not very happy to be suddenly stuck at home all day but at the same time she thought that her move would be beneficial to all in the given circumstances.

Zoe's responses capture the time pressures that affect the parent (typically the mother) with the main caring responsibilities, between the time they get home and the children's bedtime. It exposes some of the dilemmas that parents who are passing through the fast lane of life without much support (Eurofound, 2012) feel when going through this life-course stage which can be challenging.

Whilst Zoe had decided to exit the fast lane of life by quitting her job and conforming to gendered assumptions typical of the Maltese context (Caruana et al., 2011), it should not be assumed that all parents will want to, or can afford to do so. Hence considering the importance given to time generosity, workers with caring responsibilities or other commitments outside work, are still likely to feel obliged to continue with their work from home after normal working hours. This is because time generosity, and to a great extent face time, are one of the fundamental pediments on which the concept of the ideal worker rests. In fact, in the section below I speak about a small cluster of male workers who had some caring responsibilities which limited their presence and their face time in the office in the evening. This led to the creation of another category of worker: *the Not So Good Workers*. These left the office on time, but still found a way-out of showing their commitment to the organisation by working long hours in the evening and during the weekend from home. Yet, the fact that they were not physically at the office meant they could not fit as well as those who stayed

on after office hours, whom I earlier described as the *Good Workers*. I amplify on this category of workers in the next section.

### **7.3.5. The Profile of the Not So Good Workers – Constrained to Leave the Office on Time but Willing to do Extracurricular Hours from Home to Compensate**

In the previous section, I have shown how mothers like Zoe are under a lot of pressure because they take on the largest share of family responsibilities. During my interviews, none of the men interviewed for this study suggested that they were the main carers of their children, but this does not mean they had no family responsibilities at all. However, for this cohort of workers, men's conflict arose in having to *help out* their partner who worked full-time. This was highlighted by the HR who in the context of a discussion on the changing gender roles she told me that she could:

Liz: ...pin point three for sure, three husbands, men employees, you know, that are very much, that their wife works, full time, and they have to take care of their kids in the evenings as well. Sometimes, they have to pick them up, you have to take them to school, so this is ... it creates a bit of strain, stress for them, you know? Like, for instance, this guy, was telling me; he's one of the managers, and his wife works full time as well, but it's very difficult for her to leave on time. So he ended up doing it himself. At five o'clock he has to leave to pick up his child from the Child Care Centre.

I can understand him. Sometimes we will be in a meeting, he has to be the one who says I'm leaving, you know? He's a manager, his staff would be more available than him. He told me last time: I don't like the situation ... The other one takes the kid in the morning to school. So he's never available at eight o'clock in the morning, for instance, you know, cause he has to take the kid to school.

Liz here speaks about a minority of men who are parents of young children and whose wife works full-time. Because these are involved in the care of their children, she remarked that this creates stress on them especially on the father who occupies a managerial position, because his subordinates were more available than him. She added that such fathers generally were not happy with the situation and leaving the office on time (while their subordinates stayed on at the office) was not something they liked, possibly because they were conscious of the strong underlying values around the importance of time generosity and the importance of face time. In fact, many of those who leave the office on time said they remedied this situation by continuing their work in the evening and during the weekends from home in order to compensate. This was confirmed by one of the managers (David) who said that:

David: We obviously understand that you have a life outside of work. Even myself, I have a family, I have kids so you have a right ...

Anna: How do you deal with it?

David: The way we deal with it, it's up to the individual really, we do not force anything onto anyone. It's up to the individual to say: 'Listen, I can spend this extra effort so I am going to remain at work.' We also encourage working from home, so if for example, you need to pick up your daughter at five o'clock and keep going home and stay with her, you can; we have the technology and the means to continue working from home. If you need to stay a whole day at home, because your wife is sick and you have to stay with the kids, you can do that and still work at home and you won't have to take leave in that case because you're still delivering. At the end of the day, if there's a particular milestone and whatever leave you need to take, whatever holidays you need to take, whatever tasks you have outside of work during that period, go ahead and do them. But the important thing is that you're still trying to deliver on that milestone.

David's remarks suggest that by continuing their work at home through

telework, those who have to leave on time or have a family-related problem, can be somewhat excused, as long as they show their commitment otherwise. Such expectations can make life more stressful to those who have bigger family responsibilities like Zoe, but may pose fewer problems to those who are free to work from home in the evening. Workers were aware of this and Charles (Senior Implementation Consultant) told me:

Charles: I prefer to leave at five, the fact that my mum is over 80 and I have an elderly aunt who is also over 80, I need to visit them and do the shopping, and then I'm willing to work for two hours after dinner.

Here Charles is justifying his wish to leave on time from the office, but immediately clarifies that he is happy to work additional hours after dinner. This allows workers like him to remain closer but not quite within the ideal worker boundary by being generous with their time. It is interesting to note, that in contrast to the group of workers who were unwilling or unable to stay on at work after their normal working hours, other workers went out of their way and walked the extra mile for the company. These were considered as heroes by their co-workers for their input and for being generous with their time as I explain below.

#### **7.4. Heroic Acts and the Ideal Worker**

Linked to the sense of commitment and duty it was interesting to note that some workers willingly made huge personal sacrifices for the organisation that



seemed to go beyond the normal call of duty. For example, Kevin (Senior Implementation Consultant), who often works abroad, decided to travel out to work on a Sunday instead of on a Monday morning and to return home on Saturday, because otherwise he said he would only work a three-day week when he is abroad. This practically meant that he used to spend less than 24 hours at home in total during the week. When I suggested that he may be giving a lot of extra hours to the organisation he replied that “personally I have never thought about it.”

This sense of personal sacrifice was labelled as ‘heroics’ by the Marketing Manager (Ryan) who remarked that because the younger workers are well qualified and can find jobs in this area without too many problems, it is difficult to expect ‘heroics’ out of them. Thus, hinting that this may be a generational issue, he remarked that the people who generally do so, are moulded in a different way and whilst arguing that the industry should not base its success on individual ‘heroics’, he claimed that :

Ryan: Many times in the service industry it is the individual's ‘heroics’ that give you a cutting edge ... in the service industry some individual ‘heroics’ make a big difference.

Anna: So they are expected, what?

Ryan: The fact is we need them.

Anna: When you say individual ‘heroics’, what do you mean?

Ryan: That people go out of their way. For example this weekend the system of one of the banks in Malta crashed ... we have the contract and the employees are on call and they get paid a certain amount for a certain amount of time they work over the weekends and they are duty bound, I mean. However, one of the guys, he is not one of the original team members, but he has the old ethos,

he is over 33, and he had to work 22 hours at a stretch. He is contractually bound to solve the problem, but he actually stayed 22 hours ... instead after 15 hours he could have said: 'I give up' and if he gave up everyone would have said ok, ... because after 15 hours of work you go home and sleep. But he was not satisfied. And the fact is that he was capable, he had the stamina and he worked for 22 hours.

Ryan's description ties together elements of sacrifice for the benefit of the client and the organisation, in that through such heroic acts, or tackling work in fire fighting mode (Bohn & Jaikumar, 2000), the clients' problems are resolved and the company improves its reputation in the process.

Whilst naturally the heroic worker pays a price for such acts (in terms of personal time loss), one should not assume that the sense of sacrifice is always negative. In fact, a worker who was continuing his studies at university and who regularly worked from home after his evening lectures told me that:

Kevin: Satisfying a customer gives me more satisfaction than getting an 'A'.

This remark suggests that workers like Kevin get a sense of gratification when they manage to keep their clients happy and this may supersede the sense of sacrifice for having done so in the first place.

On the issue of giving an optimum service to the clients, Charles told me that on his anniversary, he was going out to lunch on Sunday with his family and:

Charles: On the verge of going out at 11 or 11.30 am, I got an email and I gave him the service. Because you tell yourself: 'am I going to leave this pending?' What can you do? Will you let them lose a

day's work? Just because I am five minutes late, it doesn't make too much difference.

Here Charles minimises his effort in working on a Sunday and he seems happy to give the client a service because for him "it doesn't make too much difference." Hence, Kevin and Charles's input suggests that doing heroic acts and going the extra mile for the organisation and clients, cannot be seen in an exclusively negative light because these also bring a sense of fulfilment whilst allowing such workers to remain close to the ideal worker boundary.

#### **7.4.1. Dual Agenda Analysis on the Concept of Heroics and the Link to Long Working Hours.**

When heroic acts are one-offs they may have little impact on the employee, but when workers enter the 'heroics' mode and regularly give up their personal time for the organisation, the impact can be negative. When I discussed this issue with one of the Managers (David) he showed ambivalence, because whilst acknowledging that people can burn out if they give their all to the organisation, he was also aware how long working hours are still used as a benchmark to identify the ideal workers:

David: It happens. One of our particular guys, he was working on a project and he had very tight deadlines, he was working late, working weekends and got burnt out practically, and he actually requested to leave the company. He applied for a job, requested to leave ... And that rang a bell, and we realised we cannot keep on going in this way ... the employer also has to understand that people have their lives outside of work so if someone is demotivated at the end of the day he is still not going to deliver,

even if he is working late because you get tired and you get burn out so you won't be ... you're still going to pay a price.

Anna: So you are conscious of this?

David: Yes. And it's not easy to manage really.

Anna: But in a way can't you see sort of, that you are being rewarded and you are seen as an ideal worker if you actually work like this ... ?

David: I know, I know. It's true.

Anna: Is that sustainable in the long run do you think?

David: It's a difficult question. Apart from the commitment there is also the quality ...

Anna: Do you see this when people are tired, that quality drops?

David: Yes it happens. And we try to gauge on both basically [quality and commitment]. On the commitment, I think the commitment is important. So willingness to show that extra effort, I think, is still important.

David here admitted the dangerous links between working excessively long hours and the acquisition of ideal worker status. He also acknowledges how this value, which has invisible roots and which seems to spread through the directors and the managers who lead by example and who set the bar high (in terms of the long hours they work), creates a dilemma which is not that easy to solve.

The issue of having to work long hours was accepted by many as matter-of-fact and as something inevitable. Yet, during the process no one was asking what could make workers work smarter rather than harder. So, in the next section, I touch upon an interesting emerging issue which is linked to outdated work processes and how these could increase work-life pressures. When I started

my research I had no idea that this issue would crop up, but on realising its impact on organisational effectiveness and work-life issues I felt I had to give it the attention it merits.

## **7.5. Outdated Work Processes and Time Issues**

When discussing the issue of time and work, surprisingly, many informants pointed out that certain work processes at Tech Co. were rather outdated. This seemed rather strange coming from workers who operate in a company which sells software packages to help other companies become more efficient. For example, at Tech Co. time recording was not automated and if workers did not put in their hours immediately, it became very difficult for them to remember what they did later. Because this affected the billing process, the workers were often chased in order to hand in their time sheets and this caused further stress to the workers. On this issue, Clara (Senior Implementation Consultant) remarked:

Clara: We are not supposed to log all of our time. Only a portion of our time. I am supposed to figure out what I did in the last month. Forms have been the same for the last 8 years. I have to find my time on bits of paper ... give me a process which works for me. They have said they will improve the system for a long time ... it's very much a dictatorship when it comes to the systems.

Clara's remarks capture some of the difficulties that workers face in recalling how they used their time. This becomes even more complicated because, as noted in other studies (Lewis, 2009), they are only allowed to record productive

time which is directly related to the project. This means they have to leave out chunks of time they used doing essential peripheral work, like replying to emails, answering the phone, helping colleagues resolve technical problems, discussing issues within the group and so on.

Time recording was not the only manual process which was mentioned. In fact, Clara added that the incoming requests from the clients were also paper based:

Clara: When clients phone reception they will tell her about their problems, she will log it, print it out, and allocate it to someone. Then we receive an email ... then someone would pop a piece of paper on my desk.

Similarly, when workers need to apply for vacation leave they have to fill a form, sign it, scan it, and then give the copy to the HR. A colleague who worked in her section (Kevin) who travels frequently for work said that bureaucracy runs deep at Tech Co. and for example, he was not allowed to book the flights himself, but these had to be done through the central administration. Typically this entails many emails flying back and forth when, if he was allowed to do so, he could just do it himself online. Furthermore, before he travels abroad he also has to fill up forms in order to ask for money in advance and to get his hotel booked. Once he returns back to work, he again manually fills other forms to claim the expenses he incurred on food, lodging, internal travelling and so on.

On this, Kevin (Senior Implementation Consultant) remarked:

Kevin: What frustrates me is that the system is not automated and when you have to apply for something you have to print out the forms, you can't do it ... I mean we are in the IT business, we are in the business of trying to automate things.

Kevin said that he spends about four hours filling in forms every time he returns from abroad and he added that this could be resolved by issuing workers like him who travel frequently with a credit card, so that at the click of a button he would be able to make a print-out of the expenses incurred through the card. He said that he had been “crying out loud” to have such a card but it was not granted because he was told that “it increases their administrative work.” This clearly raises issues related to lack of trust in the workers and an under estimation of the workers’ time which is being consumed by outdated process. Several workers remarked that it was ironic that the top people in the organisation were always harping that a consultant’s time costs money to the client and yet, workers were still ordered to go through these time-consuming processes.

Outdated processes and bureaucracy were frustrating to the workers and were obviously taking up a considerable amount of productive time thus reducing the efficiency and unknowingly adding costs to the organisations. Hence, it becomes natural to ask why these processes were not updated when there was such a big emphasis on time keeping. Considering that at Tech Co. the concept time generosity was a central element of ideal workers, this seemed to give rise to the idea that the worker’s time was elastic rather than finite in nature. This idea, which was disseminated in an environment where the means of assessing productivity were low, seemed to act as a key barrier to conceptualising more innovative ways of working were the concept of time generosity and strict time keeping become irrelevant.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I used time as an indicator of ideal worker values and explored how time-related assumptions, which are not gender neutral, were played out in this specific context. Here, I was able to capture some of the complex and often contradictory discourses on the use of time and its links to Hegemonic Masculinity. For example I showed how long working hours were presented both as a voluntary choice and yet as something inevitable.

Using the influential voices of the directors and those in management positions, I showed that at Tech Co., where the means to assess performance were weak, time was used as an alternative mode to assess the commitment and the productivity of the workers. Hence, time generosity served as a means to sort out potential leaders (the *good workers*) from the 'other' workers (*the bad and the ugly*) who stuck to normal working hours and who were therefore evaluated less positively. Here, I showed that many of the directors (all male) and the managers (all male except for one) worked long hours themselves and expected others to emulate their behaviour to meet this important component of ideal worker standard. Then, using the workers' voices, I showed that the push for time generosity was subtle but well ingrained in the workers' perceptions of what constitutes an ideal worker. Here, in line with Gramsci's concept of hegemony, rather than an imposition, time-generosity was framed as a choice or as a voluntary gesture reflecting the workers' commitment to the



organisation.

Whilst in the introduction of this study I had framed long working hours as being in conflict with the personal side of life (including the family), through this chapter I showed that when men operate in a traditional family arrangement (the father as the main breadwinner) and in a traditional national context (like Malta) where most of the mothers stop working around the birth of their children (NSO-CLS, 2011), long working hours on the part of fathers do not necessarily conflict with the family and the personal side of life (Single Agenda Logic). Instead, time generosity on the part of the worker seems to bring a number of apparent benefits to the male breadwinner, to his family and to the organisation. This is because men are able to affirm their masculinity on the home front as they avoid the “sissy stuff” (like house chores and child care) which are left to women to shoulder (David & Brannon, 1976). By avoiding these responsibilities at home they can concentrate on their prime masculine role which is that of the breadwinner (Williams et al., 2013; Kimmel, 2010; Bailyn, 2006) and hence they are also able to perform their masculinity in a culturally approved manner (Beynon, 2002; Eurobarometer Survey, 2010; Maltese Family Survey Conclusions, 2007).

On the organisational side, long working hours likewise, allow men to enact their masculinity by living up to the ideal worker values (Kelly et al., 2012). By doing so they are able to distinguish themselves from the mothers (who can't work long hours because of their caring duties), and from the others (the younger inexperienced single male workers who don't want to work long hours

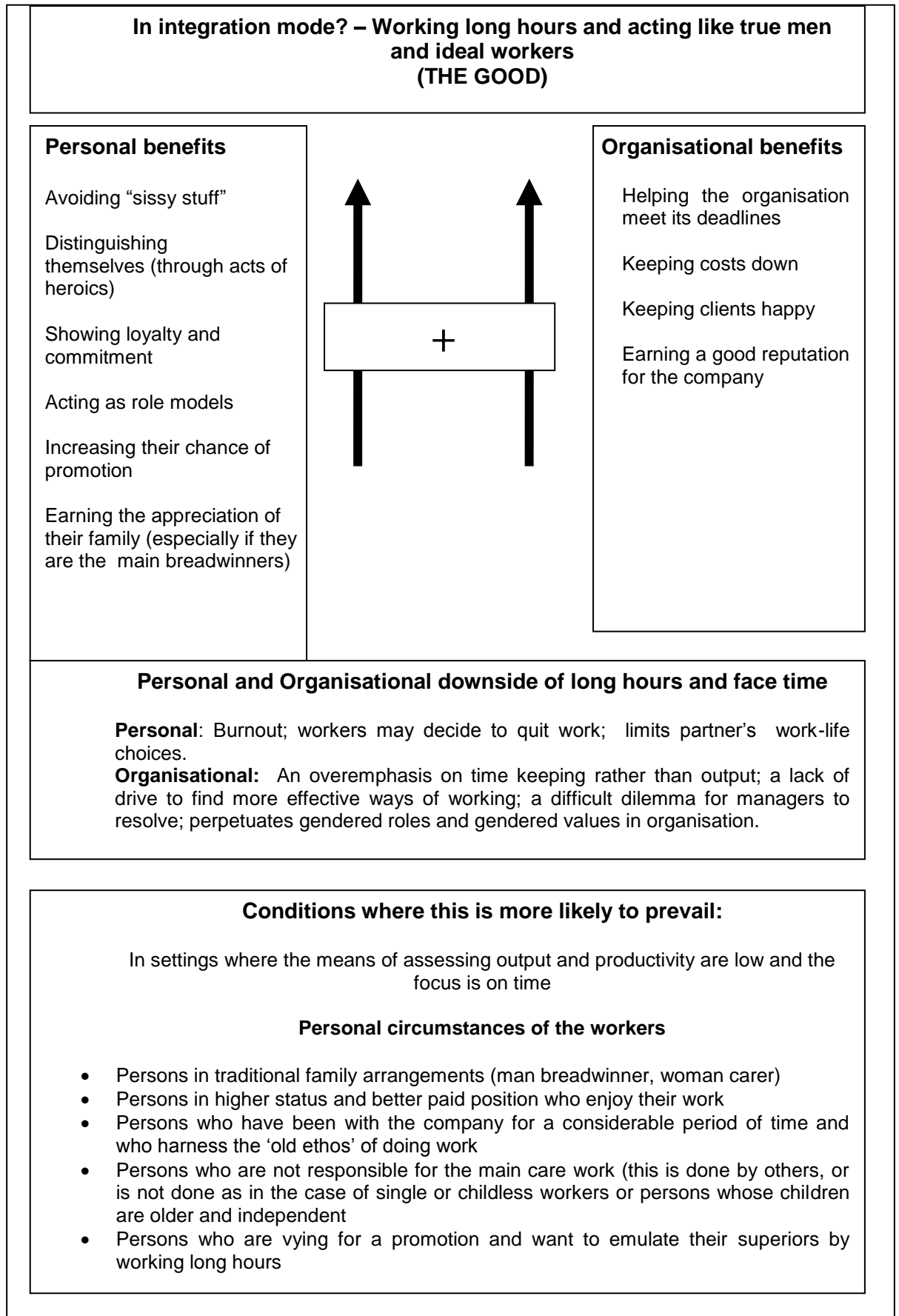
possibly because they don't see its benefit yet as reported in Mc Donald & Jeanes, 2012). Men who occupy the top posts in the organisation and who link technology and computing with fun, find it easier to work without limits.

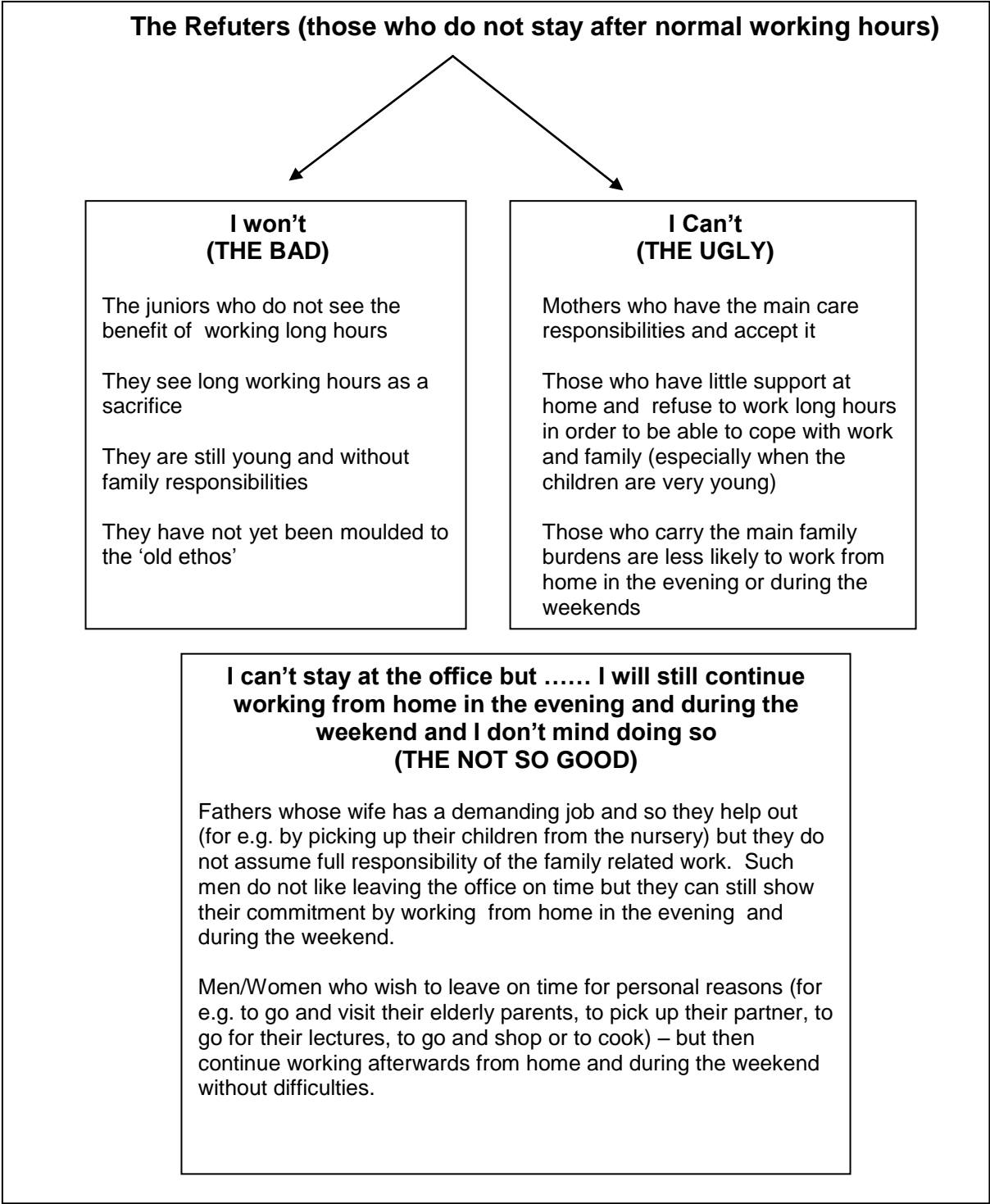
At Tech Co., long working hours seem to have a trading value as these become exchangeable for promotions, when these occasionally arise (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2004). Since promotions typically bring with them more prestige and better wages, men who work to gain this status are likely to be appreciated by their family, especially in single earner households, which are still predominant in Malta (LFS, 2014). Simultaneously the organisation benefits in many ways and through this unpaid (extra) work it is in a better position to meet its deadlines; to keep costs low and to keep its clients happy. Thus, when considering the benefits that time generosity brings to the organisation, it becomes easier to understand why those workers who leave work on time are evaluated less positively and why organisations have few incentives to discourage time generosity on the part of the workers. All this also shows the significant role that structures play in shaping work practices and how these influence individual choices and reproduce the gendered divisions in the family and at work, which are so difficult to break. It also confirms how men's ultimate choices around paid care and work are the "unspoken flip side of the choices made by women" (Stephenson, 2010, p.237). In fact, in this chapter through the case of Zoe who was giving up paid work before the birth of her second child, I showed how mothers' choices are still tainted by strong, gendered elements, thus suggesting restrained choices rather than gender free choices (Lewis & Haas, 2005; Lewis & Smithson, 2001).

Through this chapter I also highlighted the negative side of very long working hours in that this can affect men and women negatively too because it can lead to burnout. This raises doubts around the sustainability of long working hours in the long run, whilst it exposes managers to conflicting values they often have to push in order to sustain ideal worker norms. As a downside to the extra attention paid to long working hours and to face time, I raised the concept of time elasticity (Louis, 2007) and how this can be linked to outdated work processes (like time keeping, applying for leave and filing travel related costs manually). Here, I argued that these are not only time consuming for the workers, but when the focus is on face time there may also be fewer incentives to look at innovative ways of how to make work smarter rather than harder.

Figure 7.1 below captures the main categorisation of workers according to how generous they are with their personal time:

**Figure 7.1 The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly plus the Not So Good**





After taking an extensive look at the issue of time and the ideal worker, in the next section I shift my focus to matters related to space and spatial flexibility, work-life issues and the ideal worker.

## **Chapter 8      The Use of Space: Legitimate and Illegitimate Work-life Choices – Sifting the Mothers from the Others**

### **Introduction**

As I have shown in the previous chapter, fitting into the ideal worker template at Tech Co. entailed both time generosity (in the form of extracurricular hours) and the bodily presence of workers in the office (face time). In fact, in Chapter seven I showed that workers who for some reason left the office on time (*the bad, the ugly and the not so good workers*) were seen as faltering in some way when compared to the ideal worker. As a result these were considered in a less positive light than those who remained at the office after normal office hours (*the good workers*) – even when the work was continued virtually from home.

Building on these findings, this chapter focuses on the use of space and how it interlinks with ideal worker values and work-life issues. It captures the inconsistent and often contradictory discourse on the use of space and the perceived gender appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of working from home (Lewis, 2003b).

More specifically, by using the gender and the Dual Agenda lens and looking at how different categories of workers made use of space at Tech Co., in this chapter I argue that the frequency one works from home, and the reason for doing so, can make a difference which ultimately affects whether the decision

appears to be legitimate or illegitimate for workers who do so. Furthermore, I show how the use of space led to the categorisation of workers into three distinct groupings, namely: the *mothers* (who were *accommodated* to work from home because of their caring needs, thus rendering their claim as an illegitimate one); the *managers* (whose occasional work from home was *legitimated* on the basis that this did not stem from caring-related needs); and the *other workers* (who were *banned* from using spatial flexibility since they were neither mothers, nor managers who could be trusted to do so).

These findings help to sharpen the definition of the ideal worker and help to show how ideal worker assumptions in relation to the use of space are manifested and reinforced in practice in the case study organisation. These are also useful to show how gendered norms and gendered processes are reinforced in practice and are perpetuated over time. For an overview of the categorisation of workers at a glance see Figure 8.1. on page 253.

### **8.1. Working From Home in a Specific Context – The Situation at Tech Co. Analysed through the Gender Lens**

In order to set the scene and capture the main perceptions and values around the issue of space and spatial flexibility and the ideal worker, during the first phase of the research in 2009, I asked the HR Manager (Liz) whether the organisation had any policies that regulated home working. The HR Manager replied in the negative, but on hearing the phrase ‘working from home’ she immediately told me that they were ‘helping’ some mothers to ‘cope’ with family

and work:

Liz: We have helped them to cope with both. We have two persons who work full-time, who work at the office in the morning, then they go home, and work from home.

Liz here was referring to two young mothers who carried out administrative work in the Finance Department and then worked from home in the afternoon when their children returned from school. The HR manager's idea of "helping them to cope with work and family" implies that these mothers were facing problems which were not affecting the other workers (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2002). This means they were an exception rather than the norm.

The HR manager's reflection immediately sets the mothers apart from the rest of the workers and shows them in a more vulnerable and hence in a less positive light when compared to the rest of the workers. Linking work from home to mothers with caring responsibilities (rather than, say, to fathers or to single persons and workers in general) also shows an immediate, yet unconscious gendered assumption about caring roles in the family which ultimately affect work-related decisions

When I inquired about the two mothers who were working from home whilst caring for their children in the afternoon, the HR manager told me:

Liz: It's working very well.



Anna: But then, how does the company view flexibility?

Liz: We've accepted it. There are no complaints. We've tried it. We've tested it for three months first, as a pilot project.

Liz's reply implies that this issue was approached with caution and home working was even pilot tested. Her words "We've accepted it" suggest that there might have been resistance or hesitation around the issue of teleworking. When I inquired about the results of this experiment the HR Manager remarked:

Liz: The results were ok. I asked for feedback. I sent an email to all the managers, to all the people, who are actually their clients, internally, to see if there were any concerns, and there were none ... Some people didn't even realise, that they were on teleworking. They didn't even realise. So, it was plain sailing. And they're still doing it today.

This was confirmed by one of the Directors (Alex) who told me:

Alex: We've given them the internet connection; we've given them access to all the systems, you know; we phone them at home, as if we're phoning them in the office, and it seems to be working very very well.

Hence the HR's manager and the Director's replies suggest that in these cases, working from home was not impacting negatively in any way on organisational effectiveness or on their co-workers. Yet, during a more recent interview (held in 2013) the HR still opened the door to speculation on mothers who work from home as she underlined the fact that a new mother who had a one-year-old baby was being paid for a full day's work but she only worked for half a day from the office. During this interview she aired her doubts about the mother's capability to work full time whilst simultaneously caring for her baby at home.

This suggests that suspicions still lingered about the effectiveness and the value of mothers who worked from home whilst caring for their young children.

### **8.1.1. Spatial Flexibility and its Links to Performance and Career Progression: Keeping the Work-home Boundaries Intact.**

On realising that the mothers who worked from home were seen in a different light, I asked the HR Manager (Liz) how working from home could affect the career progression of mothers who did so. Whilst showing uncertainty, she replied:

Liz: I don't know how it will affect them, if they want to improve in their career, you know?

On hearing this, I automatically asked the HR Manager how teleworkers were valued vis-à-vis other workers who worked full-time from the office:

Liz: It always depends on how much you give ... If ... her performance is really really good, and she is a star, or he is a star, then we can make excuses, and we can, he will be given a promotion, even though he's working from home.

But the persons who are not, it all depends on the performance. All depends... I don't think it will impede them from getting a promotion because they are working partly from home, I don't think so. But again, they have to be good and excellent performers.

Anna: So, in a way, working flexibility is seen as a treat, as an accommodation?

Liz: As an accommodation, yes, it's seen as an accommodation.

When I challenged her why spatial flexibility should affect the career progression of the mothers who were working from home, she told me:

Liz: True they give you their work, but they're restricted; they cannot grow in the company. Can they ever become managers when they spend half a day at home every day?

When I asked her whether they were interested in becoming managers, she told me:

Liz: They probably don't want to. They are being accommodated. It's a very good system and in reality they are also accommodating the company.

Liz's reply was disconcerting to say the least, because whilst in an earlier instance she had argued that working from home should not impede teleworkers who were excellent at their work from getting promoted, yet, at the same time she was extremely sceptical about the ability of such workers to be good managers unless they worked full-time from the office. This confirmed the higher value attached to work done from the office, and how working patterns that separate the private and public life are still "staunchly defended" by those in authority (Rapoport et al., 2002, p.109).

It is ironic to note that the HR Manager and the Director harnessed such values when generally ICT workers are often assumed to have the right technology to work remotely from home (Kelan, 2005). Hence, in principle, it should not really matter where and when ICT workers carry out their work as long as this does not affect their output, their colleagues and their clients. And using the same

logic, it should not make a difference which categories of workers work from home, why and how often they do so. Yet at Tech Co. it was made clear that spatial flexibility was not cost neutral and it did not have the same effect on all.

At Tech Co. it was the combination of motherhood and regular teleworking (rather than occasional or less regular teleworking) which proved to be a negative formula. This combination seemed to flout ideal worker norms and left an indelible bad mark on the mothers (lower ambition and hence lower eligibility for promotions), or what Webber and Williams (2008) call the motherhood penalty. But were these values applied across the board at Tech Co. or were mothers in a category on their own?

### **8.1.2. Working from Home is not Open to all, but it is Fine if you are a Manager who works from Home for Work-related Matters.**

In order to continue probing how gender impacts on the issue of spatial flexibility and career progression, I asked the directors how they would feel if the demand for working from home comes from a man instead of woman, to which Alex (director) replied:

Alex: I think if it's justifiable, then of course, yes. It depends on this person's position in the company. You know we wouldn't like one of our senior people to have issues with *his performance* because of this obviously. But, I think, in general we would try to accommodate.

Whilst highlighting that in principle they would try to accommodate male workers who want to work from home, here Alex continued to amplify on the important debate about the issue of performance and the career progression of those who work from home. Here, apart from the issue of gender, he suggested that the place occupied in the hierarchy could also make a difference.

On seeing that telework could affect the performance and the career progression of both the mothers and those in higher positions, I asked the HR Manager (Liz) whether telework was open to everyone, to which she replied:

Liz: No, I don't think. There is some flexibility, for the managers, for instance, I mean, they can work at home, and you can make instant arrangements with your manager, even if you're not a manager, the senior people ... It happens a lot, you know, like, for instance, they're working on a project, they need to prepare a document, or something and he would ask his manager, can I work from home tomorrow? And they do.

Anna: Is it the exception or the rule?

Liz: It is a bit the exception, but it is acceptable, from senior people, it is acceptable.

It is interesting to note that whilst the Director earlier suggested that working from home is less suitable for managers, here the HR Manager in line with other studies (Kelly et al., 2010; CIPD, 2012) gave indications that the managers and the more senior people in the organisation can make on-the-spot arrangements and telework without any problems. This was confirmed by one of the managers who worked in the Finance department (Peter), and who claimed that he teleworks too:

Peter: Quite regularly yes. Even though not as regularly as half my staff but actually I do it every week. Two days a week. I stay at home teleworking. It's effective. I mean I come here normal working days when I come in the office. I come here from eight till five.

When I'm at home, I mean, I start at half eight and continue till eight, or nine o'clock ... It's attractive, I mean, personally, when I'm teleworking I do longer hours, I produce much more than ... less interruptions surely. I'm comfortable at home, more relaxed ... I find that teleworking is actually beneficial as regards, even as regards family ties and family responsibilities etc, so there can be a good balance using teleworking, between private life and working.

It is interesting to note that Peter was the manager of the two female workers mentioned above who were teleworking. Here, rather than showing cautiousness as the Director had done when speaking about managers working from home, he chose to focus on the positive organisational (longer working day) and personal benefits (comfortable, more relaxed; beneficial with regards to family ties and family responsibilities) that come with working from home.

In spite of taking this positive stance, Peter made it amply clear, that he was not working from home as regularly as his staff were doing, possibly because he did not need to do so to stay with his children after school. As indicated earlier, all this suggests that a lower frequency in teleworking (not on a daily basis), a higher position in the hierarchy (in this case a managerial position), and teleworking as the preferred option which brings fewer interruptions and a higher output (rather than for family related options), allowed workers like Peter to remain closer to the ideal worker parameter by distinguishing themselves from the mothers who had to do so on a daily basis for family reasons.

### **8.1.3. Spatial Flexibility - The Issue of Trust and the Difference between Young and Mature Workers.**

Despite the fact that no evidence was brought by the participants of any real problems caused by those who were teleworking, the approach towards those working from home was always cautious and an aura of suspiciousness crept in each time this subject was broached. When I pointed this out to the HR Manager and asked her why working from home seemed to be reserved to a few (three mothers and the managers) she did not seem to have a clear answer and said that:

Liz:            Maybe it's the culture, it's the norm; we've been doing that, you know?

When I asked her whether this also raised issues of trust, she had a more plausible reply and said:

Liz:            Yes, there would be. Because what happens is, that you tend to work closer to these people, because they're the senior people, so trust is built automatically, it's bigger. With others, with the young ones, you don't have a relationship going, to a certain extent, you know? So it's more risky, maybe, you know, because you don't even consider it, because you don't really know the person that much.

The issue of trust here takes centre stage as Liz explains that with older people and especially those in higher hierarchical posts, trust is built over a number of years, whilst with the younger ones this still needs to be established. Whilst acknowledging that with people you know there tends to be more trust, at the same time Liz's claim seems to be based on the flawed logic that young people

(as a category) are not trustworthy enough to work remotely, from home. When I challenged the HR Manager about the issue of trust, she remarked that:

Liz: There is a lot of trust within the company, I think, but not enough to allow a person working from home, totally. There has to be... there is, it exists, but with individuals, with particular individuals, not with everyone as a policy.

The issue of trust was also picked up by two of the Managers (Tony and Ryan) who in the context of a discussion on working from home, made a clear distinction between the younger and older workers:

Tony: Since we are a smaller team and typically the people are a bit older and more mature, it's not like... they are younger, like students they tell you they are at home and they are doing something else ... so I mean they are - the level of people, you know. We would have the trust, so it's not really an issue in our case.

Similarly, Ryan (Manager) focused on the distinction between allowing the mature and allowing the younger workers to work flexibly:

Ryan: The problem is that this is a double-edged sword because ... these people don't have an understanding of the organisation. So what happens is, that flexibility in the hands of those who know the modus operandi of the organisation, it makes a lot of sense. This type of flexibility handled by a person who does not have an understanding of the organisation, by those who do not understand the clients, or those who do not have enough job insight and what have you, it becomes very very dangerous.

As managers who take important decisions regarding their employees, Liz, Tony and Ryan's replies highlight the general lack of trust in the younger workers being able to work unsupervised from home. This underlying



assumption which was widespread amongst the senior members of staff, must have led to the decision to restrict telework to mothers (who could not do otherwise and needed to be accommodated on a daily basis), and to the top persons in the hierarchy (who enjoyed more trust). So what was the underlying issue at stake here? Was it the element of working without supervision? Or was this an issue of mistrust in the younger workers?

#### **8.1.4. All Workers Can Work Away from the Office - As Long as they Do so After Normal Working Hours!**

It is interesting to note that many workers including some of the younger ones (who were earlier described as being not trustworthy enough to work from home), reported that they sometimes worked from home in the evenings or during the weekend. They saw this as an extension of their working day and when they did so, the question of trust was not raised at all. Kenneth, who is a young Implementation Consultant, gave an example of home working and explained that when he needs to run a process on the server, which takes four hours to run, he sets it on before he leaves the workplace at 5pm:

Kenneth: But then I don't leave it till next morning to check it, but very often at seven or eight in the evening, I go in the system through my laptop from home to check at which stage it has arrived, so that if it did not work, I will re-run it. Now I can reason: 'no because my work is from eight till five and so I will only check it in the morning', but we do not do that; most of my colleagues would not do that.

He argued that as young workers they were doing their part by working from home as needed and he suggested that:

Kenneth: When you do not need to come to work at the office, you can do it from home, and work from there as long as the work is done and the deadlines are met, it shouldn't really matter for the company, according to me.... this already happens with the management; some managers do stay at home and work from there, so, they already do it, it can be extended ... It is more, maybe, psychological I think, the worker would be happier, because the worker can remain at home in his tracksuit and continue his work.

Kenneth's comments capture some of the contradictions surrounding the ban on most of the workers to work from home and as he reflects on the benefits that working from home can bring, he also suggests that this can be extended to other workers. But what do workers at Tech Co. in general think about working from home? Is this something high on their agenda and that of the organisation? And what role does gender play in this issue?

#### **8.1.5. No One Asks for Spatial Flexibility at Tech Co.**

Whilst becoming aware of the contradictory stand taken on the issue of home working and noting that workers like Kenneth were suggesting that the option be extended to more workers, I asked the HR Manager whether telework is considered as something positive which can enhance the organisation rather than weaken it:

Liz: It is seen like that as well, but we don't think about these things.

Not thinking about these things means that issues like FWAs were not considered to be a priority, possibly because the HR manager told me that workers at Tech Co. never ask to work from home and she never gets any requests from workers to do so. When I asked her whether Telework and other FWAs are something they promote she replied:

Liz:           No. We don't even discuss it. We don't talk about it.

When I pointed out to Liz that working from home is still largely associated with mothers she defended herself by saying:

Liz:           Because they asked for it ... we don't offer it just like that, only if they ask for it.

Liz's reply shows that working from home was not seen as a business strategy and was still considered to be a taboo subject which is best kept under wraps at Tech Co.

#### **8.1.6. Misinformation and Lack of Consistency on the Issue of Spatial Flexibility.**

Because at Tech Co. spatial flexibility was neither discussed nor promoted, a lot of confusion and misinformation reigned on who could work from home and when. For example, some workers like Kenneth (Implementation Consultant) linked home working to sick children when he noted that:

Kenneth: As far as I know, those in my grade, we are not allowed to work from home, as long as it's not something for example like when someone's children are sick and they need to stay at home with them and ... but it's not, ehhm, it's not something that is granted freely.

The lack of information on teleworking also led to inconsistent practices and for example some workers like Daniel (Implementation Specialist) felt compelled to go to the office even when he was travelling abroad in the afternoon:

Daniel: On contracts sometimes we travel to Libya and the flight leaves at 2pm and for me since I'm not going to the airport with my car, I have to go back home, get my bag and leave to the airport. So, when I wake up in the morning I can work from home ...

Anna: You don't actually do that?

Daniel: Erm, they were still up to discussing it ... but I don't know how feasible ... we mentioned it once, when I asked if I can do it, but then they said they had to mention something on it ...

Anna: Does that mean you still come in? Did I understand you correctly? Because you are still going to waste a lot of time travelling, I mean...

Daniel: And the thing is that you have to go back home, get your bag, because you're not going to go with your car and leave it there. I then have to involve my mum who has to go out of her way, so, you have to see the human aspects of it as well.

Daniel's remarks capture the notion that ideal workers should show their face at the office, even when common sense would dictate otherwise. On the other hand, Thomas (Implementation Consultant) who worked in the same section as Daniel, told me that he only works from home on the morning before he is due to travel abroad in the afternoon. This means that Daniel and Thomas relied on their perceptions about what was appropriate or inappropriate for them to do in the given circumstances and it is clear that their perceptions are different.

Other workers like Clara (Senior Implementation Consultant) whilst showing interest in working from home, said that she found it intimidating to go to her manager to ask to work from home. In fact, when I asked Clara whether she had ever considered working from home, whilst referring to her manager, she replied:

Clara: It depends on which mood he is ... I would like to, but I know that my manager is inflexible and I know that I can't go there ...

Anna: How would your manager take it if people started asking him to work from home? How does he see flexibility? Do they really approve it?

Clara: At times he ... yeah? It depends on the mood he is.

Here Clara confirmed the subjectivity of being able to work from home, which in her case depends on the mood of her direct manager. She told me that other members of staff had asked to work from home but their requests were rejected, and since she anticipated a negative reply, she avoided asking in the first place. Having to ask to work from home implies doing something out of the ordinary in a setting where the autonomy of the workers is restricted. Why was this happening at Tech Co.? Why was teleworking neither promoted nor discussed in an environment where it could possibly thrive? What was stopping workers from doing so?

## 8.2. The Perils of Working from Home and the Difficulties of Assessing Output

In Chapter seven, I showed that at Tech Co. the means to assess productivity were unclear to all (directors, managers as well as the workers) and hence there was a lot of emphasis on face time rather than on the output of the person. In such a context, where the means to assess productivity are weak, the presence of workers in the office may bring a false sense of security that workers can be kept in check if they are at the office. The idea of keeping control and the notion of abuse was brought up by several workers, and for example Clara (Senior Implementation Consultant), who incidentally relied on telework during her assignments abroad, highlighted this sentiment when she claimed that:

Clara: I appreciate the flexibility of having the option, (to work from home) but then you tend to, but then there are people who could abuse it ... it's a fine line for management ... but then if you have proved yourself to be ... to deliver, it shouldn't be.

On a similar note Ray (Senior Software Developer) expressed his reservations about his own capabilities of working unsupervised from home even though he saw telework as something positive:

Ray: It would be good, working from home, I think. But again, like, if I had the liberty I would use it to work, but then I would need to be careful. I think there needs to be some sort of process to control this too. I think, so that it won't ... you need to know what you are supposed to put in, a number of working hours, so that your productivity would show.

Hence in a context where workers tend to link working from home with possible

abuse, what did the predominantly male workers think about working from home and how did this link to their assessment of the ideal worker?

### **8.2.1. To Work or Not to Work from Home? Yes, but it is Better if We Don't!**

If we look at spatial flexibility as something positive and beneficial, one would assume that everyone would be keen to take up this option. Yet, this is a simplistic way of looking at the issue of spatial flexibility and through the interviews with workers at Tech Co. I realised that there are several personal, organisational, and cultural factors at play that may affect this option and these are not free from gendered assumptions.

It is interesting to note that when I put the question whether workers in the two chosen teams would be interested in working from home, most of the informants showed ambivalence towards this option, and many had reservations about it. They immediately brought up a series of justifications why they generally try to avoid it. In fact, most conversations had the “*yes – but*” format as the participants came up with a list of partly real and partly perceived problems which could hamper them from working from home. These are discussed in more detail below.

## 8.2.2. Working from Home is Bad for Teamwork

Several workers from the Software Development Department were sceptical about working from home and said that they cannot telework because this would have negative repercussions on teamwork, on their creativity and their ability to solve problems. For example, Roderick (Software Development) whilst claiming that working from home would be good, insisted that it is best to work from the office because of the concept of 'buddy coding':

Roderick: I think it is difficult to implement successfully.

Anna: Why?

Roderick: Because here we have teamwork and I think it's very important, in the sense ... development, being our work, I think that as such, I think that it would always be better to work as a team, because sometimes there are problems, and it would be good to share them. Even here, we have the concept of buddy-coding, which means two workers working together on the same thing at the same time. Because, sometimes, you are focused on something, and when someone is helping you, like, he sees things differently. In the sense, if you are working alone at home, you lose out on this, I think.

When I inquired whether the concept of buddy coding can be done remotely, he replied:

Roderick: You can, but I think you, you will lose out. I don't think it can be implemented successfully, working from home, on a regular basis. If it is done occasionally, say once or twice a month you remain working from home, and you do your work from there. But, I think most of the time, it's better to be here in order to retain teamwork.

Anna: But..if in the future, if say you are going to have a baby, or something like that, would you be interested in the long run?



Roderick: No, I would be interested, but as I already told you, I'm afraid that creativity will somewhat decrease.

It was not just the workers in the Software Development unit who brought up the issue of teamwork as the main reason why they would not want to work from home. Likewise, the workers in the Business Application Unit pointed out that working in a team was essential but more so during particular stages of the projects when as a team they need to "sit around a table, get a flip chart and, start scribbling and start discussing."

### **8.2.3. Working from Home is Bad because of Possible Distractions**

It is interesting to note that when I brought up the issue of parenthood and the possibility of teleworking, many brought up the issue of distractions at home as the reason why they would not want to do so. For example when I asked Ray (Senior Software Developer) whether he would be interested in working from home if he became a father he replied:

Ray: A lot, a real lot. ... If I had the opportunity to do so that would be good, because then I can say ... I, for example ...

Ray's affirmation was followed by immediate concern that the proper work environment is the office and not at home:

Ray: But listen, from home you will not work as well as you do here, you know? Sometimes, for example, I come in on Saturday. With

my laptop I can actually work from home on Saturday, but I still come here to work, because here is the proper work environment, so you work more.

At home there are many distractions - television, what is happening and so on ... so as for myself, if I had the liberty to work from home it would be great, to work from home.

It is interesting to note that whilst Ray thinks that the office is better than home because there may be many distractions at home, other workers like Daniel (Implementation Specialist) would like to work from home to avoid the frequent interruptions and the distractions at the office:

Daniel: There are times when I wish I could work from home ... Because for example you're working, then someone comes in, you have to stop what you're doing, you forget what you were doing, you have to get back into the groove.

Anna: Are there a lot of disturbances happening between you? Because on one side I understand the importance of interacting with people and supporting each other ... but at the same time do you find that this creates a lot of pressures, or disturbances?

Daniel: Not really pressure, more a kind of disturbance. And I know it's part of my job, but for example I'll be working on one thing and focusing, and I will have my train of thought on it and then: 'this has come in, let's work on it quickly it's urgent' so that's my train of thought right there and when you do that there is room for error and clumsiness which unfortunately is one of my downfalls and you miss out on a point 'why did I do this? Let me start again.'

Hence it remains unclear where it is at the office or at home that workers are most distracted. However the issue of distractions at the office seems to be taken as a matter of fact and simply assumed to be part of the job. On the other hand, distractions which emanate from the family are assessed differently especially when babies or young children are present.

#### **8.2.4. When Babies are Present – the Productivity is Assumed to Go Down.**

Some of the workers believed that the productivity at home could never match the productivity at the office once children are present at home. For example, Thomas (Implementation Consultant), whilst showing the wish to work from home, said:

Thomas: Yes, it's obvious ... because if you are going to be working from home for four hours you will probably only be able to work three probably. Because you are at home for a reason, if the baby is crying or something happened ... I can imagine that if you are working four hours from home I guess you will only be able to work two hours. I don't know, I don't know. You have to see ... so then you come and do the rest here and work till late.

Here Thomas is linking home working to a very specific period in one's life when the children are still young and where they are likely to cause disruptions. Of course this depends on a number of factors like for example the number of children present and their age and the type and quantity of support received. In fact it is pertinent to note that research suggests (Rodriguez Araujo, 2008) that men like Thomas are less likely to be interrupted since they anticipate receiving their partner's support when they work from home.

This does not mean that all workers can rely on their partner or on their extended family's support if they work at home, and when the children are still very young, working from home may be challenging indeed. Zoe (Implementation Specialist) expressed this sentiment when I asked her whether she would be able to work from home after having her second baby:

Zoe: I cannot imagine working from home with a small baby. It will be a lie to me and a lie to the company because I know that the moment the baby will cry, I'll just leave everything and I will pick the baby up, basically.

Here, in line with other studies (Russell, O'Connell & Mc Ginnity, 2009), Zoe as a mother was anticipating work-life conflict rather than the possibility of work-life integration through the use of telework. She was not anticipating much support from her partner and this made it more difficult to telework with a newborn baby and a young son.

So, whilst acknowledging the challenges that working from home can bring to carers of very young children like Zoe, it should not be assumed that all the reasons which were put forward to avoid working from home were logical ones, as I show in the section below.

#### **8.2.5. Challenging Some of the Perceptions Related to the Use of Space and Space Flexibility**

During a focus group meeting with a group of senior Implementation Consultants, Kevin showed concern about his ability to offer an optimal service to the client if he worked from home and told me that:

Kevin: because if people dial in, if people call in, and you get the call from home ... I don't feel relaxed, it's not the same...

Kevin was adamant about his preference for work from the office. He stressed this point during a focus group where the HR Manager was present. Yet, during

the same meeting when the HR Manager left the room, in the context of a discussion on his working conditions in comparison to those of an external consultant who was working from home once weekly, he claimed:

Kevin:           So, for example, at the moment I am working with ... an external consultant ... and when I see his conditions and commissions and compensation he is getting. And for example, this consultant is working four days a week from the office and one day from home, that doesn't make me feel good; then I question loyalty.

Noting that in the presence of the HR Manager Kevin had earlier insisted that he would not feel comfortable working from home, and how he would not even try to do so, I challenged him as to why he was now suddenly envying the external consultant for being able (amongst other things) to work from home for one day a week. When I asked him why he can't work from home he replied:

Kevin:           If I had to, it would be easier.

And when I challenged him again as to why he was not doing so, he said:

Kevin:           I don't think I'm allowed to do so.

Kevin's remarks capture the ambivalence at its best and shows how working from the office is defended as the better option of the place where workers can perform their duties as a matter of course. Coming from a worker like Kevin, who like his two other colleagues in the team (Clara and Charles), successfully worked away from the office in foreign countries and who also regularly continued to work from home in the evenings, it was rather baffling why he was

insisting that work is best done at the office.

Such strong perceptions show how difficult it is for workers to go against the accepted ideal worker norms in their particular context and within their organisational setting. The suggestion is that even knowledge workers who have the tools and the means to work remotely, are hardly ever given the opportunity to explore alternative and innovative ways of working that could possibly make them happier.

### **8.3. Willingly Surrendering to the Power of the Organisation and Following the Footsteps of Ideal Workers who Work from the Office.**

The list of objections brought forward by most of the workers clearly highlights the difficulties in breaking up the work-home and work-family boundary. This made me realise how willingly workers surrender to the power of the organisation and how perceptions about what is considered to be good or bad, what is allowed or banned, what is deemed to be appropriate or inappropriate for a good worker to do according to their gender, can condition workers to remain within the safe ideal worker parameters.

The fact that most of the men at Tech Co. did not have the main caring responsibility in their family could have induced most of the male workers to disassociate themselves from working patterns which were linked primarily to working mums with young children. This came out more clearly through William

(Business Analyst) in the course of a discussion about work and family and the plans he may have about integrating work and life and spatial flexibility:

Anna: In your stage in life, apart from studying, I don't know, do you have a family, or do you plan to have one?

William: Eventually, yes.

Anna: Do you think at that stage it would help, for example, if you could work more from home, or maybe work differently, be more flexible, for example?

William: That's one of the things, you know. If I find another job, that's what I will be looking for, obviously, how flexible I can be with this company that I will be working with.

Anna: What sort of flexibility would be ideal for you?

William: In that occasionally, I can work from home, you know?

Anna: Is that fundamental?

William: For example, even if I can just work, work during the day, during the morning work over here, and in the afternoon I go home, for example. I don't know, maybe my wife would be pregnant, you can have half and half a day, still working, but ... from home.

It is interesting to note that William was the only male worker who told me that he might consider working half a day from the office and half a day from home just like the mothers were doing. However, before doing so, he had already specified that he would want to do so "occasionally" thus also distinguishing himself from the mothers who were doing so on a daily basis. Similarly, during a focus group Charles (Senior Implementation Consultant) at first suggested that working from home should become an option for everyone especially because the office is often too noisy. On seeing his interest in home working, I asked him whether he would be interested in doing so himself. Charles

immediately clarified that he actually prefers to go to the office to work. So, when I asked him why he made the proposal in the first place he said:

Charles: Why should others be allowed to work from home and not me?

Charles's reply captures the sentiment of the majority of male workers at Tech Co. who seemed to show preference to working from the office, but who may occasionally consider teleworking- as long as this was not done on a daily basis (like the mothers were obliged to do in order to care for their children). This implies that most of the men at Tech Co. were not envisaging themselves to be the main carers but were assuming that someone else would take on that burden thus leaving them free to work in line with the ideal worker norms set by men with other men in mind.

## **Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter is linked to the issue of space, spatial flexibility and the interlinking factors related to work-life issues, gender and masculinity. Here I showed that at Tech Co. working from home on a regular basis seemed to conjure up images of mothers with family-related problems. These had to be at home at a particular time every day in order to care for their young children (for example when they returned home from school in the afternoon). This limited their availability at the office and reduced their face time there. The directors and the managers at Tech Co. could also work occasionally from home (for



example to finish an urgent report without getting interrupted) but their motivation was different and stemmed from organisational needs (rather than from family related needs). This made spatial flexibility appear legitimate, whilst the concession to allow mothers to work from home every day was seen as a favour or as an accommodation. The rest of the workers, being neither managers nor mothers with family-related problems, were not entitled to work from home.

The working patterns of the mothers did not seem to bring negative consequences to the clients, to co-workers or to the organisation (instead it was described as a win-win situation). I showed that the company did a lot of precautionary testing before giving the go-ahead to the mothers to work remotely. Similarly, the only male manager who was teleworking on a regular basis (twice a week) claimed that he was more effective, felt more relaxed and worked longer hours because he had fewer interruptions at home. This confirms that responsiveness to work-life demands need not interfere with the company's drive for efficiency and profitability (Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2007). Yet, because the mothers resorted to spatial flexibility, there were suggestions that they were less ambitious career wise and there was a feeling that they could not advance in their career. The HR Manager's words capture this feeling best when she said: "True they give you their work, but they're restricted; they cannot grow in the company. Can they ever become managers when they spend half a day at home every day?"

Such claims immediately highlight how mothers seemed to transgress the gendered boundary of the ideal worker by resorting to spatial flexibility for family related needs. However, because men typically leave the caring responsibilities to others, (Acker, 1990) this still leaves them the option to work from the office as needed, when needed, whilst the mothers cannot easily do so. Hence, both the motivation (whether for family related or for organisational needs) and the frequency of using spatial flexibility on a daily basis or on a less frequent basis, seem to make a difference. These differences were sufficient to sift out the mothers from the ideal workers thus confirming that the “disembodied and universal worker unencumbered by procreation and care” remains a fundamental element of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990, p. 139).

At Tech Co. spatial flexibility was neither promoted nor discussed in the organisation. The HR Manager insisted that workers in general did not ask to work flexibly from home. Being a taboo subject, I showed that at Tech Co. there were a lot of misconceptions around the issue, and perceptions differed from one person to another (for example, a worker felt the need to go to the office in the morning when he was travelling in the afternoon, whilst his colleague in the same department thought that it was fine if he worked from home in the morning before he was due to travel).

When discussing spatial flexibility, many raised issues related to abuse and some workers seemed unsure even of their own capabilities and the ability of others to work away from the office without any supervision. This seemed to capture the feeling that a “worker out of sight is a worker out of control”

(Rayman et al., 1999, p. 175). In this case it was not just the managers who thought so but even the workers themselves showed the same concerns about possible abuse by workers.

The issue of abuse was linked to the question of how to measure output and productivity when workers are not present in the office. Possibly due to the lack of instruments for measuring output, seeing workers at the office seemed to bring a sense of false reassurance to the managers and the directors at Tech Co., even though the presence of workers in itself does not automatically imply a positive output (Elsbach, Cable & Sherman, 2010; Bailyn, 2010).

When the issue of spatial flexibility was probed through the masculine lens, and workers were specifically asked whether they would consider working from home once they became parents, most of the male workers showed interest (Mc Donald & Jeanes, 2012; Russell & O'Leary, 2012; Pini & Mc Donald, 2008) and typically said yes, at first. However, as soon as they said so, they would bring up a list of reasons why they could not, or rather, why they would not want to resort to spatial flexibility on a regular basis (as the mothers were doing).

This resistance was legitimised in terms of the harm it could cause to the workers themselves, to their team, to their clients and to the overall organisational effectiveness. For example, some argued that working from home would have negative repercussions on teamwork and creativity (in that it would disrupt the concept of buddy coding in the Software Development

Department), or else they claimed that at particular times it was essential to discuss project ideas with all of the team members. Those servicing the clients had reservations about teleworking because at times they typically needed help from their co-workers to solve clients' problems.

Others insisted that the proper work environment is the office because at home one is bound to be distracted by what is happening around them and by the temptation to watch television. In doing so, such workers failed to mention the distractions that workers experience through their interactions with their co-workers at the office and they just accept this as the norm. They also failed to note that instead of the television at home, they have direct access to the Internet on the very same tool (the computer) on which they work all day. This confirms how instinctive beliefs about what is considered to be appropriate ideal worker behaviour limit the worker's ability to reason things out objectively and to stick to the old ways, working without crossing the ideal worker threshold that is rooted in gendered norms and expressed in routine gendered performances. It also shows weak and limited organisational learning (Lee, et al., 2000).

The issue of distractions at home was mostly linked to parenthood in that both male and female workers assumed that having babies and young children would mean that less time can be dedicated to paid work if workers work from home. This assumption raised problems regarding the mothers who used spatial flexibility, in that questions loomed about their ability to focus on work when at home even though supporting evidence stated otherwise. This

suggests that there is a tendency to put all mothers with children into one big group without first asking about the number of children they have, their age, their temperament, the support or lack of support they receive when working from home (for example from their partner or relatives) and whether the children attend a nursery or school and for how long they do so. Furthermore, there is a tendency to assume that work at home can only be done during normal office hours when, in reality, a lot of work done through ICT can be done at any time and any place (although there may be restrictions related to giving a service to the clients).

When discussing spatial flexibility the workers' values often tallied with the expectations set up by their superiors and there was a tendency for workers not to digress from these values which were closely linked to the ideal worker and gendered norms. This seemed to lead most of the male workers into thinking that working from home on a daily basis is something which only mothers do and hence, in order to avoid doing "sissy stuff" and being labelled negatively, they realise that they cannot follow the same pattern (David & Brannon, 1976; Kimmel, 2010; Khan, 2009). Such hegemonic values linked to masculinity make it very difficult for workers in such organisations to conceptualise spatial flexibility as a legitimate work option for all, and in doing so, the reign of the Single Agenda logic lives on and reproduces itself. Table 8.1 below captures this chapter and its outcome at a glance as follows:

**Table 8.1 The use of space, ideal workers' values and the categorisation of workers: mothers, managers and the others.**

<b>The use of space, ideal workers' values and the categorisation of workers into: mothers, managers and the others</b>			
<b>Who is using spatial flexibility?</b>	<b>Mothers</b> Are allowed to work from home ( <b>an accommodation</b> )	<b>Managers</b> Have the liberty to work from home occasionally ( <b>working from home is legitimised</b> )	<b>Other workers</b> Can't work from home ( <b>an imposed and accepted limitation</b> )
<b>Frequency</b>	Daily	Occasionally	On rare occasions
<b>Reasons for seeking spatial flex</b>	Family--mostly childcare related	Work related reasons (e.g. to finish urgent reports) To avoid distractions and excessive noise at the office	To stay with sick children/family members
<b>Real/perceived reasons for avoiding spatial flex</b>	Distraction when the mother does not have help and the children are still babies/ very young	Doubts still linger on the possibility of managing people if not always present in the office  Problems measuring output	Assumption that spatial flex reduces teamwork and creativity  Assumptions that the office remains the best environment where to work  Perceptions that spatial flex can lead to abuse  Assumption that the distractions at home are going to be bigger than those at the office
<b>Impact of spatial flexibility on career progression</b>	Mothers who work from home on a regular basis are considered to be less ambitious and hence less likely to be promoted	None on established managers who occasionally do so.	None noted on workers who on rare occasions work from home

# Chapter 9      Conclusions, Discussion and Recommendations

## Introduction

This chapter, which brings this research to a close, is divided into **four main parts**. In the **first part** I synthesise the overall and the individual key research findings of this study and highlight their main contributions to knowledge. **In the second part** of the chapter I open up the discussion on the findings in relation to the two broad aims of this study, namely: the ideal worker and how ideal worker values are reinforced and reproduced; and on the potential and barriers to Dual Agenda change in the case study organisation. **The third part** of the chapter captures my methodological reflections on the study with a special focus on the CIAR process. In the **fourth and final section** I conclude this work by assessing the implication of the findings to the broader context, discuss its limitations and finally propose some recommendations for future research on this subject.

## 9.1. A Synthesis and Discussion of the Key Research Findings and its Key Contribution to Knowledge

### 9.1.1. What Was the Purpose of the Research?

This research captures some of the complex and at times contradictory voices that emerged when discussing gendered organisations and work-life issues.

The study was carried out in a Maltese organisation operating in the ICT sector where men were the main protagonists. The national context, which is very traditionally gendered and which in some ways can be considered to be extreme, offered a unique opportunity (Yin, 2009) to analyse how invisible gendered assumptions in relation to ideal worker values (Acker, 1990) are applied in practice and perpetuated over time (Rapoport et al., 2002; Bailyn, 2010). This part of the research was examined through research questions one, two and three, which focused on the ideal worker and men's ability - or their inability - to integrate paid work with their personal lives.

Because I used a form of action research (CIAR) and the Dual Agenda lens (Rapoport et al., 2002; Bailyn & Fletcher, 2007), I was able to examine some of the processes, interactions, expectations and work practices that emanate from hegemonic masculine and ideal worker values, and was able to assess their impact on gender equity and organisational effectiveness. Where appropriate and as a part of the action research process, I challenged some of the gendered assumptions which were raised by my informants (Directors, Managers and Workers) during the various research cycles that involved interviews, focus group meetings, and feedback sessions that were spread over five years. Through the early stages of action research cycles (I did not go into the experimental phase of the action research process), I was able to look at the potential of and barriers to Dual Agenda change at the individual and the organisational level, which were raised in research questions four and five.



In order to address question six, throughout the process I also looked at how my findings around the conceptualisation and the manifestation of ideal worker values are informed by and can inform theory and practice. In the section below I first give an overview of the salient findings and then focus on the seven key individual findings in more detail.

### **9.1.2. What are the Salient Findings?**

In the case study organisation, the image of a self-reliant hard-core techie who is not encumbered by care and housework and who displays a low sense of entitlement to Flexible Work Arrangements (Lewis & Smithson, 2001; Lewis & Haas 2005) emerged as a clear indicator of ideal worker values (Bailyn, 2011; Rapoport et al., 2002; Acker, 1990). Ideal ICT workers were assumed to be in a position to get by with limited induction and follow-up training and be able to continue learning in their own free time. Being unencumbered workers, it was thus assumed that ideal ICT workers would automatically be able to give their priority to paid work and to be able to work long hours (preferably from the office and not from the home) - as necessary and when necessary - something which unencumbered workers (especially mothers) could not do with ease.

By being generous with their personal time, ideal workers at Tech Co. were able to show their loyalty and commitment to the organisation and to act as role models for others to emulate, thus reaffirming the hegemonic values of the leaders. In doing so, they also avoided doing the unpaid chores at home that

are typically associated with women and which tend to be less valued in comparison to paid work. Thus, workers who managed to work long hours garnered a number of benefits (Kaufman, 2014; Kaufman & Gerson, 2012) which strengthened their masculinity and improved their chances of being promoted, amongst other things (Rapoport et al., 2002; Bailyn, 2006b; 2011). Ideal worker values, like for example time generosity on the part of the workers through unpaid work after normal working hours, also brought a number of apparent benefits to the organisation. These helped in keeping the costs down and in allowing the company to meet its deadlines and to service its clients better.

This research shows that multiple forces at play render Dual Agenda change more difficult to materialise in a context where hegemonic masculine values prevail (Kimmel, 2010, Khan, 2009, Beynon, 2002, Connell, 2005; Fisher, et al., 1998; David & Brannon, 1976); where the sense of entitlement to forms of work that support work and family and work-life integration amongst men is low (Lewis & Smithson, 2001; Lewis & Haas 2005); where organisational learning is limited (Lee et al., 2000); and where gendered values are reinforced in multiple ways in the micro and broader context (Lewis & Den Dulk, 2008; Kamenou, 2008). These findings suggest that attempts to change gendered organisations through CIAR at the organisational level only, may not be sufficient to tackle the multiple forces at play which sustain the Single Agenda logic.

I now discuss the seven key findings separately in more detail below.

### 9.1.3. What are the Key Findings?

Whilst many CIAR and work-life research projects were women centric (Kornberger, Carter & Ross-Smith, 2010; Charlesworth & Baird, 2007; Kim et al., 2006; Bourke & Russell, 2006; Broznick et al., 2006b; Fletcher & Holvino, 2006), this study largely focused on men and work-life issues. This was useful to extend knowledge in relation to theories of Hegemonic Masculinity and how they link with theories of Gendered Organisation and Sense of Entitlement theories through the conceptualisation of the ideal worker in the ICT sector. Furthermore, the study elaborates how ideal worker notions are maintained and bolstered by what happens in the multi-layers of context at the personal, the family, the organisational, the national and in the international context. Seven key findings emerged through this study and these are discussed individually below:

In view that the term hegemonic masculinity is often critiqued for its ambiguities and elusiveness (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Hearn, 1996; 2004; Yancey Martin, 2009), **my first key finding** is that this research made it clearer how the values of the leaders, who are privileged in many ways, shape up the gendered boundaries and the gendered processes in the organisation as best fits their personal needs. This is generally done without much consideration on how their values and gendered work practices affect the 'non hegemonic workers' who are less privileged and who may have different work-life needs to theirs. For example, through this research I was able to show how long working hours, which are typically assumed to conflict with the rest of life, brought substantive benefits to

the hegemony and to the organisation in the form of free work. On the personal side, being leaders with a lot of power and leverage, I showed how the small group of directors and the managers worked on interesting projects for which they were well paid. As they solved technical problems with their buddies, the majority did not seem to be hard pressed to rush home – unlike those with caring responsibilities (who for example had to pick up their children from day care at a fixed time). Likewise, the hegemony presented no compelling reasons to work every day from home (like some of the mothers were doing) because in the vast majority of cases, there was always someone else (typically their female partners) who would assume the main care responsibilities at home when their children returned from school or when they worked late in the evenings.

Thus looking at hegemonic masculine values as best serving the interest of the hegemony is useful to study the hurdles in challenging gendered values in organisations and how these interplay with choice and constraint and the different sense of entitlements to work-life support (Lewis & Smithson, 2001; Lewis & Haas 2005) on the part of those who are considered hegemonic and non-hegemonic.

**Through my second finding**, I was able to show how long working hours from the office, provided the hegemony with a ‘good excuse’ to avoid the care and house-related work which in turn risked putting them in “sissy stuff” territory and which could also distract them from paid work. Paid work and long working hours brought the hegemony money and status and as men of power in the organisation, their values and actions served as models for others to emulate -

especially if the non- hegemonic workers wished to be promoted to the upper echelons. This masculine logic freed them up of any guilt feelings for not prioritising family over paid work, and reinforced the notion that they were giving their best both to the organisation and to their family (by earning a lot of money). This allowed them to perform their masculinity in a culturally approved manner in a neo-liberal economy where the notion of care has not yet been de-feminised, and where many men still think that they should work like true men rather than like women who divide their attention between paid work and care.

**My third finding** highlights some of the interlinking factors which act as hurdles in challenging gendered values in organisation which emanate from the broader context of the organisation. For example through this study it became clearer to note that in national contexts like Malta where social policies and welfare regimes do not assume the equality imperative and where dual-earner families with caring responsibilities are not well supported (e.g. in terms of paid family leave for fathers, free childcare and after-school service), the majority of fathers (unlike the mothers in this study) did not feel the need to make adjustments at work in order to cope with family and care. This allowed the male respondents more independence and freedom on how to use their space and time, but it made it more difficult for workers (mostly for mothers) to break the gendered contract within the family - especially when these had young children.

Things happening at the broader context too can affect the worker's sense of entitlement to work-life measures. For example, because of the economic crisis, the study showed that workers were not being replaced and were expected to do

more with less. In this climate of uncertainty, the workers accepted the heavier workloads with a sense of resignation and seemed more cautious to depart from what they perceived to be ideal workers or hegemonic masculine values. Hence, these external interlinking factors may be useful in explaining the paucity in change in matters relating to gender in organisations which seem to move at “glacial pace” (Moen & Sweet, 2004, p. 220) and which are generally difficult to confront and understand.

**My fourth finding** is related to the notion of face time and time generosity, which both emanate from hegemonic masculine values linked to the ideal worker. This study suggests that this value is likely to be perpetuated in organisations where the means to assess output and productivity are low. In such cases, being visible at the office and working long hours seem to act as a placebo for effectiveness in the absence of a more direct way to measure productivity. This issue needs to be given more importance in order to challenge important notions like space and time in relation to gendered organisations. If organisations have strong means to assess output, place and time would be rendered less relevant and in turn, this may allow more flexibility to workers. However, it is unsure whether this will be sufficient to overcome the gendered choices in relation to work and family.

**My fifth finding** shows that in organisations like Tech Co where hegemonic masculine values are strong and are considered to be positive for both the hegemony and the organisation (for example on the issue of long working hours discussed above), innovative ways of working which may challenge the values of the hegemony, are unlikely to be encouraged. This may contribute to lower

organisational learning (Lee et al., 2000) and may lead to inefficient work practices which become outdated but which may remain unchanged since they emanate from the leaders, who in many ways become revered for their power in the organisation.

**My sixth finding** is in relation to technical competences as symbols of hegemonic masculinity (Wajcman, 1991; Cockburn, 1983) and seeking a plausible explanation why this is still happening in spite of the fact that digital technologies are considered to be more egalitarian than industrial technologies. Through this research, it became evident that in the case study organisation, hard technical skills were given priority over soft skills like listening and communicating skills. Here I was able to show that the undervaluation of the soft skills, which tend to be linked to women, is not cost neutral and for example, lack of effective communication with the client can disrupt the project in many ways. This underscores the importance that ICT workers possess both technical and soft skills and may serve to open up the debate on how skills which are considered to be masculine (or feminine) can be expanded to both sexes. Furthermore it raises questions on how jobs in the digital technologies, can become more mainstream by giving equal attention to the soft and the hard technical skills.

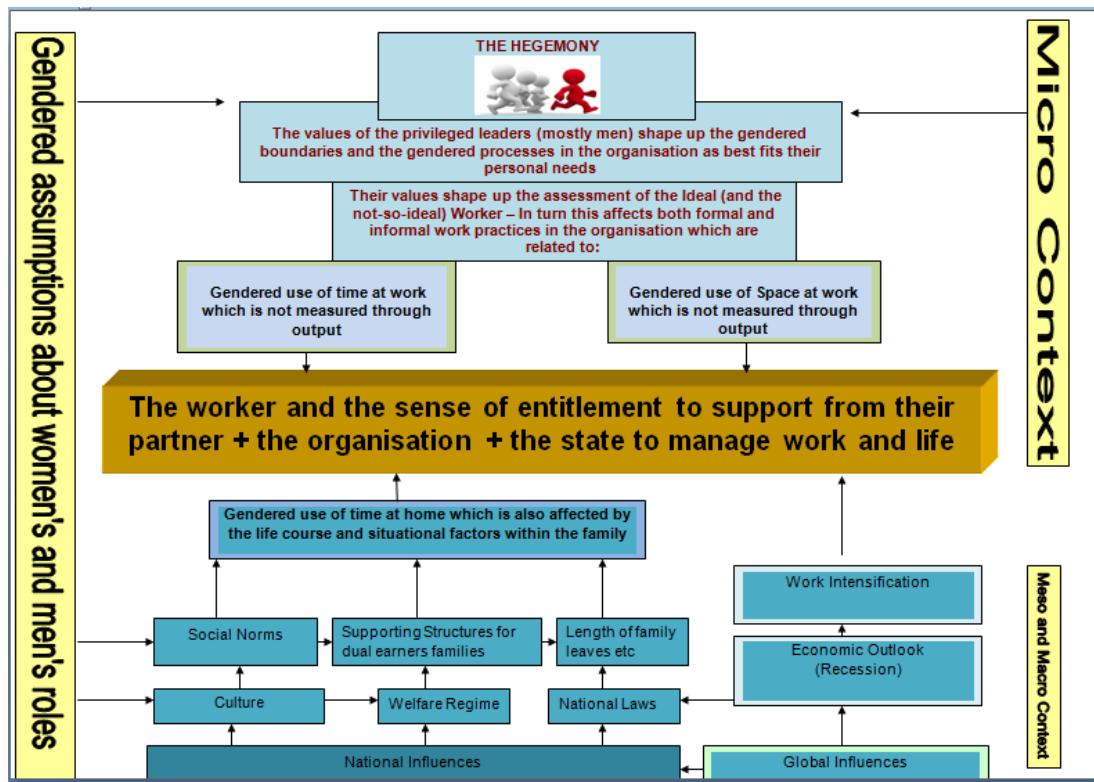
**My seventh and final finding** is also linked to technical skills in that hegemonic masculine values assume that the ideal ICT workers are technically savvy and do not need much training, and if they do, they can train on their own after normal working hours. This idea is intertwined with the idea of self-reliance that is one of the key components of 'true manhood' (David & Brannon, 1976). In this study, I

showed how lack of induction and follow-up training could cause problems in the project, which in turn add pressure and frustration on the more experienced workers. Furthermore, it became clearer that hegemonic masculine values can also come at a cost to the organisation and may affect the workers in negative ways. This shows that hegemonic masculinity, whilst being a theoretical construct goes beyond the discursive (Foucault, 1980) and its impact is palpable in many ways, especially through the use of CIAR.

Figure 9.1 below brings together the seven key findings discussed above and shows how the intersecting layers of context affect work-life issues within a gendered micro, meso and macro context.



Figure 9.1 The interlinking layers of context



#### 9.1.4. Key Contributions to Knowledge

My main contribution to knowledge highlights the importance of studying situated masculinity within the micro context of organisations without neglecting the interlinking factors at play within the broader meso and macro context. The multi-dimensional approach shown in model 9.1 contributes to knowledge by highlighting the complexities surrounding the notion of hegemonic masculinities and gendered organisations in relation to management practices and how these affect the work-life decisions of women and men. This is helpful in moving the discussion on gendered organisation beyond the simplistic focus on organisation per se.

Through this research, I was also able to show that whilst the CIAR approach may not be sufficient to tackle the multi-forces at play that sustain the notion of gendered organisations, the use of CIAR is useful in carrying out initial exploratory work in organisations. This allows for a better understanding of how the values of those who lead organisations (the hegemony) who are privileged in many ways, shape-up work processes in relation to time and space in organisations.

Finally, through this study I was able to map the ideal ICT worker in the specific organisation and unearth some of the invisible assumptions that draw on hegemonic masculine values that are sustained through the notion of ideal worker. Hence, in many ways hence through this study I was able to show how hegemonic masculinity is reinforced and reproduced within the intersecting organisational and national contexts.

The findings and key contributions to knowledge will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Table 9.2 below links the research questions with the discussion and indicates where these are addressed in this chapter.

**Figure 9.2 Linking the research questions to the discussion in the chapter**

<b>Questions No.</b>	<b>Focus on : The ideal worker and how ideal worker values are reinforced and reproduced</b>	<b>Discussed in Section 9.2 in this chapter</b>
1	How is the ideal worker defined in the specific male dominated ICT company and in a traditional national gendered context (Malta)?	9.2.1.
2	How are ideal worker assumptions manifested and reinforced in practice?	9.2.3.
3	How can men integrate paid work with their personal lives without being punished or labelled negatively for doing so?	9.2.2.
<b>Questions No.</b>	<b>Focus on: The potential and barriers to the Dual Agenda</b>	<b>Discussed in Section 9.3. in this chapter</b>
4.	What is the potential for Dual Agenda change at Tech Co.?	9.3.1.
5.	What are the barriers to change at the organisational level and at the individual level?	9.3.2.
<b>Question No.</b>	<b>Focus on: Theory Oriented Question</b>	<b>Discussed throughout this chapter</b>
6.	How can the findings inform theory and practice?	9.1 to 9.7.

## **9.2. Discussion - The Ideal Worker and how Ideal Worker Values are Reinforced and Reproduced**

### **9.2.1. The Ideal ICT Worker in a Specific Male Dominated Organisation**

In the case study organisation, it was clear from the outset that when speaking about the ideal worker, many had a man in mind. In fact, most of the references to workers were expressed in the masculine gender as if the women operating

there were invisible or less relevant. The lack of women in the organisation was not considered to be an issue and the overwhelmingly male majority of workers hardly noted it. Whilst this in itself may be considered to be cost neutral, in reality this meant that most of the work processes were built around masculine assumptions that conjure images of unencumbered male workers. Hence, by default, those who were leading the organisations (in their vast majority males, whose wives were responsible for the main caring roles in the family) assumed that their workers could imitate them - and like them - they would be able to give their priority to paid work first and always. As a result, in the case study organisation, time generosity (rather than output and effectiveness) was used as an indicator of commitment and served to sort out the potential leaders from the 'other' workers who did not fit the ideal worker template (Rapoport et al., 2002; Lewis et al., 2006; Lewis, 2007). In this hegemonic process, time generosity and long working hours were not presented as an imposition on the workers, but as a free choice. Yet little time was spent deliberating whether this was the best way to assess their workers.

When focusing on the skills of the ideal worker, the image of a technically savvy worker emerged as a fundamental pre-requisite for those operating at Tech Co. Soft skills were reported to be just as important as the hard technical skills, however in this setting, there was a clear overemphasis of the technical skills to the detriment of the development of the soft skills. This seemed linked to the fact that building a rapport with the client (through soft skills like communicating and interpreting the clients' needs), which is fundamental for orienting projects in the right direction, was not considered as real work (Bailyn, 2006b; Rapoport

et al., 2002; Perlow, 1997; 1999). As a consequence such work was not billed and was less valued. On the other hand, the concept of the tough technically competent ICT worker fits better with the symbol of Hegemonic Masculinity and with the idea that men have a more natural flair for technology than women do (Wajcman, 2006; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999). The idea of a competent technical worker is also intertwined with the idea of self-reliance. Self-reliance is one of the key components of 'true manhood' (David & Brannon, 1976) and adapted to this context, there seems to be an underlying assumption that tough workers do not need much induction or follow-up training. In addition, being male and unencumbered workers, it was assumed that they could do some of their training during their own free time in the evening or during weekends.

By using the Dual Agenda lens it was possible to assess the impact of these gendered assumptions relating to self-training and how these affect the workers and organisational effectiveness. Lack of training was causing more mistakes which created many bottlenecks in the projects and added pressure and frustration on the more experienced workers who were constantly disrupted and obliged to help the younger inexperienced workers. This also meant that workers remained dependent on each other, and because of this, their opportunities to work from home and to flex their hours, were restricted. Furthermore, assuming that workers can continue to update their ICT skills after normal working hours, suggests that those workers who have commitments outside work and especially those who have caring responsibilities (generally the mothers) can be disadvantaged when compared to the unencumbered ideal worker. However, this did not matter at Tech Co., because using personal time

for the benefit of the organisation was not conceived as a form of injustice (Lewis & Haas, 2005) by the hegemony, but as a way how to get more for less from the workers. Hence, what is perceived to be beneficial is not considered to be a problem - and what is not considered problematic, can hardly be fixed.

### **9.2.2. How do Men in the Organisation Integrate Work and Personal Life?**

When it comes to the single male workers in the organisation, these had very little to report *vis-à-vis* work-life conflict, as the majority gave the impression that they were managing to integrate their paid work with the rest of their life, without too many problems. With regards to men with a family in Malta, where the main breadwinning role is still strong and where the gendered contract is largely intact, the idea of long working hours (which is an integral component of the ideal workers) does not tarnish men's outlook as good fathers or make them look greedy. On the contrary, since this also generally means a better income and a better standard of living for their family (Borg, 2010c; Harrington et al., 2013), generally long working hours are seen as something positive rather than as something negative to be avoided.

Long working hours also seemed useful to men with a family because in staying away from home they could avoid the daily chores (Hochschild, 1997) and some of the "sissy stuff" (David & Brannon, 1976) linked to women. Typically, for those working full-time, these unpaid tasks have to be crammed in the few hours left after work and before bed-time (especially when young children are

present). These chores, like caring for the children, providing food, and establishing some order at home, are tiring and have to be done on a daily basis. Furthermore, they take-up a considerable amount of personal time, which may hinder those doing them (typically the mothers) from participating more fully in other activities including paid work, community activities, sports and other leisure.

The stress that some young mothers go through was made more obvious by one of the participants (Zoe) who spoke about being tired all the time - because after a full day at work she had to rush to pick up her son from childcare, do the cleaning, prepare food for the next day, play with her son, do the dishes, and do “everything all together at the same time” because her husband worked very long hours. This stress could not contrast more with the different discourse brought up by men who spoke about: ‘staying with their children’ after work, and who listed their children with their other leisure activities, which they managed to do after work.

Hence, to a great extent, even when working long hours, the majority of fathers at Tech Co. seemed to be managing to integrate work and family in a way which made sense to them; without tainting their masculinity (Beynon, 2002); and without the hassle and stress expressed by the young mother quoted above, who assumed the main care-related responsibilities. Likewise, because it is still not considered unfair or unjust for men and fathers to do less at home (Special Eurobarometer Survey, 2010; Lewis & Smithson, 2001), they seemed to profit from inequalities that sustain the Single Agenda logic.

### **9.2.3. How are Gendered Assumptions Manifested, Reinforced and Reproduced in Practice?**

Ideal worker values are largely built around masculine norms and so it becomes essential to ask how these values and norms are manifested, reinforced and reproduced in organisations. One of the ways in which ideal worker values are perpetuated is by looking at how these values are perceived by those who lead the organisation. For example, when analysing the issue of long working hours and how those at the helm (the hegemony) view this subject, it was interesting to note that they presented this as something positive.

At Tech Co., these values emanate from a small cohort of like-minded men who get their satisfaction through solving complex technical problems and who enjoy the thrill of technology. This group of men, who occupied important positions within the organisation, worked long hours with their work buddies. These acted like a second family - but without the hassle and the restriction that the real family typically brings with it (Hochschild, 1997). Because men occupying the top posts in the hierarchy are also generally well paid, they may have few incentives to break the pattern of long working hours when they are enjoying the work and are well compensated for it.

As a result, because men typically compare themselves to other men - rather than to women (Lewis & Haas, 2005) long working hours become a benchmark for others to emulate. This flags problems in changing the Single Agenda logic, especially because those who lead the organisations (for whom work-life integration is not a priority) live by this gendered creed, expect others to follow



their rules and believe that this is the best way to organise their life and do their business (Rapoport et al., 2002).

In fact, one of the main ways how ideal worker values were perpetuated at Tech Co., was by ensuring that those who transcended these values were looked upon negatively, whilst those who complied with the values of the hegemony were rewarded (for example through promotions) for keeping within the ideal worker boundary. This means that those vying for a promotion (who may be many) have little choice but to emulate their superiors (the few) by working long hours in order to remain within the ideal worker parameters. Whilst this is not applicable to all jobs in all sectors, where it is relevant, it creates a vicious pattern that is very difficult to break, especially when considering that the organisation may benefit from them too. For example, at Tech Co., free and voluntary after-hours were useful in helping the organisation meet its deadlines; to keep its costs down and to keep its clients better serviced.

In exploring how gendered ideal worker values are reproduced within the organisation, it is pertinent to point out that these values cannot be seen in isolation and disjointed from other values in relation to notions of ideal mothers (Mc Donald & Jeanes, 2012; Caruana et al., 2011; Lewis, & Den Dulke, 2008; Webber & Williams, 2008; Russo, 1976) and ideal fathers at the personal, family and wider social context (Beynon, 2002; Eurobarometer Survey, 2010; Maltese Family Survey Conclusions, 2007). For example, the participants in this study were exposed to a form of masculinity (and femininity) shaped by: strong traditional family values that led to low female employment rates; by

elements of a conservative welfare regime that led to a lack of childcare provisions; very low uptake of parental leave (unpaid) by men; and extremely short school opening hours, which made it difficult for both parents to work full-time, especially when the children are young.

A Sense of Entitlement theory provides some insights and perspectives into the ways in which normative gendered patterns are perpetuated in these contexts. Through processes of social comparison, individuals develop perceptions of what is normative and feasible and therefore what is equitable and just and hence, what they feel entitled to be able to do (Lerner, 1987; Lewis, 1996). Generally, people make comparisons with people of their own gender (Major, 1993, 1994). Thus, insofar as it would be going against the norm for mothers with young children not to adjust their working hours for family reasons, it would be considered unfeasible for men do so because of “social, normative and feasibility” factors (Lewis & Smithson, 2001, p. 1458). Combined together, these factors may have restricted the work-life choices assumed by the informants in this research and reinforced the gender contracts at the personal and family level. These in turn also affect the notion of ideal worker in the organisation. For example, considering that Malta has very low female employment rates, could have added pressures on male workers at Tech Co. to work more, whilst the short school hours could have reduced the perceived feasibility of mothers to work full-time from the office. All these factors show how interlinking issues sustain and reproduce gendered choices within the family and in organisations.

### **9.3. Exploring the Potential and Barriers to Dual Agenda Change**

#### **9.3.1. The Potential for Dual Agenda Change - How Gendered Assumptions may Undermine Workplace Effectiveness and Gender Equity.**

Whilst at face value the Single Agenda logic seems to bring positive things to those who lead the organisation, this does not mean it does not have a negative side too. In fact, through my study I identified at least three categories of 'refuters' (some of whom were men) who were seen in a less positive light when compared to the workers who occupied the higher posts of the hierarchy (who were generous with their personal time). It is pertinent to point out that the over-emphasis on long working hours did not only bring negative consequences to different categories of worker (most notably to mothers), but the overreliance on time generosity also meant that some workers could not stand the pressure and this led to their burnout. However, this was hardly noted, and those who did not fulfil the masculine ideal worker script were simply ignored and passed over for promotions for failing to do so. Since long working hours stemmed from the values of the hegemony, these were taken for granted and there was little effort to assess whether these values made sense to all, including the organisation. For example when using long working hours as a benchmark to assess ideal workers, there is the danger of rewarding face time rather than output and productivity (Lewis, 2001). This seemed to be the case at Tech Co. where the means to assess productivity were weak and where organisational learning was limited (Lee et al., 2000).

Because at Tech Co. there was less focus on output and efficiency, an implicit idea that 'time is cheap' prevailed. As a result, the drive to find more effective ways of working seemed to be missing. In fact, through this study I showed how certain work processes and form-filling tasks, were ironically still being done manually in a company which as its core business, strove to make things more efficient for others through ICT. The workers were bothered by this and were asking for changes because these antiquated processes were eating up their time. This was also reducing the overall efficiency of the work-place. This was one of the most clearly noted cases where living up to ideal worker principles related to the use of time, rendered the organisation less efficient in this aspect. This showed the potential of the Dual Agenda to improve organisational effectiveness whilst challenging gendered notions in relation to the ideal worker. Yet, because there was less focus on efficiency and more focus on time, this was largely ignored by the management to the detriment of all, and hence this learning opportunity was lost.

### **9.3.2. The Barriers to Dual Agenda Change.**

One of the most important aspects that became clearer through this study is that because men generally do far less unpaid work at home than women do (Fagan, 2010, NSO 2006; Parker & Wang, 2013), work-life integration continues to matter less to them than it matters to women. In fact, many of the men I interviewed (with and without children) had hobbies or engaged in sports, whilst others were studying or were involved in other after-work activities of their

choice. This in itself indicates that these male workers were already managing to integrate their paid work with the rest of the lives. For them, this was work-life integration and it was already happening. In fact trying to introduce the concept of the Dual Agenda at times felt like trying to give them an unwanted favour, or as offering them something well before its due time. Hence, considering all factors, it seems that the current gendered order of things along the Single Agenda logic, both at work and at home, may suit them to a point where they conclude that: ***“if it ain’t broke don’t fix it”***.

All this suggests that the issue of inequalities of burdens at home and the different gendered sense of entitlement to work-life reconciliation (Lewis & Smithson, 2001; Lewis & Haas, 2005) are rather difficult to tackle and overcome by looking at the workplace only. Gender roles are embedded in our deep mental frames at a very early stage (Martin, Ruble & Szkrybalo, 2002; Liben & Signorella, 1993; Kohlberg, 1966) and when we enter the workplace, we simply carry these gendered values with us, and influence the workplace with those same values. Therefore, whilst we should not ignore the impact of structures on gender roles (Acker 1990, 1992, 1998; Ferguson, 1984; Cockburn, 1983; Kanter, 1997), much more attention may need to be given in order to assess how gender roles at the personal level impact on organisation and sustain the Single Agenda logic.

Conscious of the multi-faceted problems to challenging the Single Agenda logic in organisations, Bailyn et al., (2001) call on various actors like: employers, unions, families, government and communities to join forces in order move

towards a logic that seeks to integrate paid work with family life. This entails a re-thinking about ideal worker values and the roles which women and men take up in the family, at work and in society (Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005). This holistic approach is crucial because through this study I showed how difficult it is to challenge gendered assumptions in a solitary organisation if the other issues in the micro and broader context remain unchanged. To me this felt like swimming against the current in a rough open sea, possibly because unlike the original CIAR project, the need for change was not felt, neither at the personal nor at the organisational level.

#### **9.4. Methodological Reflections on the Study with a Special Focus on the CIAR Process.**

I am conscious that my research is but a very small piece of a much bigger and complex puzzle on the issue of gendered organisations and work-life issues which was carried out in a specific context. Since I opted for an interpretative and constructionist approach (Burr, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1998) I am aware that my research is influenced by who I am, by what I have read and what I have experienced as a woman living in Malta. Amongst the most important influences, I acknowledge my feminist values and my zeal for gender equity, which often contrasted with the values of the male directors that were more materialistic and largely focused on the profit aspect in the organisation. I am also aware how my interpretations depended on the social, political, cultural, economic, and other factors in which I am immersed (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Hence, I acknowledge that many internal and external factors may have influenced my findings and affected its outcomes (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999).

Since my research was limited to one organisation in a very specific context, I am aware that my case study does not lend itself to generalisations as envisaged by those who take a positivistic approach. However, the contextual information and detailed nuances I managed to capture by observing the micro-processes in the organisation have allowed me to develop and extend theory that can be applied to other cases (Halkier, 2011; Becker, 1991). In order to compensate for the lack of generalisation, I gave thick descriptions that allow the reader to understand the context in which my research is immersed as I tried to pull out some of the meanings and reasons behind some of the actions adopted by the participants (Ponterotto, 2006; Lincoln, 1995; Patton). Hence, whilst acknowledging that my findings can be considered to be “transactional and subjectivist” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p.109), throughout my study I tried to capture and make sense of the informants’ perspectives. Here theories of Hegemonic Masculinities (Kimmel, 2010, Khan, 2009, Beynon, 2002, Connel, 2005; David & Brannon, 1976) and Sense of Entitlement theories (Lewis & Smithson, 2001; Lewis & Haas 2005), were especially useful in enabling me to see things through various lenses.

Through my work, I strove to offer a trustworthy piece of qualitative research that can stand scientific scrutiny and rigour (Lincoln, 1995) by taking practical measures to ensure quality (Berman & Coxon, 2005; Shenton, 2004; Silverman, 2001; Lincoln, 1995; Guba 1981). For example, in order to ensure that I

captured the participants' point of view during a focus group meeting (rather than impose mine on theirs), I gave my informants a summary of my findings before I presented it back for feedback. This gave me the comfort that what I had captured was in line with their values and with what they wanted to convey in substance. Furthermore, I documented the step-by-step research process in detail (See chapter 4) and kept a research diary (Mc Niff et al., 2003) to allow me to record my thoughts and to note down relevant observations and reflections which emerged throughout the long research process. These proved to be extremely useful as I was bringing this research to a close.

CIAR played a crucial role in this study and hence in the next part of this chapter I reflect on the strengths and the challenges I met in using this form of action research. I first start by discussing the positive aspects of CIAR.

#### **9.4.1. The Strengths of the CIAR Process**

The CIAR approach which has been referred to intermittently as both a method (Bailyn, 2009; Bookman & Lewis, 2007) and as methodology (Baird et al., 2006; Bailyn & Fletcher, 2007) provides a useful means to explore some of the complex dynamic processes at play in organisations and to theorise about them. Depth and detail are fundamental when looking for something invisible yet so forceful like gender assumptions, and so, this form of action research is ideal to observe and reflect the micro-processes that reinforce and reproduce gendered organisations. CIAR also leaves plenty of room for researchers to



reflect on their work and to raise questions that they may not have been able to ask before. For example, by being able to raise important questions related to gendered processes, I am now in a better place to understand the complexity of the subject and the difficulties that arise when trying to approach this subject in a solitary (rather than in a holistic) manner.

So whilst noting that research often leads to more questions than answers, CIAR allowed me to open a dialogue with my informants, and in so doing I realised how, for example, a simple word like 'flexibility' has multiple meanings which can change from person to person and which differs according to which angle one looks at the issue from. For example, I link the word flexibility to positive connotations, in that I tend to link flexible work with work-life integration. On the other hand, for the management the word 'flexibility' conjured thoughts of instability and lack of order. In addition, for example, considering that I started my research during the financial crisis, when I discussed flexibility issues with the company directors, they were looking at flexibility as something that would allow their workers to work more for less, but they were not envisaging workers to get more flexibility in return. Therefore, in the eyes of the directors, flexibility was a one-way route for the benefit of the organisation only. By taking time to collect, transcribe and reflect on the data collected, and by going back to discuss the findings with my informants, I was able to capture fine nuances like this, which sharpened my thoughts along the way.

Throughout this process, I was aware that CIAR cannot provide quick fix solutions (Lewis et al., 2006) but it can act as a catalyst for small changes

(Rapoport et.al., 2002). I consider these small wins as seeds which are sown in the brain of the informants and which eventually may help alter their perceptions. One of the best examples I can draw relates to a discussion on FWAs which I had with three informants during a focus group. At the beginning of this focus group, possibly because the HR Manager was present, one of the workers was insisting that they already have a lot of flexibility in the organisation because they are allowed to flex their starting and their finishing time. When I mentioned a wider array of options that workers in other organisations can tap into, it dawned on this employee that in the case study organisation workers seemed to be “happy with small mercies”.

In the same focus group, another male informant at first insisted that he can never work from home, and yet when I pointed out that he already Teleworks successfully when he is abroad, he started to see things differently, and implied that he would not mind working a day a week from home (like his external consultant was doing). All this came about because I had the opportunity to interact with my informants and was able to challenge some of their assumptions. This does not mean that my input was sufficient to bring about significant changes - because for change to happen it needs to be sustained by some form of action on their part and it needs acceptance by their superiors - which in this case was missing. However, at least I could sense a shift in mindset that would have been more difficult to achieve without the direct contact and without the possibility to challenge and interact with my informants (Leinonen, 2012). This is a very useful and important aspect which needs to be highlighted when discussing the CIAR process.

The CIAR process is also useful in that it allows you to probe things which may have been overlooked at the beginning of the research. For example when I structured the Interview Guide, I had no questions relating to training and gender issues in the ICT context, because I had not come across the issue in other studies. Yet, because the informants were not restrained by a structured questionnaire and could express themselves at will, this very interesting issue emerged.

Being on site and seeing the workers *in situ* allowed me to take note of the context which my informants operated in, and to pay attention to issues of power (Marshall, 2011). This opened my eyes to how those in power (the hegemony) affect organisational values and set work practices in accordance to their beliefs, which in this case were not gender neutral. Thus, overall the CIAR approach allowed me to reflect on the deep-seated gendered assumptions that unconsciously affect many of the work-life decisions we make as women and men both at work and at home. Furthermore, the CIAR process made me realise that shifting personal and organisational values is a mammoth task that is likely to encounter many hurdles on many levels.

Now that I have focused on the more positive aspects of CIAR, in the next section I want to highlight some of its more challenging features.

#### **9.4.2. The Challenging Aspects of CIAR**

Whilst noting that most CIAR researchers work in teams (Bailyn & Fletcher, 2007; Rapoport et al., 2002) I realised the gross disadvantage in being a sole researcher who was trying to explore and challenge some of the most fundamental assumptions regarding work, family and the rest of life in the case study organisation. This was especially difficult at the beginning when dealing with the company directors (all males). In fact, during the first cycle of action research (June 2009), after giving a presentation to the Directors, the first post observation that I wrote down in my research diary was how tough and challenging the session had been. There were many reasons why I felt so.

For example, during that feedback session, I realised that people need time to understand and make sense of what I was saying, because they had limited knowledge on work-life matters and these issues did not feature much on their personal and on the organisational agenda. On the other hand, I also needed time to understand the business side of things and its many challenges, of which I knew much less than my informants. Furthermore, the directors (especially on hearing something that they did not agree with) raised the issue of reliability because my findings were based on qualitative research methods rather than on positivistic quantitative methods. Hence, at times they asked me to quantify my claims in order to assess their importance. A typical question would be: “but how many said so?”, thus indicating lack of trust in qualitative methods.

Because I attempted to challenge some of their assumptions, the Directors took a cautionary approach after the first research cycle, and when I asked for their permission to continue my research with the workers, as expected, they showed some resistance. In fact, the green light to continue my research took more than four months, and because the company was undergoing a restructuring exercise, my research was delayed even further. This made me aware how fragile the position of the CIAR researcher is, although in my case things could have been exacerbated by the fact that no business problem had been identified.

Whilst I encountered resistance at the beginning of the study, it must be noted that this does not stop at that initial stage. On the contrary, I found resistance during all the course of the research. For example, before I was due to interview the workers, I was asked to present the Interview Guide with the questions for approval. Here, I was given instructions not to threaten the stability of certain work practices. For example, the HR Manager warned me that most probably some workers would complain about time-recording issues. However, she informed me that I cannot allow the workers to explore alternatives, because the time recording process had been implemented after two years of work, with the input of expensive consultants. When I suggested that this may be an opportunity to improve things, she said that I could ask how the time recording system can be enhanced but I could not challenge its existence *per se*. All this entailed careful negotiations to operate within ethical boundaries agreed with my gatekeepers but without limiting the study.

With regards to the content of the Interview Guide, I was also given instructions by the HR Manager to change the order of some of the questions, and was specifically asked to remove a particular question which focused on processes. The HR manager was adamant that in the focus group meeting it was going to be impossible for the workers to think of all the processes and to evaluate their rationality and effectiveness. This showed lack of trust in the workers and meant I had to delete this question. However, after further negotiations I was allowed to put in an alternative question on processes that was acceptable to both. At least six other minor changes were made to different questions and all along the HR manager insisted that I should not give the workers the impression that things could change easily. Instead, she insisted that I should give the informants a clear message that this research was exploratory and that the informants' suggestions were just that – rather than proposals which could materialise. On the part of the organisation, this showed reluctance to learn, to experiment and to change (Lee, et al., 2000).

Another challenging aspect of CIAR is its length and its complexity. CIAR is a long iterative research process. It entails many skills such as patience, collaboration, diplomacy, good networking, courage, perseverance, the ability to face resistance and overcome it, in order to ensure access and the continuation of the research process. In my case, the CIAR process was even more difficult because the research was not initiated as a request on the part of the company, but originated out of my need to do research for my PhD.

The CIAR approach is also a political process which raises many issues related to power. For example, it made me realise how difficult it is to change things

that emanate from the values of those who lead the organisation. CIAR can also be seen as something threatening and de-stabilising, because through the process of meeting and confronting the informants there is the danger (or the opportunity) of instilling new values that those in power do not necessarily agree with. Apart from being very political, the process is rather protracted, is time consuming and requires many cycles of research, analysis, feedback and reflection sessions. Whilst this was extremely interesting to me, the directors were less interested in the academic process.

After assessing the strengths and challenges of the CIAR approach, the following are the key learning points I derived through this process:

#### **9.4.3. Learning Points on the CIAR Process**

a) Ideally, CIAR projects are done when a real problem is identified in an organisation and when those in power want to do something about it - as in the Xerox Project (Rapoport et. al., 2002).

b) CIAR projects are best done by a multi-disciplinary team of researchers consisting of Gender and HR experts, rather than by a sole researcher - as was in my case.

c) Gaining access into an organisation is never easy unless one is invited to do so by the organisation. Hence, this may take a considerable amount of time,

not only at the beginning of the research process, but also in between the various research cycles. Various hurdles can lengthen the process beyond the planned periods.

d) Having a go-between person to help you gain access and to ensure that the research can continue is vital. However, it is also important to note that people working in organisations generally feel obliged to defend their organisation. They tend to assume the same values as their superiors and may not always take your side.

e) Resistance can take many shapes and forms, and it does not stop once a person gains access into the organisation. Resistance to CIAR projects is likely to be on-going and negotiations are required to ensure that you can still fulfil the aims of the research without being blocked from continuing to do so.

f) It is important for CIAR researchers to note that input from the informants can often be contradictory. This means that it may take a while before a more complete picture emerges. Hence, CIAR researchers must be on the look-out for contradictory claims and how these evolve. Much of this can be captured through further probing and especially when challenging the contradictions, once they are noted.

g) It is imperative that informants are allowed enough room to express things that were not asked in the first place. Many interesting aspects which initially may have been overlooked can emerge if informants are given enough time and



space to do so. Hence, CIAR interviews, focus group meetings and feedback sessions should not be rushed.

h) CIAR is useful to plant the 'seeds of change.' However, these need to be followed-up for them to materialise. Change is difficult, especially if it goes against the established rules and the taken-for-granted norms within the organisation. Hence, change is more likely to happen if it is consensual and if it is desired by those at the top and those at the lower levels (at Tech Co. there was little evidence of this at all the levels).

i) It may be a good idea if the CIAR projects also include elements of quantitative research. A mixed-method approach (Ongwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005) may allow researchers to draw on the strengths of both the quantitative and the in-depth qualitative research. This is more likely to pacify employers who typically adopt positivistic paradigms (Coglan & Brannick, 2010; Johnson & Duberley, 2000) and who seem to know far less about the strengths and the richness of qualitative research.

j) A lot of attention must be given to group dynamics in CIAR projects because these seem to change when informants express themselves in the presence of their superiors and when they can speak more freely. This suggests that informants be given opportunities to express themselves both with and without their superiors in order to enable researchers to see what is feasible and less feasible in the organisation.

k) Whilst one-to-one interviews with key informants can yield very interesting data, people in a group seem to create a supporting environment between them that allows them to open up more, especially when discussing subjects like work-life issues, which may be considered as a taboo subject in the organisation.

l) It is fundamental that when doing CIAR projects researchers pay attention to the multiple layers of context at the personal, the family, the organisational, the national and the international context in order to assess how these interlink and impact on the informants, on the organisation and on the research in general.

After these extensive reflections on the CIAR process, I now move to discuss the relevance of my findings to the wider context.

## **9.5. Are these Findings Relevant to the Broader Context?**

Whilst the Maltese gendered context does not seem to foster gender equity in the workplace, this study does not seem to be an exception in encountering difficulties in challenging the Single Agenda logic through the CIAR process. In fact, it must be noted that with the exception of the famous Xerox Project (Rapoport et al., 2002), which raised a lot of hope for Dual Agenda change, most of the other CIAR projects carried out in different parts of the world proved that a re-visioning of the work culture away from deeply embedded gendered

work processes is a big challenge (see my full review of the CIAR projects discussed in Chapter 2.4). This does not mean that these projects did not bring about other positive changes, but success (in the projects I reviewed) was generally reported by way that the new measures allowed women to cope with their dual earner-carer roles, or helped them to progress in their career, but it hardly affected men. This means that there was limited tangible evidence that ideal worker values and gendered norms were being challenged or changed within organisations in different contexts. In fact, many project leaders doing similar CIAR projects, lamented on the huge difficulties they found in trying to bring about change that challenged the gendered boundaries (Kornberger, Carter & Ross-Smith, 2010; Charlesworth & Baird, 2007; Kim et al., 2006; Bourke & Russell, 2006; Broznick et al., 2006b; Fletcher & Holvino, 2006). Hence, it becomes natural to ask: why is there this resistance? And what could make a difference?

This raises the famous 'chicken and egg' situation. What should change first? Does change start within us as girls and boys in the family sharing our rights and obligations more equally? Will it happen when better educated and higher paid women start calling on their partners to make adjustments and modifications at work to share the load of unpaid work better - thus narrowing the sense of entitlements gaps between women and men? Will the signs for change come from the employers seeking to cut down the costs related to traditional ways of doing work, for example, working long hours from the office? Moreover, can change be accelerated through government policies and welfare

regimes that build on gender equity rather than on the more traditional gender roles?

I will address some of these questions in my conclusion (Section 9.7.2.) however, before I do so, in the next section I reflect on the limitations of this study.

## **9.6. Limitations of the Study**

As I indicated earlier, being a sole researcher in a Maltese organisation where the micro and meso context was highly gendered may have affected the research and rendered the Dual Agenda more difficult to conceptualise and implement in this setting. However, resistance to Dual Agenda was also noted in other contexts and this indicates common factors at play that transcend national boundaries.

Another important limitation of the study is linked to the fact that my informants were rather homogenous: white, heterosexual, well-educated and well-paid (mostly) male ICT workers. This means that the lack of diversity could also have affected the outcome of these findings in several ways since race, sexual orientation, education, the position occupied in the hierarchy and in the family as well as the income could all make a difference in work-family and work-life issues.

Hence, while noting these limitations, in the last and final part of this research I discuss the implications of this study for future research and make some concluding remarks.

## **9.7. Implications for Future Research and Conclusion**

### **9.7.1. Suggestions for Future Research**

Building on the findings of this study and noting its limitations, the following suggestions for future research can be useful in helping extend theories and practice in relation to the Dual Agenda:

Considering the role of context, the gendered sense of entitlement to work-life integration and the gendered contract which seems to perpetuate the unequal division of domestic labour, which reinforces gendered organisations, it may be useful to carry out a CIAR study which involves workers and their partners (and possibly other members of the family) who are willing to address this imbalance. Whilst this may raise some ethical concerns that must be addressed beforehand, such research may contribute to a better understanding of the linkages between paid and unpaid work and the differing sense of fairness between women and men, and of possible ways on how to address the imbalance.

In order to render assumptions about time and place less relevant, research on how to measure output, productivity and efficiency is important. The Results Only Work Environment (ROWE) is one of the examples where this is being experimented in organisations in the United States (see: <http://www.gorowe.com>). Whilst noting that its uptake could also be gendered (Kelly et al., 2010) extending this approach to other national contexts and opening it up for more men could increase understanding of its wider potential.

The concept of Sense of Entitlement for work and family support can be influenced, amongst others things, by state support through social policies and different welfare regimes (Lewis & Smithson, 2001). Most CIAR research has taken place in the USA where there is comparatively minimum federal support for work and family. A CIAR study in parallel in two very different national and welfare contexts would help to assess whether and how social policies and welfare regimes can make a difference to enhance Dual Agenda change. For example it would be interesting to compare Malta (which has a hybrid welfare regime which is influenced by more conservative Southern European traits that sustain traditional gender roles), with Sweden or Iceland (which have a social-democratic welfare regime which promotes gender equality).

A limitation of this study is the lack of diversity among the case study participants who were relatively homogenous in terms of their race, education, ethnicity and their sexuality. As the findings of this study highlight, the process whereby the male breadwinner social model and gendered division of labour in the family perpetuate gendered organisational assumptions and Single Agenda

thinking, a more diverse sample may help to identify routes towards change at the family level. For example, some theorists claim that heterosexuality perpetuates the gendered household arrangements (Kurdek, 2005) and that lesbian families are less constrained by gendered assumptions, and show more flexibility and creativity in combining paid work with domestic responsibilities (Dunne, 1998). Exploring how same-sex couples integrate work and personal life may be useful in challenging the gendered contract in the family and its possible spill over to workplaces.

### **9.7.2. Concluding Remarks – Looking at More Equitable Futures for Women and Men Both at Work and at Home – The Integrative Approach**

The Single Agenda logic (Rapoport et al., 2002) largely feeds on the masculine gendered script (Acker, 1990). Kaufman (2014) suggests that the best place where men can start undoing their masculinity (which also brings them many rewards) is through the transformation of fatherhood. He insists that the meaning of masculinity (like femininity) is “ephemeral” and fluid and hence it can be altered and changed. Kaufman (2014) insists that his “dramatic” but “realisable dream” is to see fathers do an equal share of parenting - rather than simply helping out. Hence, this puts the responsibility directly on men and entails challenging and changing what men consider fair and just allocations of

work-family responsibilities (Lewis & Smithson, 200; Major, 1994, 1987). This is no easy task.

Such a change, amongst other things, may need to be supported by appropriate legislation related to parental leave where, for example, the father is allocated a quota that is lost if not taken-up by him. This is already happening in some countries like Iceland and Sweden, but this is just a start that targets men directly – and it may not be enough. As this research has indicated, attempts to implement change through the organisation, may not be sufficient, and in order to start making a difference, change must also be happening in parallel on many levels (for example, in the family, the national and the international level). Apart from men, it must also involve many stakeholders (women, employers, legislators, trade union leaders etc) in order to adopt a more holistic approach to change (Bailyn et al., 2001; Gambles et al., 2007).

One of the most important places where gender and the gendered contract are enacted is in the family and hence, more attention needs to be given in order to assess how gender is done and undone there. Bailyn (2001) refers to the work of Jessica De Groot who takes a micro approach to change and assists individuals, families as well as organisations to redesign work in order to create an integrated approach to work and life (see: <http://www.thirdpath.org>). Whilst such interventions are useful, gendered notions of what is social and normative for men and women to do, can be noted very early in children (Martin, Ruble & Szkrybalo, 2002; Liben & Signorella, 1993; Kohlberg, 1966). Hence, challenging gendered roles may be best tackled on a much broader scale and



from a very early stage through the family, through schools as well as through the media. This is necessary because by the time people enter the work place it may already be too late for most people to change and to alter their gendered values. It may also be too late to challenge gendered assumptions within organisations.

Undoubtedly, organisations continue to be an important place where gendered values can be enacted and dismantled. Change in organisations may sometimes come when least expected. For example, it is interesting to note that recent work by Lewis (2014) shows that during the financial crisis in the UK, more men started working from home, not as a work-life measure (possibly because work-life measures are still linked to mothers) but as an imposition by their employers as a money-saving strategy. Hence, something as negative as the recession can also act as a catalyst for change.

Unfortunately, however, the recession in general seems to be exacerbating work-life conflicts, as employers in many countries are asking their workers to do more with less. In fact, research from the European Union (Eurofound, 2013) is showing that a third of employees in the EU 27 States are reporting that they are facing serious difficulties, at least several times a month, in fulfilling their family responsibilities. Similarly, American research (Parker & Wang, 2013) is indicating that over half (53%) of all working parents with children under 18 in the United States are claiming that they are encountering difficulties when trying to balance their family responsibilities with paid work. It is also worth remembering that American fathers for the first time in history are

feeling more work-life imbalance than mothers do when trying to juggle family and work (Adman et al., 2011). So, is the time ripe for men to try to do something about their conflicting work-family roles?

As gate-keepers who occupy most of the top posts in business, political, religious and social organisations, men have a very important role to play in challenging gender inequalities (Connell, 2003). This study, which looked at the work-life issues through the masculine lens, has made it obvious that unless men want to be part of the process for change, the goal of enhancing gender equity in organisations risks remaining a much desired goal, or at worst “an utopia” that is extremely difficult to realise (Kornberger, et al., 2010, p.14). This does not mean giving up on the long-term goal of achieving more gender equity in families and in organisation. Some couples already embrace the equity logic and as they share the burdens and joys of family and work together, they also reap its many benefits. By time, and as more men and women transgress the artificial boundaries imposed by gender at the personal, the family, the organisational and at the broader level, the notion of gendered organisations may slowly dissolve and dissipate. When this happens, the either/or choice which currently restrains many people from achieving their very best both in the family and at work may be overcome too.

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# **Appendix 1      Interview guide for the HR manager**

## **Getting to know the organisation**

1. Tell me a little bit about the company, its history and organisational structure.
2. How many employees are there? (men/women)

## **Understanding the Nature of Work and the challenges**

3. How is work done over here?
4. What are the biggest challenges you are facing at the moment?
5. What do you anticipate for the years ahead?
6. Talent management – recruitment and retention of employees. Can you give me some information on how you deal with this?

## **Defining the Ideal Worker**

7. If you had to give me a description of your ideal worker, how would he/she be?
8. Who normally gets promoted over here?

## **Understanding the Personal Needs of the Workers**

1. What is the average age of your workers?
2. Are they single? married?, Do they have children?
3. What are they interested in?
4. What drives them at work?
5. What are their concerns?
6. How do you think your employees manage family, or non-work crisis?
7. How does the company view flexibility? (Is it part of the culture? Or are we just talking policies and procedures?)

## **How shall we work?**

## **Whom shall I interview?**

## **Ethical Issues**

## **Appendix 2 Interview guide for company directors and managers**

---

### **Tell me a little bit about your work**

#### **Understanding the Nature of Work and the challenges**

1. How is work done over here?
2. What are the biggest challenges you are facing at the moment?
3. What do you anticipate for the years ahead?
4. Talent management – recruitment and retention of employees. Can you give me some information on how you deal with this?

#### **Defining the Ideal Worker**

5. If you had to give me a description of your ideal worker, how would he/she be?
6. Who normally gets promoted over here?
7. What is recognised as competence?
8. What work is seen as “real” work?
9. How is time used?
10. How is commitment gauged?

#### **Understanding the Personal Needs of the Workers**

11. What is the average age of your workers?
12. Are they single? married?, Do they have children?
13. What are they interested in?
14. What drives them at work?
15. What are their concerns?
16. How do you think your employees manage family, or non-work crisis?
17. How does the company view flexibility? (Is it part of the culture? Or are we just talking policies and procedures?)
18. What would you change in the organisation?
19. How can the company save costs?

## **Appendix 3 Interview guide for workers**

**The aim of this research is to work together to find innovative work practices that will enable you to integrate your personal needs with the demands of work and at the same time increasing (or at least, not decreasing) organisational effectiveness (DUAL AGENDA)**

### **Getting to know the participant and Understanding the Nature of Work**

1. Tell me about your work here
2. What is really positive about working at Tech Co.?
3. Are there any challenges you are facing in your job at the moment?

### **Defining the Ideal Worker**

1. What sort of behaviour is valued and rewarded here?

### **Understanding the Personal Needs of the Workers**

1. What are your interests outside work?
2. Normally, do you manage to combine work with other commitments (for example family/studying/hobby/gym/community work)?
3. Does your current working schedule enable you to combine them adequately?
4. In general are employees expected to stay-on at work after the normal working hours or to work evenings/weekends? Why?
5. Are there certain times that are more important to be at the office than others?

### **Suggestions for Change**

1. Is there anything that you would recommend to increase the organisational effectiveness at Tech Co.?
2. Have you ever thought of a different way of working that makes more sense to you and that will save the company costs?
3. Have you ever thought of ways that will enable you to do your job effectively and that will also bring benefits to you? How?

### **Processes**

1. How does a particular task /project get done by the team?
2. In your opinion are all processes rational and necessary?
3. Is there anything that might be causing stumbling blocks/bottlenecks?
4. Have you ever thought of things/processes that could be done differently? How? Why not? What are the stumbling blocks?

## Appendix 4 Presentation to directors (First cycle)

Slide 1



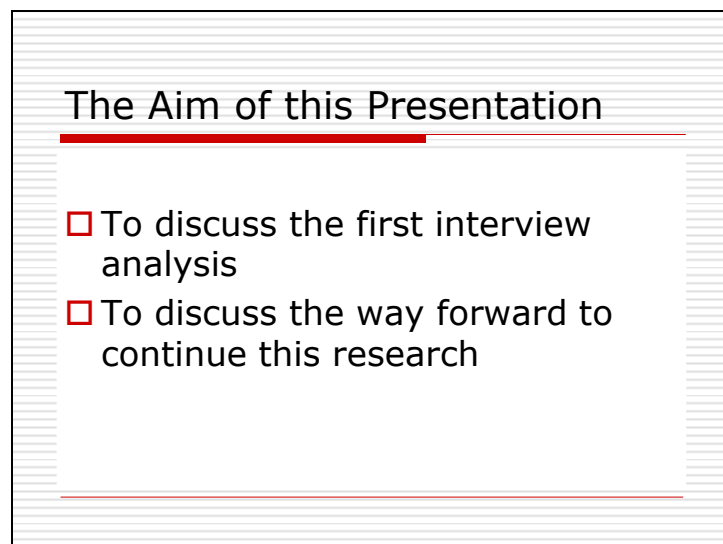
Integrating the Business Needs  
with the Employee Requirements

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First Feedback Meeting – June 2009

Anna Borg  
Doctoral Student – Middlesex University – UK

Slide 2



The Aim of this Presentation

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- To discuss the first interview analysis
- To discuss the way forward to continue this research

---

Slide 3

**Work done so far**

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- 10 Interviews with Company Directors and Managers
- Transcription of first interviews
- First Analysis and Reflections

---

Slide 4

**What was I looking for?**

---

- Understanding the nature of the work
- Current and future challenges
- Defining the Ideal Worker
- Understanding the Personal Needs of the Workers (very little came up so far)
- The issue of flexibility (when, how, where to work)

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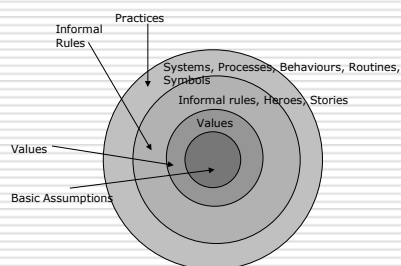


## Getting to know the values

Subtle and unseen assumptions about the 'Ideal Worker' at Tech Co:

- That unnecessarily creates work life conflicts
- Have a negative impact on the organisational effectiveness

## The core of the organisation



Tropenaars and Prud'Homme (2004)

Slide 7

## Reporting

---

This is just a first glimpse of the whole picture and it should be considered as work in progress.

Let us start by focusing on what you consider to be the existing and future challenges for Tech Co .

Slide 8

## Current and future challenges

---

### Recession

- Keeping costs manageable
- Managing change
- Diversification of the market in order to survive the credit crunch
- Increasing sales
- Looking at existing processes

Current and future challenges

---

**Recession**

- ❑ Making Tech Co more resilient
- ❑ Delivering more quality in shorter periods of time
- ❑ Restructuring the organisation in order to improve customers' expectations

---

Current and future challenges

---

**Staff**

- ❑ Keeping key people in the company
- ❑ Having people in tune with a common strategy for the organisation
- ❑ Identifying when staff are bored
- ❑ Ensuring that staff enjoy what they are doing in order that they work harder

---

**Current and future challenges**

---

**Staff**

- Getting more people involved in the ownership of the organisation
- Giving staff the opportunity to develop their careers
- Keeping abreast through research and training
- Engaging more with the workers

---

**Defining the Ideal Worker**

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- Gives a lot of attention to quality
- Honest
- Enthusiatic
- Good listener
- Admitting when one makes a mistake
- Readiness to change
- Technically savvy
- Flexible attitude (give and take mentality)

---

Slide 13

**Defining the Ideal Worker**

---

- Leadership qualities
- Puts the customer first
- Ability to influence others
- Enjoys his/her work and works more
- Problem solver
- Disciplined
- Not pampered
- Interacts with the client

---

Slide 14

**Defining the Ideal Worker**

---

- Has a sense of humour
- Hard working
- Intelligent
- Has a give and take mentality
- Has a positive 'can do' attitude
- Generous
- Provides solutions to problems
- Works well within the team

---

### Focus on Time and Flexibility

---

To be a good worker at Tech Co you have to **give that bit more TIME.**

There is the underlying assumption that **physical presence = results**

Many respondents claimed that now or in the past they regularly **worked 9-12 hour days** and they see this as a positive value.

---

### Focus on Time and Flexibility

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- ❑ Tech Co expects workers to be generous with time and to have a flexible attitude.
- ❑ Flexibility (for example, working from home) was often defined as an 'accommodation' rather than as a 'strategic business decision'.
- ❑ Although some said that working from home is encouraged they said that this is not for all (would not like senior people to do so, or said that this is only for trusted persons)

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Slide 17

### Focus on Time and Flexibility

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- Some respondents said that unless a worker is outstanding, giving **extra time** to the company matters a lot.
- Rather than punctuality, people are frowned upon if they regularly **leave on time or if they leave early.**

Slide 18

### Examples

---

- "...if you just want to work from 8 to 5 you are going to remain stuck where you are because you are not giving that extra effort".
- "I work late, I stay on till seven usually...occasionally till eight. Very rarely I go early. By the way, I go home, I switch on my laptop, and start answering e-mails, so I work weekends from home, evenings,.."

## Examples

---

- "it's the culture. So people come n late, we expect people at a certain level to manage their own time. We don't clock watch, I always hated clock watching, and nies li jitolqu hekk fil-hamsa bumm, mal-bieb, idejquni wkoll".

## Examples (English Translation)

---

- "it's the culture. So people come n late, we expect people at a certain level to manage their own time. We don't clock watch, I always hated clock watching, and people who leave right on time at five, they are at the door, also bother me"



## Examples

---

- "...I find it difficult to believe illi, meta jkollu personal commitments jitlaq fil-hamsa, imbaghad, int dhalt fit tmienja u nofs, mhux fit-tmienja suppost nibdew? Se tfettaq fuq nofs siegha? Mhux se nfettaq fuq nofs siegha, but you see trends..."

## Examples - (English Translation)

---

- "...I find it difficult to believe that when someone has personal commitments they leave at five. Then, you came in at half past eight. Aren't we supposed to start at eight? Am I going to make a fuss over half an hour? I am not going to make a fuss over half an hour, but you see trends...."

## Examples

---

- "Do you expect, sort of, somebody to do that on a regular basis? You know?"
  - "People should spend a certain period of their time, doing it on a regular basis. Jien ghamilt, nitkellem fuqi personaly, nahseb m'ghamiltx l-isbah ghaxar snin min hajti nahdem on average mit-tmienja, ghaxar, tnax il-siegha kuljum. Mill-inqas".
- 

## Examples - (English Translation)

---

- "Do you expect, sort of, somebody to do that on a regular basis? You know?"
  - "People should spend a certain period of their time, doing it on a regular basis. I did, speaking about myself, I think I spent at least ten years of my life working from eight for between eight to ten or eleven hours a day. This is the minimum"
-

## Examples

---

- "Miniex nghid li bniedem ghandu jaghmel iljieli jahdem hawn, irid jaghmel sal-hdax ghax imsawwat qed tifhem? But if you really enjoy it, jekk inti, jekk ghandi bicca equipment jien, u biex inhaddmu dak, u ma nistax, ghandi problema fuqu, jew klijent ghandu problema, you just do I, I mean you have to enjoy what you do...and because only like that you can do it well"
- 

## Examples - (English Translation)

---

- I am not saying that someone should spend all his evenings working, or that he must work till eleven because he is being pushed to do so, do you understand? "But if you really enjoy it, if you, if I have a piece of equipment, and to make it work, and you can't, you have a problem with it, or a client has a problem, you just do I, I mean you have to enjoy what you do...and because only like that you can do it well"
-

Slide 27

**Examples**

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- "Il-pjan hu, that we, who is giving this effort, putting in the effort, will be in one way or another will be, involved in the ownership".
- "People are treated very well in my opinion. There are no strict rules, you know, that people have to abide with them...even in terms of timing....it's not like you have to be here at eight, punch in, you know..."

---

Slide 28

**Examples - (English Translation)**

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- "The plan is....that we, who is giving this effort, putting in the effort, will be in one way or another will be, involved in the ownership".
- "People are treated very well in my opinion. There are no strict rules, you know, that people have to abide with them...even in terms of timing....it's not like you have to be here at eight, punch in, you know..."

---

Slide 29

## Examples

- Do you have a system?
- No, we don't have, and I wouldn't want it at all. Some people abuse in terms, for instance, they come in at half past eight and leave at five anyway.

Slide 30

## Examples

- "I want (this person) to become an executive...but leaving on the spot at five every day, it's not the most important things, but..."
- "...but I would like (this person) to be a bit more concerned about it."

## Examples

---

- "If you are above average person, and you give an extremely good job, you know, and you deliver on time, and you come up with ideas, then you can be excused on many other things, even on timing, you know?"

## Examples

---

- When asked how flexibility is seen by the company the respondent said"
- " I think if it's justifiable, then of course, yes, it depends on this person's position in the company. You know, we wouldn't like one of our senior people to have issues with his performance because of this, obviously, but I think, in general, we would try to accommodate".

## Examples

- ".....one of our particular guys, he, he was, was working on a project, with a very tight schedule, he was working late and working weekends and there was a burnout practically, and he actually requested to leave the company.....And that rang a bell ....and speci ta (sort of), we cannot keep on going this way. I mean, at the end of the day I understand that people have their own personal life and work is not everything....."

## Examples

- "I work till 6 or 7 every day and my wife does not like it. It's difficult. Once or twice a week I try to go home early"
- "If you want to work from 8 to 5 you are going to remain stuck where you are, because you are not giving the extra effort. People who are trying – those are the ones who are going to get rewarded.."

## Focus on Time and Flexibility

---

Some questions:

What are the intended and unintended consequences of this assumption (presenteeism)?

Does presenteeism always lead to results?

Is flexibility two sided?

---

## Some Reflections

---

- Till now flexibility seems to be tolerated rather than encouraged
  - What messages would the company be giving out to staff when putting more emphasis on face time.
  - How will this impact on loyalty and productivity on the employees' side?
-



Slide 37

### Some Reflections

---

- You may be rewarding persons who work long hours rather than those who can pre-plan and prevent crisis.
  - You expect people to stay on after normal working hours when worker's levels of energy and creativity may be at their lowest.
- 

Slide 38

### Some Reflections

---

- The long hours culture will automatically impact negatively on those who have a life outside work or who have family commitments.
  - The long-hours culture will mean promotions to those who fit into this value template only.
-

## Some Reflections

---

- You are not dealing with children, you are dealing with adults who are well educated and who have their own values and work life needs.
  - You are assuming that work can only be done in the office.
  - Working after hours may mean that one is wasting time (writing useless reports?) or that he/she have may have too many distractions/disruptions during their normal working hours (useless meetings?)
- 

## Some Reflections

---

- Flexibility may act as buffer to working extra hours when necessary
  - Expecting workers to stay-on after work (in a non crisis moment) may bring reluctance to stay on when this is really needed.
-

Slide 41

## Some Reflections

---

- **Fairness** - Equitable does not necessarily mean identical conditions because workers and team members have different challenges and constraints.

Slide 42

## Some Reflections

---

- I sensed that the company is introducing more controls (for example on time, on when to take leave) and this is generating **bureaucracy** –Tech Co has thrived and grown within a very loose structure with very little control and where TRUST was paramount.
- Do you really need more controls and bureaucracy when workers work in micro-teams?

Slide 43

**Way Forward**

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- ❑ Selecting the Pilot Project Team which will continue with the research on an experimental basis
- ❑ The set-up of a Liaison Committee to discuss the research and keep everyone involved.

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Slide 44

**Thank You**

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[anna.borg@um.edu.mt](mailto:anna.borg@um.edu.mt)

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Slide 45

**The Dual Agenda – A synergy approach**

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**Increasing organisational effectiveness**

Work- Personal Life Integration (Equity)

- Not individual Accommodation/favours
- Not best practices
- Not family friendly policies on their own, but:  
Innovative work practices

**Flexibility as a business strategy**

---

Slide 46

**A process of change by:**

---

- Making personal life a strategic issue alongside the business needs of the organisation
- Collaboration leading to sustainable improvements with personal pay-offs

---

Slide 47

## How? – A Collaborative Approach

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### COLLABORATIVE INTERACTIVE ACTION RESEARCH

- Experimenting – simple and agreed changes
  - Talking/ Interviewing to identify working practices and assumptions that undermine dual agenda
  - Legitimising taboo subjects – personal concerns
  - Reflection –Ask workers to propose change and come up with solutions
- 

Slide 48

## How will Tech Co benefit from this?

---

- Innovative and flexible work places are becoming increasingly attractive to recruit and retain qualified workers
  - Often lead to a reduction in staff absenteeism due to flexible work solution
  - Lead to increased productivity due to staff loyalty
-

Slide 49

## The Business Case for Change

---

- ❑ Will permit you to retain precious trained staff who know your clients
- ❑ Will save you recruitment, retraining and advertising costs
- ❑ Innovative work solutions may permit the extension of opening hours which lead to enhanced business opportunities

May not cost anything but can make you an employer of choice and increase organisational effectiveness

---

Slide 50

## Conclusion

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**Thank you**

anna.borg@um.edu.mt

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## Appendix 5 Presentation to HR manager and directors (Second cycle)

Slide 1



1

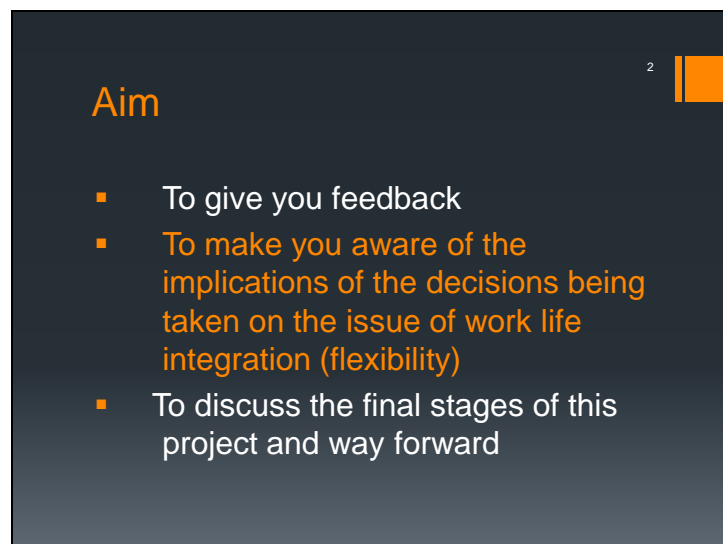
### Integrating the Business Needs with the Employees Requirements

Feedback Session – 5<sup>th</sup> January 2012

Anna Borg

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Slide 2



2

### Aim

- To give you feedback
- To make you aware of the implications of the decisions being taken on the issue of work life integration (flexibility)
- To discuss the final stages of this project and way forward

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Slide 3

3

## Methodology

Informants	No
<b>Directors</b>	3
<b>Managers</b> Software Development , Marketing, Network Systems, Finance, Business Applications, Enterprise Platform, HR	7
<b>Workers - Business Application Unit</b>	6
<b>Workers - Software Development Unit</b>	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>

Slide 4

- 4
- ## What is the main research question?
- Are the business needs being integrated with the employees requirements?
  - What are the findings showing us?

## Slide 5

5

### Why is Flexibility so important?

- Maltese workers in the ICT sector have chosen flexible working hours as the most popular incentive in recent years (Castille Resources, 2008; Hughes, 2010).
- ICT workers in Malta indicated that, whilst a good financial bonus is still attractive, it is relegated to second place, after flexibility.

## Slide 6

6

### Why is Flexibility so important?

- During a financial crisis, ICT companies are more likely to see wage inflation as a threat to their business.
- They may be reluctant to continue offering higher salaries to poach specialised and experienced staff in this area.

(Hughes, 2010)

## Slide 7

7

### Why is Flexibility so important?

Economist Intelligence Unit with Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM):

- The biggest challenge for organisations is to attract and retain top talent.
- 58% of respondents said that this can be done through workplace flexibility.
- Workplace flexibility ranked higher than compensation.

(Guide to Bold New Ideas for Making Work Work, 2011)

## Slide 8

8

### Why is Flexibility so important?

- Other studies in the UK show that young persons are ready to “accept lack of long term security and less than optimum conditions in exchange for flexibility and reasonable hours, in order to achieve work-life balance”

(Sturges & Guest, 2004; Smithson & Lewis, 2000)

Slide 9

9

## Some companies are aware of this

Organization:	IBM										
Location:	Arizona (statewide)										
Size:	1000+ employees										
Industry:	Technology Manufacturing, Services and Consulting										
Profile:	<p>Flexibility is a constant focus for IBM. Describing itself as the worlds most forward looking company, the organization offers a number of work-life integration options, including part-time and compressed workweeks, job sharing, leaves of absence and the ability to work from home.</p> <p>On any given day, more than one third of IBMs employees worldwide are either telecommuting or working in a customers offices. The firm, which posted double-digit growth in 2008 compared with the previous year, says it makes work-life integration a business imperative because the impact on employee morale and effectiveness is so significant.</p> <p>Flexible work options allow our people to serve clients as never before, says a company representative, who reports metrics demonstrating enhanced productivity, client satisfaction and service excellence as results, not to mention improvements in employee morale, retention and recruitment. Determined to gain optimum benefit from its workplace policies, IBM is supporting its employees in the practice of flexibility and sharpening the company's vision to focus more on results than process.</p> <p>One of the reasons people come to work for this company is because we take workplace flexibility seriously, says the IBM spokesperson. They work where it is best for them and our clients. As in other IBM locations, employees in Tucson can make use of a number of flexible work options that enable them to work remotely, as needed with management approval.</p>										
Business Results of Flexibility:	<p>Improving Recruitment and Retention, Reducing Turnover</p> <p>Enhancing Employee Engagement and Satisfaction</p> <p>Providing Exceptional Client Service</p> <p>Enhancing Productivity and Profitability</p>										
Scores:	Percentile	Overall	Employee Score	Culture	Flex Careers	Choices in Managing Time	Caregiving	Time Off	Reduced Time	Flex Time and Place	Health Care & Econ. Security
	99	78	71	10	10	10	6	9	10	10	8

Slide 10

10

## Some companies are aware of this

<b>Microsoft Corporation</b>											
<p>Shared workspaces and flexible staffing options enable staff to choose where they want to work every day, and, wherever they are, at home or in the office, they can tap into a full array of online information and tools, 24/7. Since every employee is eligible to take advantage of these benefits, Microsoft is able to better attract and retain top performers, and the company cites benefits such as increased productivity, accountability and employee focus not to mention an opportunity to showcase its workplace technologies.</p> <p>Employees are required to perform against a set of job commitments that are reviewed through regular one-on-one discussions with their managers. To help supervisors and staff navigate the many flexible options they have, Microsoft posts information on its human resources intranet site, listing available options and tips for success. Flexibility in our workspace adds to our reputation, says Meagher. To showcase this point, this year Crains Chicago Business named Microsofts Chicago office second out of 20 employers identified as the Best Places to Work in Chicago.</p>											
<p>Improving Recruitment and Retention, Reducing Turnover</p> <p>Enhancing Productivity and Profitability</p>											
<p>Culture of Flexibility</p>											
Percentile	Overall	Employee Score	Culture	Flex Careers	Choices in Managing Time	Care giving	Time Off	Reduced Time	Flex Time and Place	Health Care & Econ. Security	
98	77	80	9	4	7	8	6	5	9	8	

Slide 11

11

## Some companies are aware of this

Organization:	Embolden Design										
Size:	10-24 employees										
Industry:	Software, Web Development and Information Management										
Profile:	This Web development company which grew revenues 40% year over year from 2006 to 2008 and improved its profit margin even more gives credit to its peoples competitive wages and benefits. Embolden offers employees wide choices in scheduling, including part-time work, non-traditional shifts, the ability to telecommute and generous personal time off. The company attributes its extremely low turnover rate averaging less than 5% per year over the company's history to its strong workplace that emphasizes consensus building and close ties among employees.										
Business Results of Flexibility:	Improving Recruitment and Retention, Reducing Turnover Reducing Business Costs Enhancing Productivity and Profitability										
Best Of:	Culture of Flexibility Choices in Managing Time										
Scores:	Percentile	Overall	Employee Score	Culture	Flex Careers	Choices in Managing Time	Care giving	Time Off	Reduced Time	Flex Time and Ploac	Health Care & Econ. Security
	99	81	85	10	5	10	7	7	2	9	6

Slide 12

12

## What are the key findings?

- The word 'flexibility' means a lot of different things to different people at Tech Co and the connotations are not always positive.
- Whilst there is evidence of flexibility, this is not widespread and it is not used as a business strategy. (It is used when absolutely necessary, with a selected few or as an accommodation to mums)

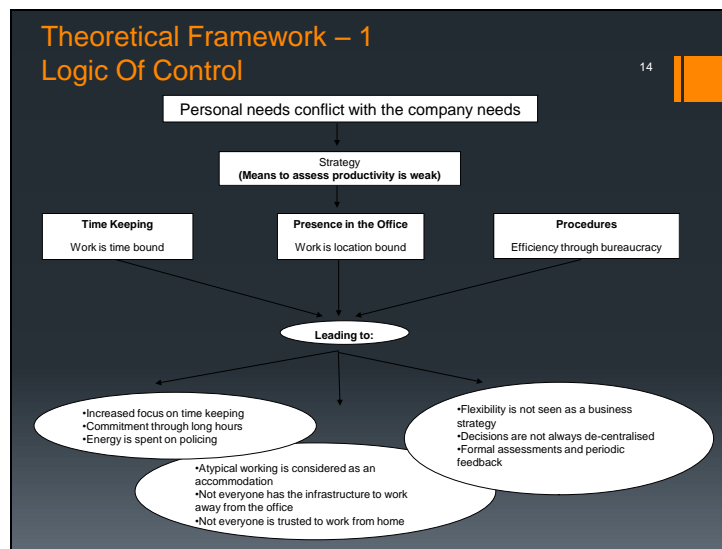
Slide 13

13

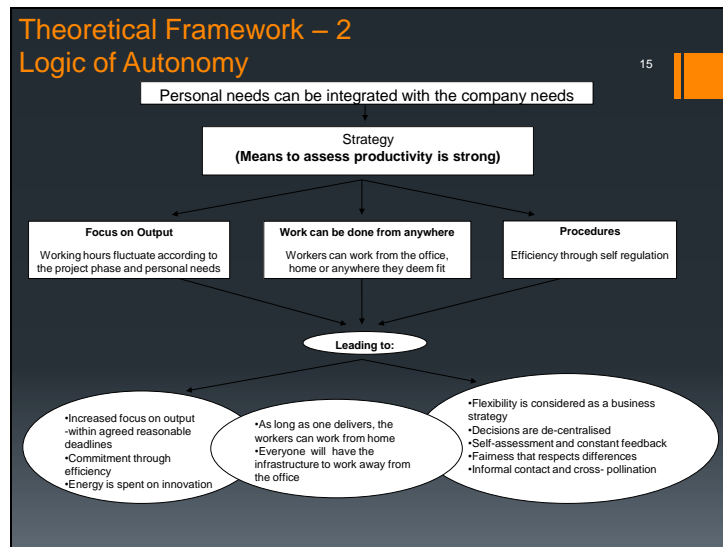
## What are the key findings?

- I noticed a push towards more control over working time, more policing and more control, for example, how long people stay in the kitchen for a coffee in the morning or for their break.
- There is a difference in the attitude of the directors regarding the organisation of work.
- There are also differences in the way workers want to organise their work.

Slide 14



Slide 15




Slide 16

### Learning Organisations

16

Learning Mode	Accommodation	Elaboration	Transformation
Response to a different way of working	Minimal adjustment to response – treating it as a random, non-standard event not worth development of new routines.	Going further in investigating and even developing new routines in response to a new phenomenon – however the organisation does not give up basic, status quo of organising and structuring work and careers.	Company's greater willingness to move away from the status quo and to actively use an external stimulus, as an opportunity to find new ways of working that will render work to be more effective.


Slide 17

17 

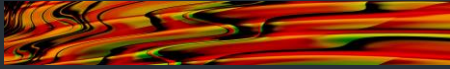
## Way Forward

- Are you interested in getting to know more about the work-life needs of workers at Tech Co?
- Are you willing to become a 'Learning Organisation'?
- Are you willing to road test the Logic of Control and the Logic of Autonomy to see which will yield better results?
- What is next?

Slide 18

18 

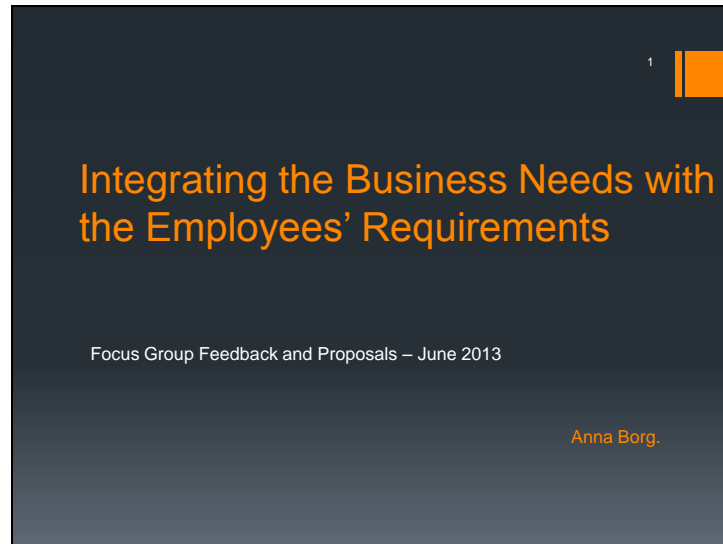
## Thank You





## Appendix 6 Presentation to focus group members (Third cycle)

Slide 1



1

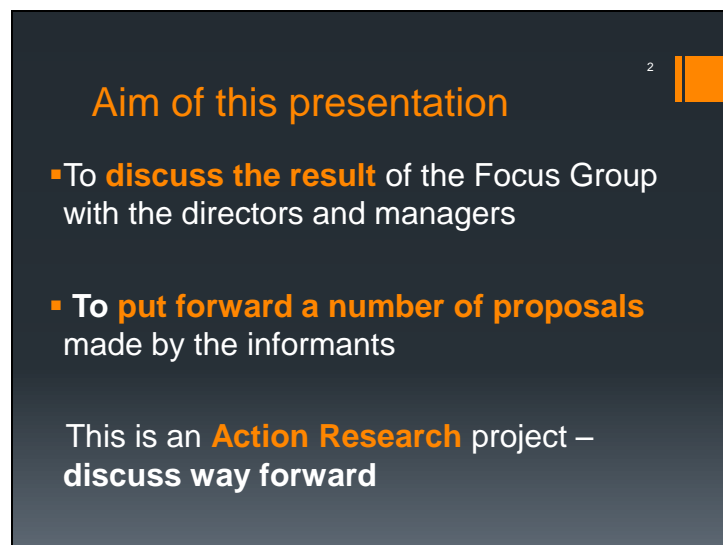
### Integrating the Business Needs with the Employees' Requirements

Focus Group Feedback and Proposals – June 2013

Anna Borg.

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Slide 2



2

### Aim of this presentation

- To **discuss the result** of the Focus Group with the directors and managers
- To **put forward a number of proposals** made by the informants

This is an **Action Research** project –  
**discuss way forward**

This slide is a dark blue presentation slide with an orange square in the top right corner. The title is in orange, and the bullet points and text are in white.

Slide 3

## Methodology

Participants	No
Members of the <b>Business Application team</b> who regularly work on projects abroad.	3
<b>The HR Manager</b> formed part of the Focus Group during the first part of the meeting.	1

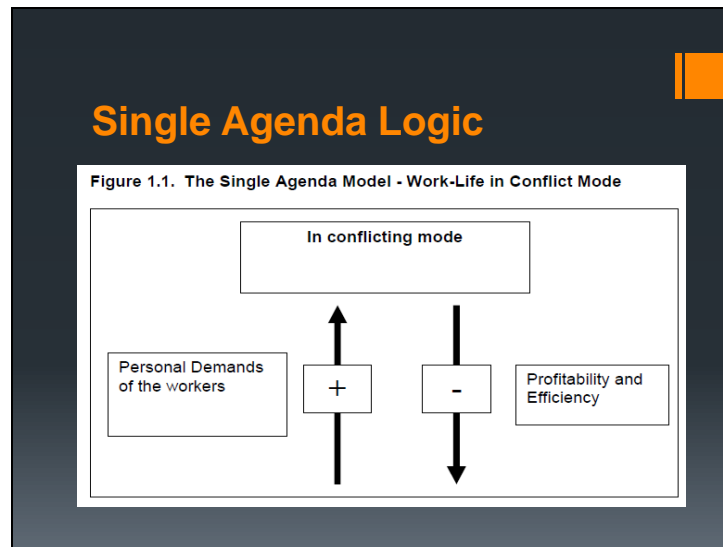
Slide 4

## What is the aim of this research?

This study is about **work-life issues**.

**Work** is part of life....but is the **personal side** of life (family, studying, hobbies, personal needs) part of work at TechCo and vice versa?

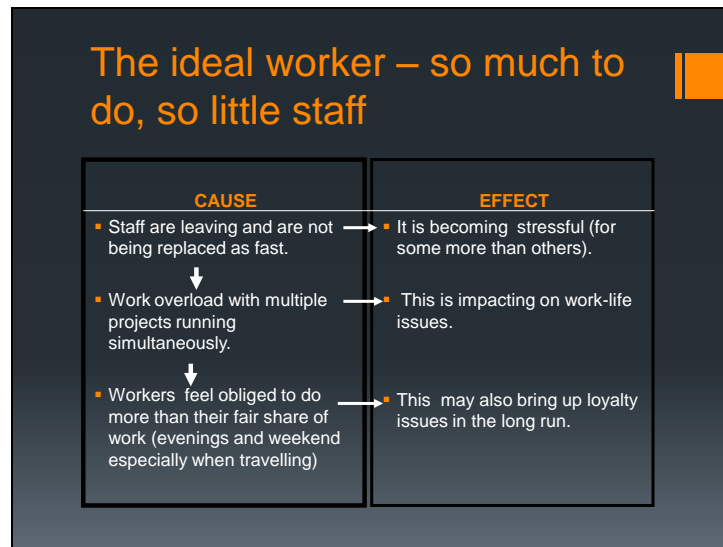
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- ## Focus Group – Main Findings
- The Ideal Worker is.....?
  - Processes from another era?

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### The ideal worker – so much to do, so little staff

The spill over effect is not affecting everyone in the same way:

1. Women who tend to take-on more family responsibilities may find it more difficult.
2. Persons whose spouse does not approve of their way of working may face more difficulties.
3. Persons who may want to start a family or with responsibilities to care for elderly parents or disabled family members.

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## The ideal worker – so much to do, so little staff

It is interesting to note that only 1 person in the team has children (who are 20+). In the future, when team members want to start a family, the conflicts are likely to increase and some workers may decide to leave the company for the lack of work-family fit.

When I asked whether it would be possible for workers who want to start a family to work the way they were doing now, a respondent replied

- “definitely not” ....”because you are travelling so much “you have so little time when you come back home .....it will be impossible to do so”.

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## When travelling, the ideal worker gives a lot of personal time, but dares not reclaim any

Cause	Effect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ When people work abroad, they spend time away from home and family.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Being away affects their spouses.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ They tend to work more than normal hours because they are on their own and so they work in the evenings and during the weekends sometimes.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ When such workers return home, they have personal errands to run.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Time-wise they are not compensated for the extra hours they work.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Workers assume that they have to take vacation leave to carry out such errands.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Increasingly feeling that they are not getting a fair deal time wise.</li></ul>

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## The ideal worker gives a lot of personal time, but dares not reclaim it.

Respondents said that when travelling or working abroad they get a disturbance allowance however they are not getting any extra time for personal use.

One of the respondents said: "Personally I have never thought about it" but new recruits brought up the subject of time compensation up and also brought new ideas on how to look at this issue.

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## The ideal worker – does not work from home – but would like to do so.

CAUSE	EFFECT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Working from home is seen as an 'accommodation' linked to mothers rather than as a business strategy open for all.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Workers who are not mothers assume that they are not entitled to do so.</li></ul>
<p>↓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Those who work from home on a regular basis are not considered to be career oriented.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Workers assume that they will be frowned upon if they ask to work from home, so they avoid asking in the first place.</li></ul>
<p>↓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Doubts linger about the productivity of those who work from home.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Workers know that employees in other organisations can work from home and they see this as a perk which they do not have.</li></ul>

## Slide 13

### The ideal worker – does not work from home

- It is interesting that the three participants in the BA team all work remotely for periods of time from abroad.
- This means they are absent from the office for long periods of time and this is not considered to be a problem for the organisation.
- Why is remote working from home seen in a different light?

## Slide 14

### The Ideal Worker - does not need much training but...

Cause	Effect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Workers at Tech Co are expected to do a lot of self-training</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Because they are not trained and are thrown at the deep end, junior staff end up wasting a lot of the senior members' time.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Sometimes they are not even trained on the products they sell, let alone on other related products.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Senior team members feel 'obliged' to be present at the office to answer queries from junior staff.</li><li>▪ Workers at Tech Co tend to fall behind in training and do not manage to keep in touch with the latest developments in the field.</li></ul>

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## Processes from another era?

CAUSE	EFFECT
Outdated manual processes for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Recording time sheets</li><li>▪ Leave applications</li><li>▪ Travel related matters (foreign currency, flights etc)</li><li>▪ Travel related costs</li><li>▪ When organising a workshop</li><li>▪ When external people are coming</li><li>▪ Looking at individual calendars to set meetings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Time consuming</li><li>▪ Frustrating</li><li>▪ Not practical</li><li>▪ Distracts the attention from more important matters</li><li>▪ Costly</li></ul>

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## The ideal worker cannot waste time – but has plenty of time to fill in-forms

- The respondents agreed that it is frustrating that the system is not automated and when they need to apply for something they have to print out the form and can't do it online.
- Respondent A remarked that the procedure is: "print out this form, fill it in (sign it, scan it) and get it sent out...I mean we are in the IT business, we are in the business of trying to automate things".



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### The ideal worker cannot waste time – but has plenty of time to fill in-forms

- One of the participants said that they spend about 4 hours filling returns every time they return from aboard, when instead if they are given a company credit card, they could simply print-out his credit card details and that would solve the problem and save them a lot of time.
- When I asked why the company is refusing to issue a credit card system, the respondents said that they had been told that "it increases their administrative work" but it seems they are happy to increase ours.
- The respondent said it was ironic that they were always harping that a consultant's time costs money to the client, and yet they were doing unproductive administrative work.

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### The ideal worker cannot waste time – but has plenty of time to fill in-forms

- The respondents started giggling when I asked how systems are still not automated in a company which specialises in ICT.
- I pointed out that 4 years earlier workers had also commented on the outdated processes.
- One of the respondents commented that actually had a system "but the guy who wrote it left, and so it (the system) died".

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### The ideal worker cannot waste time – but lacks resource planning software

- **Resource Planning Processes** - In order to keep in touch with the team when they need to plan something, respondents have to go into each and everyone's individual calendar (which is available online).
- This takes time and is not very effective.

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### Ideal workers do more with less remuneration

- The issue of travel- related compensation was raised and respondents do not seem happy with what they are getting: "it's not good enough".
- Respondents said that they were currently debating this issue and also discussing the time-in-lieu concept for the extra hours they work when they are abroad.

## Slide 21

### The ideal worker – should be happy with small mercies on Flexibility

- From the discussion it emerged that flexibility at Tech Co typically means half an hour to an hour leeway around starting and finishing time.
- When discussing how Google and Microsoft have taken the concept of work-life integration to another level (free meals, the idea of mixing work and play, getting their laundry done at work, or taking a nap if tired) one of the respondents commented that at Tech Co: "it's either one or the other, work or life" and when considering what they get there, they seem "happy with small mercies"

## Slide 22

### Proposals for road testing?

1. Teleworking as a business strategy
2. Travel related compensation in the form of time
3. More flexibility when booking flights
4. More automation - the introduction of a company credit card
5. More automation - Resource Planning Software
6. To review the current compensation system for those who work abroad.

## Slide 23

### Proposal 1 - Teleworking

Telework (working from home ) for a a number of reasons:

- For fairness's sake (till now only mothers and certain managers are typically able to do so).
- To match what your competitors may offer to their workers.
- To avoid the noise generated in an open plan office and allow workers to work in peace in a quieter environment.
- To allow work-life integration especially for those who are travelling regularly and spend a lot of time away from home.
- To allow workers to have a better relationship with their spouses/partners.
- To allow worker to deal with their personal needs, family, study, hobby related needs.
- To allow workers to extend their working hours.
- To prevent trained workers from leaving the company.

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### Proposals 2 - Travel Related compensation in the form of Time

Allow workers to increase work-life integration for a number of reasons:

- To allow workers, especially those who travel, the opportunity to catch up with their personal needs and to compensate from the time they spend away from the family and country.
- To decrease the work-life pressures that those travelling are likely to face.
- To allow participants to take their leave in order to rest and not to carry out personal errands which they would otherwise have to do during working time.

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### Proposals 3 - More flexibility when booking flights

To increase the autonomy of the workers and allow them more room to make personalised choices when booking flights (if they want to):

- This would allow the participants to choose flights to suite their personal needs at times convenient to them.
- It would save them time and free the administrative staff too.

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### Proposals 4 - More automation-company credit card

To introduce a company credit card for those who travel frequently for work related purposes:

- This would allow them to print out the expenses they made without having to fill in data on their return.
- It would increase transparency.
- It would save time and time means money.

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### Proposals 5 - More automation- Resource Planning Software

To introduce adequate Resource Planning software to enable the team to coordinate work better

- This would allow workers to keep abreast of development during the life of the project.
- It would allow more coordination between the team.
- It would allow workers to keep in touch with developments even when staff are abroad or are working from home.

## Slide 28

### Proposals 6 - Travel Related compensation

- To review the current compensation system for those who work abroad often.
- To provide a better incentive for workers to work abroad.
- To give the employees who work abroad a sense of fairness when compared to what the competitors are offering to their workers.
- To ensure that people who join the company do not get a worse deal than then they did in other organisations.

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## Proposal 7 - More training to all

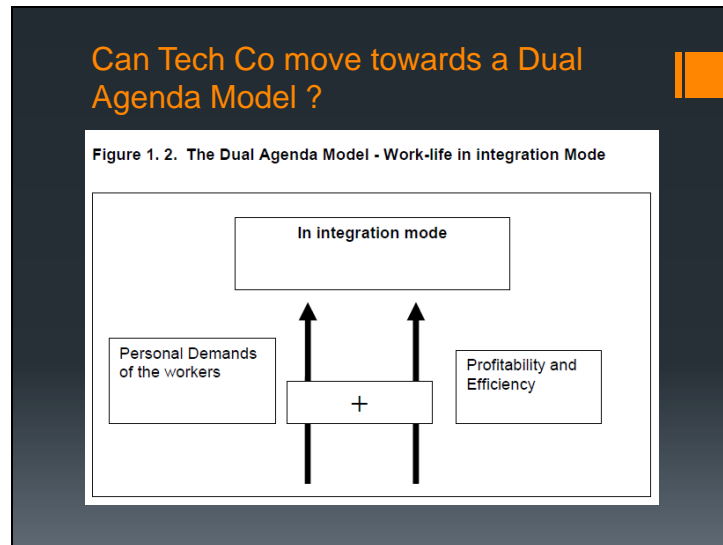
- **A bigger investment in continuous training is necessary in order to ensure that:**
  - Workers become knowledgeable about the product they work with.
  - Workers will not need to stop and ask others on how to solve products.
  - Persons in high positions are not stopped frequently by junior staff to solve their queries.
  - Workers are kept abreast of the latest technology.
  - Workers are in a better position than workers in competitive organisations.

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## Work at Tech Co is still perceived to be in conflict mode with life

The current underlying beliefs about flexible work are:	New values about flexible work are needed:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ It is dangerous to introduce new forms of flexible work because then these cannot be retracted ("it's like a cancer").</li><li>▪ Workers who work flexibly (at home part of the day) "cannot grow" with the company".</li><li>▪ "One always doubts the productivity of those who work from home".</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ To keep abreast of changes in the world of work it is necessary to look at flexibility as a positive business strategy.</li><li>▪ Ensure that everyone can grow with the company and flexibility will not harm your chances of doing so.</li><li>▪ It will not matter where people work as long as they deliver on time.</li></ul>

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### Testing time?

- Would you be interested in testing the suggested changes for a defined period of time?
- This may be the only way you can track changes and improvements.
- Big multinational companies have realised the potential of work-life integration – will Tech Co realise this too?



