

# **Family-Friendly Policies in a Voluntary Organisation : between constraint, strategy and culture**

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## **Abstract**

Since the mid-nineties, the “work-family challenge” has become a particularly prominent issue in the UK. Some of the most important issues which require to be investigated in the field of research focus not only on the ‘individual jugglers’ and public policies, but also on organisations. Previous authors have pointed out the importance of the organisational context and the relative autonomy of organisations as far as translating policies into practice is concerned. Some studies have been carried out recently on work-family issues in business companies and public sector. However, until today research has neglected voluntary sector. In this contribution, we draw on our case study of The Good Life, a voluntary organisation. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations takes this case as an example of good practices. The Good Life gives their employees a large range of policies and initiatives considered to be favourable to the work/life balance. The question addressed in our research is how such an apparently innovative development can be understood and explained. We examine the different organisational dynamics that surround the question. As well as documentary analysis, we conducted semi-structured interviews with staff including senior managers, trade union delegates, team leaders and support workers.

Since the mid-nineties, the “work-family challenge” (Lewis and Lewis, 1996) has become a particularly prominent issue. This rise of interest is connected to recent socio-economic changes: the introduction of flexible working hours, the feminisation of the labour market, the intensification of work practices, the increasing mobility of the labour force, changes in family composition and structure, the ageing population, etc. The relationship and conflict between the world of employment and family/private life are therefore becoming a major issue for many people who have to ‘juggle’ competing professional and personal demands.

Applied to the British political agenda, today there is immense institutional pressure for the world of work, to find ways of achieving a balance with domestic and private life. In consequence, some of the most important issues which require to be investigated in the field of research focus not only on the ‘individual jugglers’ and public policies, but also on organisations. Previous authors have pointed out the importance of the organisational context and the relative autonomy of organisations as far as translating policies into practice is concerned (e.g. Milliken et al, 1990; Goodstein, 1994; Osterman, 1995; Ingram and Simons, 1995; Wood, 1999). Some studies have been carried out recently on work-family issues in the UK at the level of the firm (e.g. Dex and Scheibl, 1999; McKee et al, 2000 ; Bond et al., 2002), and further research on these lines is now required.

These studies have, however, concentrated on private and public companies. Voluntary organisations have until recently been neglected, though this sector is, in both social and economic terms, far from being insignificant. In Scotland, for example, the voluntary sector’s income was £2.01 billion during the financial year 2000/2001 (Third Force News, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2002). It employs about 4% of the working population, that is, 100,000 workers distributed among about 44,000 organisations. This number does not include the 600,000 charity workers who are attached to these organisations (Ibidem).

At the end of the year 2,000, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) was granted an award from the “Partnership at Work Fund” to promote “partnership” and “work/life balance” in voluntary organisations. This, for the SCVO, gives the sector an important stake in the matter, especially in forming a response to institutional demands. This is partly because the Government has made it one of its priorities<sup>1</sup>, but there is also the need to avoid being overtaken by the “rival”<sup>2</sup> sectors and to offset the problems of recruitment, of turnover and of absenteeism. These problems appear to be particularly acute in this sector, which has the reputation of being relatively poorly paid. To encourage the introduction of policies favourable to the “work/life balance” (extra statutory maternity leave, paternity leave, flexi-time...) the SCVO favours those voluntary organisations which have introduced new policies in this area. The Good Life, presented as a model of “good practice”, is a case in point (SCVO/STUC, 2001a). This is a voluntary organisation set up in 1976 by a group of

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<sup>1</sup> « Work/life balance issues are now high priority on the national agenda. The government is actively promoting the development of work-life balance practices across all sectors and is committed to helping to create a society which supports people to get a better balance between the pressures of paid work and time to lead fulfilling and responsible private lives at an individual, family and community level » (SCVO/STUC, 2001a, p.1)

<sup>2</sup> « The private and public sectors are offering an ever-increasing menu of flexible options to employees[...] we need to ensure that the voluntary sector is able to keep pace with these new developments and offer similar benefits to its own employees both for their wellbeing and so that the sector continues to attract the skilled and experienced people so essential to its work »(SCVO-STUC, 2001a, Foreword).

parents living in the North East of Scotland. This project supports children and adults with learning disabilities and their carers. It is a relatively large organisation within this sector employing in the region of 140 staff– residential as well as office-based - of which about 2/3 are women.

Our overarching research question is: 'What factors and conditions are conducive to the implementation of family friendly policies and practices within organisations?' Many organisations have used the financial costs of these policies and practices as a potential justification for not implementing them. In order to investigate this question in greater detail, we decided to carry out a case study of an organisation within the voluntary sector where financial pressures and constraints are considerable and arguably, could limit the implementation of family friendly benefits. To this end, besides several visits to the organisation and a documentary analysis, we interviewed the company's Finance Manager, a Team Leader, a Trade Union representative and a Support Worker. We are negotiating a second wave of interviews in this organisation. Before presenting the results of our exploratory analysis, it is important to show the ways in which The Good Life exemplifies « good practice » in the voluntary sector.

### **A Model of Good Practice**

Drawing on a brochure published by the SCVO-STUC (2001a) « *the organisation has a forward-looking and flexible approach to improving conditions of service for staff, as it is keen to attract and to keep personnel in an area of work which can be very demanding, with high staff turnover.*

*One way of doing this is to be as flexible as possible. For example, some employees are able to adapt their working week so that actual hours of work can be varied providing agreed total hours are met. This allows management to fit people's hours to their circumstances as well as ensuring the needs of service users are met. Because of the level of support required, each supported house requires a mixture of full time, part time, plus staff on short term contracts, combining the hours of workers on different contracts to ensure cover.*

*The following are some of the policies that have been put in place:*

- *Maternity Leave exceeds the statutory minimum – for those employed for over 2 years, 12 weeks on full pay and 12 weeks on half-pay, and also a menu of options at the end of maternity leave such as coming back part time.*
- *Paid Paternity Leave – for those who have worked for more than 2 years, the equivalent of 6 weeks on full pay*
- *Paid Carer's Leave – maximum of 10 days within a calendar year, dependants are defined very broadly to include, partners, children under 16, adults with learning disability, elderly parents, and if agreed with management, could be extended for example to other dependants such as neighbours*
- *Paid Special Leave – for example compassionate leave for a bereavement, plus time for moving house – up to a maximum of 5 days*
- *Extended unpaid leave – negotiable with service area manager.*

*Finally, keeping up to date with legal changes is very important. An adviser from the Scottish Employment Rights Network was involved in briefing senior managers regarding recent legislation and management also meet regularly with union officials from the TGWU ».*

At the time of our preceding analyses, we underlined the extent to which the implementation of policies and practices aimed at a better balance between the spheres of work and home (and beyond) do not result from a single factor, but on the contrary from a combination of conditions and dynamics within the organisation. The Good Life is no exception to this. We can in fact note that the process of implementation of policies and practices leading to a better work/private life balance operates through aspects of the strategies, the constraints and the culture in force in this workplace.

In order to identify the context in which these policies and practices occur, we first need to outline the structure of the financial dependency of the organisation. Although this is not the only « cause » of the implementation of family friendly policies, it is indeed largely responsible for the forming of organisational dynamics through the pressure it brings to bear on the organisation.

### ***Financial pressures and work management.***

The Good Life is linked contractually with the « Social Work Department » (SWD) of the local authority. This contract, renewed and renewable every three years, provides some financial security : « It's kind of been a custom and practice. We know that they're not going to pull out and we have some, we have that security because of the nature of the services. You couldn't just change it very quickly because it's people's home and it would take a long time you know to actually change over. So we have that security in that we know they're not going to suddenly go to another provider » (Finance Manager).

Between 80% and 90% of the organisation's budget depends on the SWD for financing, the balance coming from grants and other very variable diverse operations. The Good Life is consequently in a dependant position in its negotiations with the SWD : « We're in a weak position », the financial manager declares. Even if reserves have been built up over a period of time, and a certain financial security has been achieved, this manager judges that in the long term, the organisation is vulnerable. In recent years it has, moreover, had to initiate a policy of budgetary restriction due to the static condition of financial resources. Since the wage bill represents about 80% of costs, savings have to be made principally in this area : « Some people took voluntary redundancy so we had to make quite a lot of payments for that and also we used to have a depute director and she took voluntary severance so we reduced the size of the senior management team and reduced the number of team leaders who manage the houses. So that's kind of helped us reduce costs in the longer run and the managers will always be looking at if there's any way of reducing the staff but that's difficult because we have to maintain quality service and that is I suppose one of our main priorities you know the sort of ethos of the organisation is all about providing a quality service so we have to be very careful if you know we reduce staffing that that doesn't have an effect on people who get the service » (Finance Manager).

This constrained budgetary situation has a direct impact on the level of salary offered to employees. The Good Life had initially established a link between its internal salary scale and the salary scale being used by the local authorities (the « NJC salary scale ») but it had to break off this link, in agreement with the union, in order to negotiate its wage policy internally: « We used to follow the what's called the NJC salary scale which was local authority salary scales but because we couldn't directly impact what salary increases were

going to be we were just following what was set by local authority, it meant we didn't have much control. So we negotiated with our union to break the link and said we will negotiate directly with the staff through the union to agree annual pay increases » (Finance Manager).

According to our interviewees, wage conditions within The Good Life are, nevertheless, relatively high compared with those in force in the voluntary sector. It is nonetheless the case that it is not very competitive in comparison with the public and private sectors for : « So in comparison to the council our wages are poor but in the voluntary sector as a whole we're near the top, I think The Good Life is near the top in the voluntary sector [...] the job is not particularly low paid but it's just a low pay sector, you know what I mean? » (Trade Unionist). For example, if we compare two offers of employment for a « support worker » in 2002, one by the City Council and the other by The Good Life, the comparison leaves us in no doubt as to the difference in attractiveness : the wage proposed by the former being between £18879 and £23460 while it varies from £13045 and £16360 for the latter. But the former requires both a diploma and experience, while The Good Life is asking only for experience or even simply the right motivation.

This problem of wage competitiveness results in problems with recruitment and turnover, which are moreover widespread throughout the voluntary sector. The rate of annual turnover is estimated at 14% within The Good Life. High turnover is found principally among young men and women who come to gain experience in order to move on to more highly paid employment : « a lot of the people are fairly young and they come and get experience and then they go into teaching or go into another profession so there is quite a big turnover » (Finance Manager). A trade unionist gave us the example of one of his colleagues who was in the process of leaving for a job in administration with a local authority: « One of my colleagues is leaving next week to go to the local authority to work, similar work but better paid » (Trade Unionist). A considerable turnover rate is accepted as a natural given in the sector : « fourteen is quite high but I think in the care professions there is generally high turnover » (Finance Manager).

Nevertheless, the people we met were unanimous : in spite of the low wages, they appeared 'happy' to work within The Good Life. The effective functioning of the latter leads to the supposition that this organisation remains successful in retaining its attractiveness in the jobs market and in motivating its workforce to the extent necessary to achieve its aims.

### ***A positive approach at work, in the job and in the organisation***

Within The Good Life, the drawback of low wages is counterbalanced by other aspects of the work and of the position : the extra-salarial benefits ; the management of time at work ; the quality of working relationships ; the development of its « human capital » and career prospects ; the carrying out of work beneficial to society. Let us briefly examine each of these aspects.

#### **The non-wage benefits**

Although the wages are not among the highest, other conditions of work are in themselves judged to be « attractive ». Thus, The Good Life offers a retirement plan described by the Financial Manager as «generous » : « We have quite a generous pension scheme as well that we donate nine percent of your salary, the employer adds nine percent to pensions so it's a big

part » (Finance Manager). The trade union representative concurs : « We have a first class pension scheme » (Trade Unionist)

As for health insurance, the trade unionist describes it as being « very good », as is the case with the annual holiday scheme : « Our sick pay provision's pretty good. I think if you're off sick for six months you get full wages for six months and then I'm not sure if it's for six months or a year but it exceeds what the government level would be you know so our provision in respect of that is still pretty good » (Trade Unionist).

Other spells of leave associated with the « work/life balance » programme are equally put forward as being advantageous, among them in particular being maternity leave, carers' leave and paternity leave: « But they're (NDA – the managers) very good when it comes to carers' leave, maternity leave in other words taking care of individuals they are and they'll go as far as they can go, you know. [...] Well it is a good thing to have there say like carers' leave right it is important to have and not all companies do that see and I think The Good Life they're a very good company because they have these, because I mean they have maternity leave which is another one a lot of companies have that one, right but the carers' leave is not many companies have it. [...] We've got one individual right now within our team that's doing that, see. He's taking carers' leave because his wife is no' very well and I think it's an excellent thing to do you know.» (Support Worker).

A team leader we interviewed confided to us that she had particularly appreciated the chance to take leave from work to look after her sick mother: « Yeah carers' leave yeah that's a good thing, that's a good thing to have. Yeah that's a good thing. For example I had carers' leave because my mum was diagnosed with breast cancer and she had a big operation and she needed a bit of support after the operation so I, instead of taking holidays, I was allowed some carers' leave because obviously she needed my assistance for some personal care you know » (Team Leader).

### The limitation and management of working hours.

Work in an organisation devoted to the care and accompanying of handicapped people is demanding, requiring the provision of care 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

However, The Good Life offers weekly working hours limited to 37 hours per week. This also applies to managers, as the Finance Manager points out : « I will do extra occasionally, we have evening meetings occasionally or if there's a deadline you know then I'll try and meet that but I try not to do it regularly you know as a matter of course that I would work over » (Finance Manager). The director, moreover, sets an example in this matter: « The director he doesn't you know he's not in the office till six or seven at night he goes home and I actually think that's quite a good example to set because I've worked other places where if you leave on time you feel like you're letting the organisation down or you're not working you know and I think that you know if you can't do your job within the hours then there's something wrong with the amount of work you've got or the way that you're organising your work or that you know you should say look I've just got too much rather than just accepting it and trying to keep up because I think in the end you know it will affect your health and I sort of think well working life is important » (Finance Manager).

In the British context, characterised by long working hours, this limiting of working hours is positively appreciated by employees who are striving to reconcile their working life with

other areas of their existence: « We only work thirty-seven hours a week and people like me I have grandchildren and I place great store by that and there's plenty scope, plenty time to spend with them and you feel that you're valued and that your family's valued within the organisation you know » (Trade Unionist). He also adds : « I've earned more money, a lot more money in different places I've worked but my quality of life is better now ». This testimony demonstrates that financial benefits are far from being the only motivation when it comes to choosing a place of employment and forming a positive relationship with it.

For the workers giving the care, the 24/7 nature of caring work is a constraint integral to the nature of the work. Nevertheless, the setting of working hours is negotiable between the workers and their team leader, so that different needs may be met. « I've got a girl on my team who works every Tuesday because she has commitments with young children and her husband has a business and she helps him as well so she can work every Tuesday and that's OK that fits in. With regard to everybody else I don't know I mean myself as I say you know I don't work, I generally don't work weekends unless I really had to you know so things so I shift my life around a wee bit you know but I mean I teach on a Monday night so and as long as I've done the teaching I've never really worked a Monday night but I would work something else instead you know so it can be balanced fairly I think throughout. Everybody you know every staff have requests for something and I think as long as it's honoured it's you know it works OK » (Team Leader).

In the accounts department, moreover, they are trying out a system whereby working hours may be shortened in one area by working extra in another: « For my own team we will allow people to come in early and we did have three-quarters of an hour for lunch, that's a sort of regular amount but what we've said is if people want to take half an hour, but they can't take less than half an hour and they can add up the fifteen minutes and leave early on a Friday which is what they wanted to do » (Finance Manager).

### The quality of working relationships and environment.

Our interviewees demonstrate their relative satisfaction with their working environment. The Good Life seems a quite a pleasant, sociable and fairly informal place to work. The personnel know and respect each other without hierarchies having to be insisted upon : « Well everybody here calls the director by his first name, everybody just knows them by their first names, that's got to say something I suppose, don't see anybody wearing a tie in here which is quite unusual so there is a kind of informality about it » (Trade Unionist).

No major problems with working relationships arose during the course of these interviews. The emphasis is on the quality of team relationships and communication. One care worker confided to us in this respect that : « I've been extremely lucky you know extremely lucky The Good Life have been very, very good to me. [...] They are very accommodating, they are very flexible, they're very understanding, they will listen to you, you can approach them anytime I mean to me all these things are priceless » (Support Worker).

A glance back over his working life led the Trade Unionist to declare : « I think it's a very good employer, I like working here. My brother works here, he's worked here ten years, I've worked here six years. I wish I had done it twenty years ago » (Trade Unionist).

Of course this analysis does not mean there is no problem or conflict at all but The Good Life tries to be a « friendly-organisation ». It is a kind of logic of action in this organisation.

### The development of its human resources and opportunities for career advancement

As we have seen, the SCVO management finds a relatively high turnover acceptable, realising that it cannot compete on a wage basis with other public or private organisations. It employs those who are young or not so young, with or without qualifications: « I always wanted to work in this industry but I never had any qualifications and I never thought they would want somebody with no qualifications but The Good Life sometimes takes a gamble and employs people with life experience and I'm one of them » (Trade Unionist).

They give employees the chance to acquire experience while at the same time accepting that high turnover and retention of key staff are an issue.

The gaining of experience is seen as being essential by a care worker: « You see it's like being able to resolve an unexpected situation favourably or to the best result, that's experience to me, you see and if you can't do that you've got a problem, that's it. So I love experience and I love to work in as many houses as possible and I was very lucky that The Good Life helped me to do that and I've worked in every single house The Good Life has, you see so there you are and to me that's priceless » (Support Worker).

However, the possibility of career advancement is not only to be found outside the organisation because the size of The Good Life allows for the opportunity for internal promotion. The Team Leader we met told us about the path her career had followed: « I've worked for The Good Life for seven years come August. I was a support worker for five and then I acted up as a manager for well over, well nearly two years and I got my post last September and once you are promoted, well once you are a team leader you've got two years to do the qualifications and then you have to become a fit manager and that's with the SVQ stuff with the new legislation. [...] I started as a support worker but you know I was interested in being a team leader so it was to pursue that so obviously my job you know somebody else had to slot in there so I mean the staff are encouraged to develop certainly » (Team Leader).

The Good Life has been awarded the « Investor in People » seal of approval and as such, to quote an extract from the annual report for 2000/2003 : « we made sure that we invested time, effort and resources in training and developing our staff and ensuring that this effort was fully aligned to achieving the Good Life's key objectives » (Annual Review, 2002/2003 : 30). The Trade Unionist, moreover, considers that : « The Good Life's been good in training there's now a greater intensity and concentration upon it which is dictated by government for the setting of standards » (Trade Unionist). Indeed, one of the current issues is to ensure that all the members of the core personnel gain qualifications, most of them having been taken on without being in possession of any kind of certificate or qualification : « there's a lot of changes about the qualifications at the moment and it's still being finalised because previous to be a care worker you didn't need any qualification to be a basic grade support worker but that is changing and there will be a qualification and people will have to train for that. Our team leaders have had to hold either a social work qualification or a nursing qualification or an SVQ qualification so people, there have been one or two people who have done their social work qualification here you know by day release or whatever but what we're trying to do is to train people in the SVQ because we think that that is what the new regulations are going to

ask us, ask people to have. So we're going to have to have a big internal programme of training people because we're like we've been given a remit within the next five years half, I think it's half the workforce has to be qualified, not to social work but to SVQ for care workers, I think it's going to be SVQ 2 or 3 and for a manager it would be SVQ 4 so there will be a lot of, a big programme of how we're going to train the workforce » (Finance Manager).

### Being proud of knowing you're doing a worthwhile job.

As is probably the case in many voluntary organisations, the work is more just a job: « I know that a lot of the staff especially the sort of front line staff you know it's hard work but you know I think most people do it because they want to do it and it's not just a job » (Finance Manager). The most rewarding part of the job for one care worker interviewed is not just his wage but also the gratitude his patients show him : « People make me happy and I try and make them happy. I mean the most important things I find is to win respect and trust, respect, trust, confidence within the people you work with, I don't mean staff I mean the people that pay my bread and butter who are the people I work for who is the service users, you see. They are the ones to me that I have if I can to win their confidence, their trust you know what I mean and their respect and vice versa if you can do that » (Support Worker).

So the work does not have just the function of allowing the worker to « earn a living » because it has a supplementary existential and social depth that comes from participating in the common good which gives people a sense of commitment : « I actually preferred to work in this kind of environment because I don't know, I think if you're although I'm not directly involved in what the, in the services and things I think it's nice to work in, for me it's nice to work in something which eventually is actually helping people as opposed to making money for share holders » (Finance Manager).

The Trade Unionist, a care worker himself, told us for example that he had several times brought his daughter along to along to show her what his work involved ; she even thought him to be a doctor. The symbolic aspect is important for our interviewees, who have the feeling that they have a mission to accomplish and The Good Life as a whole has the reputation of worthily fulfilling their role : « Well The Good Life I mean The Good Life are doing their best to improve their image as much as possible, see and to look like a caring company and a good company and a responsible and an understanding company » (Support Worker).

To sum up, in this type of organisation, the comparatively low wages should be seen within the whole context of this type of work, which contributes to the attraction and commitment of the workforce. The policies and practices of the work/family balance (and others) form part of this whole.

### ***Between constraints, strategies and values***

In the setting of The Good Life, the policies and practices conducive to achieving a balance between work and private life mainly involve the non-wage benefits and the different means of the management of working hours. They must nonetheless be understood in the context of the whole organisational framework. One thing is certain, they are in step with the dynamics

of the organisation, both on a cultural level (the values, the principles governing the direction the company is taking) and on that of strategy (what is in the interests of the group, and the cost/benefit audit).

On the cultural level, The Good Life is imprinted with family values, as the Financial Manager points out: « you know it is a sort of family friendly organisation » (Finance Manager ». A Team Leader reckons that this characteristic arises from the history itself of The Good Life : « because of the history it was set up by parents and carers who looked after the children so yes definitely I think it is. I would say that we were altogether a caring organisation and I think you know The Good Life you know want to support their staff through problems as well as support the tenants you know in their lives you know with their lives and how they choose to live them so yeah I think it is a family friendly you know family friendly and the history as well so yeah, I think that's stayed with it. » (Team Leader).

This cultural foundation is undoubtedly an important factor in the process of implementation of family-friendly policies. At the same time, these also have a strategic dimension, in that they attract and motivate the work-force: « They have always tried to kind of keep ahead of best practice which I think probably now well we're still trying to do that and it's almost I suppose in some ways more important for us to do that because we can't offer high salaries to people so we're always trying to keep the good conditions and maintain good conditions because it's difficult for us to maintain the salaries because of funding » (Finance Manager).

In financial and organisational terms, the different policies and practices of leave and flexible working hours present few difficulties. With the exception of maternity leave, affecting on average two or three women per year, the other types of leave do not have an important impact on the finances of The Good Life and do not disrupt the organisation of the work : « the maternity one can be quite a large cost. The other ones special leave, carers' leave probably isn't as I say maybe a couple of thousand yeah four or five thousand maybe but the maternity could be because if someone's off for twelve weeks full-pay, twelve weeks half-pay and then because they're going to be off for a long period we would have to replace the person. For the carers' leave it's just a day here or a day there so you don't have to worry about replacing, a replacement cost but maternity you would so it's extended so if we have two or three people off on maternity leave each year then it can add up. It depends on what their grade is I suppose if we had a senior manager on maternity then it might cost more to replace ».

Lacking resources to cover staff who are absent, except for in the case of maternity leave, the taking of leave can nevertheless entail an increased workload for the other members of the team. The right to take leave having been acknowledged, this increased workload does not lead to major disputes. The financial manager recalled the time one of her colleagues took paternity leave : « One of our senior managers used it in January but then what happened was he wasn't, he was replaced by someone and then someone acted up so the cost, I suppose the cost is maybe more in terms of extra workload for people who are left to carry them because you couldn't really for six weeks it's too short to really bring someone in to do his job so his job was given to various people » (Finance Manager).

The different forms of flexibility of working hours do not in themselves entail financial costs and arrangements are made within the work teams, with a view to finding a balance between the functional needs and wishes of the workers and stability within the team involved: « If there's maybe three or four people looking for the same day off they have to decide

themselves they have to tell me, you know I normally go to everybody and say look I've got a problem I cannae you know this doesn't work this day you know do you really need that day off or you know could you work just the morning or whatever and normally certainly my staff team are very flexible and they do that for each other, there's not normally a problem » (Team Leader).

Similarly, the possibility of transferring from a full-time to a part-time post does not present any difficulties, provided that the size of the organisation allows for the reallocation of employees to different posts: « So if a support worker was full-time and it might be that there's a part-time post you know because there's quite often vacancies come up so we'll say well you know there's a part-time post if you want to come back part-time » (Finance Manager). Moreover, the direct cost of two part-time posts is lower than that of a single full-time one, but the costs of coordination and supervision have nevertheless to be taken into account: « It's cheaper but then I suppose in terms of, I'm not sure in terms of productivity because you would have to have you know, still have to have training and supervision and passing on information so you'd probably lose a bit of time there but in terms of actual cost, I'm thinking of the finance of it, it is cheaper to have more part-time workers » (Finance Manager).

To summarise, these different policies have a functional character within the organisation because they affirm the values which led to the setting up of the organisation and which still guide the carrying out of its mission, while at the same time they offer an obvious interest in terms of the management of the work. Equally, they offer another advantage, that of enhancing the reputation of The Good Life. Now, its reputation is important not just with regard to its employees or clients, but also with regard to institutional standards. To be « a model of good practice », to follow or to lead institutional developments, constitutes a factor of legitimacy both in financial negotiations and in giving access to public discussion on policy making, a factor indispensable to the advancement of the cause espoused by The Good Life. Currently, in the definition of its aims, The Good Life has assumed a policy-making role (influencing policy – see internal document, *An Introduction for Users, Carers and Purchasers*, 2001).

The formalisation of policies inscribed in the « work/life balance » programme is therefore inscribed in the conjunction of a system of constraints, values and strategies, without there being one single cause. To put it another way, if there is a cause, it is circular.

## **Conclusion**

What does this case study tell us about the general conditions of implementation of policies conducive to a good balance between working and private life within the organisations ?

This case is an example of an organisation which is initiating new policies in a financially strained context. Note that the cost is not used as an obstacle by The Good Life. Why is this ? Could this mean that the argument regarding cost is a « false good reason » for not introducing new policies in this area ?

In fact, several conditions need to be met in order to ensure that these policies do not cost the organisation too dearly and that they have a strategic and cultural substratum which gives meaning and direction to the organisation.

The difficulties of recruitment, turnover and absenteeism in the voluntary sector undoubtedly provide an impetus, structurally, to research other means of motivation of the workforce, as we have indicated in this case study. However, this pressure on the management is not in itself sufficient to lead to the implementation of family-friendly policies. Were this the case, the majority of voluntary organisations, as well as all organisations subject to the same difficulties, would inevitably be models for a DTI desirous of the general diffusion of these policies. The logic of the « business case », as expressed by the DTI, is certainly not the sole explanation when it comes to understanding and explaining innovations in this area.

The size of the organisation is undoubtedly of paramount importance. Within the voluntary sector, The Good Life, with 140 employees, is a large organisation. As we have seen in the matter of transferring from a full-time to a part-time post, the size of the organisation allows for the relocation of employees to other services or functions. At the same time, it enables the workload to be redistributed when someone takes leave connected with their personal needs. It is conceivable that smaller organisations do not have recourse to this double strategy and will therefore be restricted in the formalisation of such policies or will thereby see their financial or organisational costs increase due to having to bring in cover for those on leave. Size is therefore an important condition for the implementation of these policies while avoiding an increase in costs due to taking on more workers as replacements.

Similarly, the size of the organisation has repercussions for its structure, notably in prioritising the development of a managerial superstructure. In the case of The Good Life, this consists of three « senior managers » as well as the director. The opportunity to develop sensitive and appropriate training or employment practices can aid the promotion of formal policies while at the same time picking up on institutional developments. For example, the finance manager told us that she first came across the term « family friendly » while following a course on employment law : « I did a ten week course on employment law and so I was sort of familiar with all the new things, new legislation and then the fact that it was termed family friendly, so what I've been trying to do is just to make sure that our existing terms and conditions are kept up-to-date with the legislation » (Finance Manager).

This ability to follow institutional developments is unlikely to exist in all voluntary organisations. Nevertheless, most of the latter are affiliated to organisations in the sector, such as the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation or others which play a part in this spread of awareness of institutional developments. However, the uptake and adoption of the information takes longer. This means that the introduction of new policies is slower and is perhaps not yet perceptible. This allows for the explanation in particular of the report produced by the SCVO and the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) that : « Medium and large organisations, unlike small organisations, were more likely to have in place family friendly policies such as unpaid leave of absence, part-time employment and phased return after maternity leave or long term sick leave »(SCVO/STUC, 2001).

It is possible to argue that the social and cultural world of voluntary organisations is by its nature open to new family-friendly policies. Indeed, as Ingram and Simons (1995) stated, the « constituents » and the « content » of voluntary organisations favour the introduction of such policies. For example, at the level of constituents, voluntary organisations employ a mainly female workforce, including at the managerial level. Subsequent studies have shown that the presence of women at a managerial level is an important factor in the adoption by these organisations of initiatives conducive to a good balance between the demands of work and

family life. (Ingram and Simons, 1995 ; Wood, 1999). In addition, DiMaggio and Powel (1983) or Oliver(1991) defend the thesis that an organisation will be all the more willing to follow institutional developments if their constituents are compatible with those of its own objectives, values or practices already in force. In this respect, the voluntary organisations 'should' be more open to innovations in the field of the family/work balance than the commercial companies because they have undertaken work which aims at improving conditions in society, rather than being governed exclusively by financial considerations. The « family-isation » within these organisations should also be linked with the very nature of the work they have undertaken and especially with its « caring » ethos.

At the same time, as a study from the SCVO /STUC makes clear, the ethos of « service » gives rise, in certain organisations, to an availability and a personal involvement which makes the family/work balance all the more problematic. In the case of The Good Life, though, this ethos, even though it is present, is not in opposition. The director and his senior managers report setting an example by limiting their presence in the organisation and by making use of the arrangements at their disposal (among them, the use made of paternity leave). The presence of « role models » in a position of authority appears to have a decisive effect in this respect.

It must equally be acknowledged that The Good Life has a social status to maintain in its field. The statement made by the finance manager concerning the desire of the managers to « [try] to kind of keep ahead of best practice » may also be understood in terms of remaining a leader among the organisations. Being leader allows for the assertion of its legitimacy when dealing with the financing bodies on whom it is dependant and also with those who lay down policies, in the extent to which The Good Life sets itself the target of applying pressure on institutional developments. Perhaps this is where we find a major factor which allows for the distinction between those organisations which are « front-runners » and those who are characterised by a « wait and see » attitude (McKee et al., 2000).

Case studies should lead to greater precision in diagnosing and improving our understanding of organisational dynamics. It might be useful to compare different areas of activity where there are evident financial pressures, to distinguish whether difficulties arise from implementation of work/family policies and practices, or from the social and cultural dynamics which form organisational attitudes.

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