Problems of Flexible Working Research and Theory in the New Economy

Michael COLLINS LL.B; MBA; FCII; FRSA; Barrister,
Managing Director, LPSO Limited,
Lloyd's of London, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TU United Kingdom
Tel: +44 1634 392113; Fax: +44 1634 392431;
Emails: michael.collins@lloyds.com
gbh28@dial.pipex.com

Abstract. Work in the information age is fundamentally different to work in the industrial age economy but social structures, working practices, the legislative environment and academic research all have to cope with old and new economy working being in existence side by side. Standard working in the new economy is increasingly being replaced by non-standard or flexible working and is no longer the norm. Although new economy flexible working is not (yet) fully defined its main characteristics can be identified. Current research is reviewed suggesting it does not deal adequately with the differences especially with the pace of change of technology. The paper analyses data collected by government agencies and sponsored bodies in the UK. It considers research activities into flexible working and discusses their focus on the traditional family models, gender issues and exploitation of the work-force and argues that insufficient account has been taken of changes to employment within an information society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Achieving a fully flexible labour force – that is the ability to employ and pay at normal rates just sufficient labour to meet the workload at any point in time, has been a goal of employers for as long as the concept of paying for labour has existed. There are many mechanisms by which the goal is pursued and many constraints to achieving it. Issues arise such as: is there a sufficient pool of available labour? In order to guarantee a sufficient supply at times of high demand is it necessary to pay for unused labour at times of slack demand? Is this driven by unfettered market forces alone, collective agreements, government regulation or all of these. Over what time scale is labour flexibility required? Is flexibility in place needed also? Can the labour force be used for a variety of tasks to balance variations in demand for individual specific tasks (demarcation and functional flexibility)? Is it possible to de-skill tasks and utilise flexible labour for the unskilled element? What is the relationship between the fixed and variable costs of labour and utilisation of capital resources of land and equipment? These and other questions have been the subject of research and the answers to such questions determine an employer's approach to flexible labour provision. They were the same questions and issues facing Lloyd's as we sought to introduce flexible working in our back office so we could respond to the demands of an increasingly global competitive, e-enabled 24/7 market for international insurance.

This paper first examines the working environment from the industrial revolution onwards with emphasis on flexible working. It considers research into flexible working over the past twenty years and suggests that there is need to adapt and re-interpret research in the light of changing socio-economic circumstances. This need is not merely of academic concern. This author's interest is as a research associate at a UK university but also as a senior

manager of Lloyd's, charged with finding an effective solution to the problem of matching skilled labour resources to demand. In searching for a solution we considered academic and business based research, the legislative and fiscal environment, what could be achieved with current technology and the wishes and motivations of our staff. What we found surprised us. We expected that the greatest problems would come from the last of these – technological and staff issues. In fact, we found that our staff recognised the need for change and were open to it; the technology we needed existed and was improving all the time. What we could not find was convincing academic research to support the business case, or to guide us as to how to implement a flexible working programme. We found too that the legislative and fiscal environment, including on taxation and social security, within which we had to operate was firmly rooted in the industrial age. All were not keeping up with the pace of change we were experiencing in our real world.

This paper argues that a step change is taking place in the world of work evidenced by a move away from a norm of full-time permanent employment at one location. The academic community is in a position to take a macro view of this change, and moreover to influence governments, disseminate good practice, and identify and suggest answers to questions raised about work in an emerging new economy. But first the community must recognise that the new economy exists, albeit side by side with the old, and must direct its research accordingly. This is a challenge that has yet to be met.

2 SETTING THE SCENE FROM THE FIRST INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION ONWARDS

The nineteenth century gave us cities, defined work places, security of employment and nuclear families (Cassells 2001). The 20th century gave us mass production (Fordism) and replacement of agriculture as the dominant mode of production, measured by number of employees. This development of the industrial economy during the last 200 years is often described in terms of three successive industrial revolutions (Magnusson 2000). The first saw the introduction of the factory system, many jobs were changed beyond recognition and new work was created. The second industrial revolution is characterised by mass production so as to reduce production costs and realise economies of scale. It was fuelled by a mass market for relatively homogenous consumer goods. Work was directed from above by a system of scientific management or Taylorism - or, to use a broader term, the rationalisation movement. This had the effect of concentrating people and capital in large production units with production lines operating at fixed times, often over two or three shifts in the working day and requiring manual intervention to progress the work piece. Even where people were not directly concerned with manufacturing, they had to work in the same locations and at the same time as colleagues to ensure they had access to the necessary information and support resources. All of this created a favourable environment for employment of large numbers of people at one location on a fixed hours basis performing a specific unchanging function and in return the employer was prepared to offer – or an organised and politicised workforce was able to extract – security of employment in the form of a permanent employment contract, protection of demarcation and premium payment for limited temporal flexibility in the form of paid overtime.

In most countries this second industrial revolution was accompanied by high rates of economic growth which continued into the 1970s. In the 1970's oil crises triggered by the OPEC countries and the Vietnam war were the catalyst for macro-economic shocks that

brought into question how sustainable this period of growth was in the long term. There followed an acceleration of slimming down of traditional industry in the USA and Western Europe, and increases in the level of unemployment. There has never been a return to full employment since, although the USA approached it in the late 1990s. The two events cited may have been the catalyst it seems too that there may have been longer term factors beginning to make their impact and which bring into doubt the extent to which the concepts and models used to describe the second industrial revolution and normal employment match present reality.

These emerging factors are firstly, globalisation of the world economy and industrial growth in areas outside of traditional industries, along with an accompanying trend for national tariff barriers to be removed and deregulation of the financial markets. A consequence is a heightening of international competition and constraints upon the economic and social policies of national governments, including in relation to employment (Collins 2000). The second factor is an explosion in the pace of introduction of technological innovations, especially in the microelectronics (ICT) sector, of itself a necessary concomitant of globalisation. In a short space of time this has led to new industries providing a new range of goods and services and changes to existing industries' way of working and work organisation. Thirdly, consumers have learned to be more demanding, rejecting the homogeneity of lifestyles that mass consumption to a large extent required (Jensen 1999). The demand for more rapid change in production and the manufacture of more models, brand variations and differentiated products and thereby shorter or more sophisticated production runs, has come to be an increasingly important competitive issue in the market place. The result is emphasis on "lean production" and "just-in-time" processes and less on a Fordist approach of 'any colour so long as it's black'. Of course, ICT developments here too have reduced the cost of product differentiation, thus reinforcing both the supply side and demand side for an increase in customer choice.

The traditional manufacturing sector measured as a share of GNP and in terms of numbers employed has declined in all mature industrial economies (Coyle 1998). At the same time the service sector has expanded strongly, albeit often supporting industrial processes. Many of these new services are in fact industry-related services. For example an in-house design team working for a manufacturer would likely be counted within manufacturing industry. A design consultancy providing the same services as an outsourced supplier would be part of the service sector. So although it would be premature to speak of the end of the industrial society there nevertheless has been a marked change in the way in which goods and services are purchased in the business to business sector as well as a change in consumer behaviour already mentioned.

In this environment work is now less geographically restricted than in the past. ICT development means that even people who work together do not necessarily have to be in the same place and opportunities for new decentralised intra-company work organisation are increased. Inter-company co-operation too potentially becomes easier and thus a higher proportion of tasks can economically be outsourced. Also, much service work is not dependent on co-ordination at a specific point in time offering more opportunities for time flexibility in employment. Despite this, much of the academic work on employment practices sets up as a norm a fixed hours permanent job working for one employer at one location (or based at one location in the case of peripatetic work). The truth is this is an illusion and at best has applied for a short period of time in the history of industrial work

and industrialism. The question that arises is how normal is the norm, and how is it changing?

3 COUNTING THE FLEXIBLE LABOUR FORCE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

A broad definition of the non-standard or flexible workforce includes self employed people as well as part-time and temporary workers. This definition does not include permanently employed teleworkers, (i.e. where there is flexibility only in where a function is performed) but otherwise covers everyone in formal employment who does not conform to the norm described above. Using this broad definition, the 'flexible workforce' has, according to the UK Labour Force Survey, increased steadily over the last 20 years from less than 24% in 1979 to 35 per cent in 1997 (Robinson 1999). If people on government training schemes and unpaid family workers are included the figures would be at least two or three percentage points higher (Watson 1994). Most of the growth in the first part of this period was in self-employment. Among employees, part-time workers increased in numbers while full-time workers hardly increased at all. From the employers' point of view, only temporary workers incontestably increase flexibility over labour. Temporary workers increased only slightly in numbers during the 1980s (Casey, 1991), but more rapidly in the early 1990s, reaching a total of 1.5 million (14.8%) in Spring 1995, compared with 1.25 million (11%) in 1983 (Casey et al 1997). The percentages shown represent the percentage of temporary workers as related to the total workforce on the dates specified. By 1997 this had risen a further percentage point to 15.8% (Robinson 1999).

With reasonable confidence therefore, the current UK recorded work-force can said to be characterised as being around 60% working in full-time permanent jobs, 12.5% self-employed, 16% in full or part-time temporary jobs and the remainder in permanent, part-time jobs. Overall, females are close to parity in numbers with males but represent a significantly majority of those in part-time employment and a slight majority of those in temporary jobs (Robinson 1999). In other words, 40% of the workforce and a majority of female workers do not conform to a norm of work in full time permanent paid employment. If unrecorded (black economy) workers and flexibility in *place* as well as *time* and *function* is included, and the number of teleworkers are added to the total, at about 7% (Huws et al 2000) then people who conform to the so-called norm form barely half the work-force and the proportion is falling.

3.1 WHO IS DRIVING THE CHANGE?

Do employers create the flexible firm?

The 'flexible firm' is often described as one that chooses to divide its labour force into a core of permanent workers performing the key tasks and a periphery of non-standard workers. Peripheral workers include casual and temporary employees, freelancers and other subcontractors. Those in the latter group protect the core group from changes in demand. The model was articulated by Atkinson et al (1985) and following Atkinson, much of the work centred around establishing if there was indeed an increase in flexible (non-standard) working and whether this indicated a new approach by employers (Atkinson and Meager, 1986; Pollert, 1988; Hakim, 1987).

To help answer this and related questions, the Employment Department of the UK government commissioned a number of studies (case studies and a major survey) known as the Employers' Labour Use Strategies (ELUS). The ELUS project concluded that few employers were adopting a new flexibility strategy. Rather, most non-standard employment was used for traditional reasons, as a reaction to changes in demand levels or for non-permanent or recurring tasks or simply because sufficient full-time, permanent employees were unavailable (Wood and Smith, 1987; McGregor and Sproull, 1991; Hunter and Maclnnes, 1991). More recent reviews of the literature have arrived at similar conclusions (Beatson, 1995). There was no substantial evidence of a general trend for employers to move consciously to a core-periphery model which would have explained the growth in non-standard employment. If the 'Atkinson' model has validity then at least towards the end of the 20th century, it was at the margin only. This work needs to be repeated in the 21st century, anecdotal evidence at least suggests that employers are increasingly taking a strategic rather than a tactical approach to flexible resourcing.

Other Explanations

Recently, more research has approached the phenomena from the other angle, that is from the perspective of the employee to address the question: Is there evidence of a positive strategy by large numbers of employees to eschew conventional employment contracts in favour of flexible ones? If so, is this linked to the growth in the proportion of women in the labour force and a desire to find better ways, especially by working mothers and carers, of reconciling family and domestic roles with paid work? (Brannen et al, 1994). There is ample evidence of a growth in part-time employment coinciding with the increase in the proportion of women in the workforce (Felstead and Jewson 1999) and given that a greater proportion of women work part-time than men it would be easy to conclude that so far as temporal flexibility was concerned, the growth was as a result of employee election.

It is also possible however, that increases in non-standard patterns reflect shifts in employment to sectors where the use of flexible labour was most common, or as a result of tactical changes by employers to the change in the regulatory environment, power of trades unions, and even simply in changes in the way of counting the numbers. For example, many casual workers in the building trades industries were re-defined as (labour only) sub contractors as a result of tax avoidance legislation.

3.2 MORE RECENT DFEE RESEARCH

The Department for Employment and Education, the successor of the Employment Department, has funded a number of studies in recent years to shed light on developments in non-standard and flexible working practices. The most recent is Work-Life Balance 2000: Base line Study of Work-Life balance practices in Great Britain (Hogarth 2000). This complemented two 1997 studies Family-Friendly Working Arrangements in Britain, 1996, (Forth et at 1997) and a more broadly focused DfEE sponsored study by the Policy Studies Institute: Employers' use of flexible labour (Casey et al 1997). The broad study by Bernard Casey and colleagues explored:

- the extent to which non-standard working practices were used in different types of workplace
- changes over time in the use of non-standard working practices by different types of workplace

- employers' reasons for using various non-standard working practices and for changes in their level and use over time
- the perceived advantages and disadvantages to employers of the different types of working-time practice and employment contract
- the constraints which employers face on exercising greater flexibility in the use of labour
- likely future trends in the use of non-standard work arrangements

Casey et al analysed large-scale survey datasets supported by case study work in a range of employers. The datasets selected were the Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys (WIRS), and the Labour Force Surveys (LFS). Both are longitudinal serial surveys that collect nationally representative data. The Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys collect (amongst other things) information provided by employers on the use of non-standard working practices at the level of the employing establishment.

In contrast to earlier work, they concluded that growth *was* due to changes in employers' practices rather than due to a change in the industrial or occupational composition of the economy. The growth in temporary work and the use of variable hours was, they said, almost wholly attributable to a change in employers' practices, although a growth in industries which traditionally employed part-timers was responsible for some of the growth in part-time employment. They found too that organisations that were otherwise similar, employed different approaches to flexibility suggesting there is scope for choice, but that other things being equal, employers had a preference for full-time, permanent employment.

The other two studies collected more recent data but took a more narrow view of flexibility, that is of flexible practices available with some degree of election or choice by employees. Forth and colleagues discovered that 92% of establishments they reviewed claimed to provide some kind of elective flexible working or 'family-friendly' working practice. They examined four categories of provisions, namely maternity leave or maternity pay (in excess of the statutory minimum), paternity leave (paid or unpaid), childcare-related provisions and flexible or non-standard working arrangements. For the present discussion the last category is of particular interest, and Forth et al found that of six types of flexible or non-standard working time arrangements, each was available in only a minority of workplaces:

Arrangement	% of establishments offering it
flexible hours for PT employees	41%
flexible hours for FT employees	36%
permanent switch from FT to PT work	24%
temporary switch from FT to PT work	22%
non-standard FT working week	15%
term-time contracts	7%

Just two or three years later the percentage of employers embracing elective temporal flexible working appears to have risen. A joint study by the Family Policy Studies Centre (FPSC) and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reports a figure of 71% (Dex ed. 1999), although differences in the sample and definition of flexible working might account for some of the rise. Similarly with the same caveats the later DfEE baseline study found that over 60% of employers in the UK now allow at least some staff to work flexible hours with

comparable increases to the proportion allowing switches between full and part-time work (Hogarth et al 2000).

What emerges from these major UK surveys is a picture of flexibility in the workforce which is complex and changing over time with an overall trend for 'abnormal' employment to tend towards parity with the post war tradition of what represents normal employment. Simple models such as Atkinson's flexible firm are inadequate to describe what is happening and economic determinism, employee choice, and probably simple fashion also play a part.

4. A NEW PARADIGM, FAMILIAR QUESTIONS

4.1 THE PAST IS NO GUIDE

Something that should be clear from the foregoing, although often not acknowledged with some exceptions (US Department of Transportation 1992), is that the past is not a reliable guide to the future. Research is carried out in a rapidly changing and uncertain environment. Factors which play a part in this uncertainty are industrial and social re-structuring but above all the pace of technological development. ICT developments mean that things that were expensive to do have become cheaper by orders of magnitude within a single decade, for example mobile telephony. Much of the research reviewed above was based on data collected before the internet was transformed by the adoption of HTML (and now XML) into the world-wide-web, and, for example, before the total number of email addresses in use in the UK first exceeded the number of households. Yet these tools and others such as the prospect of low cost, high bandwidth digital domestic networking via ADSL or fixed radio, and high speed internet access via mobile radio or GPRS or third generation mobile telephony (UMTS), influence the progression of flexible working not only indirectly through their effect on production processes, but also directly and their development and application is changing faster than the research can record them.

This factor seems highly significant when the question is asked in research. In work on telecommuting Hartman et al found that high levels of satisfaction with 'technical support' were directly related to higher levels of overall satisfaction and the closer the employer can come to matching at-home technical capabilities with those available at work, the more favourable are telecommuters' reactions (Hartman et al 1992). This study like many others is open to the criticism of small sample size and uncritical associations of responses with conclusions, which the authors acknowledge. The fact is however, that the ability to 'stretch the desktop' so that the home pc and phone operate as in the work-place or to migrate all electronic functions to the internet so that 'the office is the network', are both in reality twenty-first century concepts and though some are, many organisations are not ready to embrace them even if the ICT infrastructure in the territories in which they operate, can support them (Crichton 2001).

4.2 A VIEW OF THE FUTURE

As we move from the second to the third industrial revolution (variously described as a new economy, or information society or age) many employees will experience a work life very different to the norm of the past.

Old economy working is a product of the industrial revolution and the Taylorist age. Like most fashion or trends, the fact that something new has now emerged which is capable of being labelled, studied and analysed becomes apparent only at a distance. For example, it is only at a distance that the society-changing trend for women to approach equality of numbers in the labour force caused partly by a post-war propensity of women to return to work after childbirth (Callender et al 1987) can be analysed. Aspects of the phenomena become clearer with time: (availability of low cost domestic labour saving devices; the self reinforcing phenomena of increased home ownership aided by inherited capital and ever more sophisticated and accessible means of financing it; shift of labour from manufacturing to services, from physical to mental labour; the post-war effect of shortage of male labour and new found capacity of female labour; universal secondary education; longevity and life beyond child rearing and so on). All of these form part of what the Future Foundation calls 'coping with androgyny' (The Future Foundation 2000) and it is only after the passage of a generation that the scope and causes of the phenomena become apparent.

There is a new economy paradigm emerging. In relation to flexible employment the question then is: What exactly is 'new economy' flexible working and how is it different from old economy working?

As with gender parity, the factors which define and explain the new economy phenomena including flexible working will be clear in time even if not clear now – although many claim already to have such insights (Castells 1996, Anderla et al 1997, Hochschild 1997, Coyle 1998, Friedman 1999, Jensen 1999 and many others). But even if these factors and definitions are not clear to all now, this is no reason to deny a reality that flexible working in the future world is different in fundamental ways to flexible working in the past world. It is a product of the knowledge based society just as old economy flexible working is a product of the industrial age society. And because new economy flexible working is not yet fully defined or its features understood, does not mean that its main characteristics cannot be identified.

First amongst these characteristics is a move from jobs being location dependent to becoming location independent (location independent working – LIW) and the consequent effects. Effects of LIW are summarised succinctly by N. Ben Fairweather et al in work funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (Fairweather et al 2000). The next characteristic is that of time independence of the work being done and accessibility to a support infrastructure at any time. Access to an office email server at 10.00pm in the evening offers freedom to work at times other than conventional office hours but may lead to an expectation by superiors, colleagues and self not that email can be accessed late in the evening but that it will be (Gordon 2001).

A third characteristic is availability of information and the issues this raises – also not all necessarily beneficial. For example, the problem of information overload induced stress (Lau 1998) or information used to replace mutual trust between employer and employee (Gooday 1998). Next, past work on gender issues in old economy working may not provide comparable insights in the new. Indeed, in 1990 Ursula Huws wrote, "although not exclusively so, the study of flexible workers is overwhelmingly a study of women workers" (Huws 1990) Yet, as Huws herself discovered in her analysis of the most recent Labour Force Survey the majority of those enjoying spatial flexibility, teleworkers, are male (Huws et al 2001). Certainly there are gender issues relevant to a study of new economy flexible working, but they are not the same as those relevant to the old economy. A fifth related

characteristic is the increasing androgyny of the work force coupled with the belief that, for many people, a single income is no longer sufficient to support a family (Handy 2001) and a socio-economic view that an economy would benefit if members of the society combined working with parenthood. This is the view of the current UK Government. Comparing unfavourably the relatively high proportion of non-working parents in the UK to that of continental Europe and the USA, the recent DTI green paper states "The UK still has 3.1 million non-working parents with children under 16, most of whom are mothers, primarily with a child under 5. The economy would benefit significantly if more of these parents chose to join the labour market" (DTI 2000 p9).

Next, are issues relating to a potential increased polarisation of the work force between those who can benefit from flexibility in the new economy and those who may not (Coyle 1998, Jackson 1999, Rosenberg and Lapidus 1999). Certainly it can be argued that there is such a danger, and researchers can point to an apparently widening gap between the lowest and highest paid in countries with the most developed ICT infrastructures (Diane Coyle calls these two groups 'operatives' and 'superstars'). In similar vein Magnusson (2000) suggests we can soon expect to see a division of the labour market into five parts:

1. A high skills sector of industrial and service production with a high level of value-added, relatively high earnings and employee driven job flexibility
2. Traditional industrial manufacturing with relatively low wages and high risk of unemployment
3. The existing public services sector, also subject to wage pressure preserving its traditional status as low paid, but perhaps with the increasing removal of the compensating factor of high job security
4. An increasing low skills service sector, also with low wages, high employer controlled job flexibility and high risk of unemployment or temporary lay-offs
5. What Magnusson calls 'the excluded' that is those in long term unemployed, people in early retirement, those with temporary employment, those who study due to a lack of other occupation, people on social benefits, etc.

What is unclear and little researched, is whether this would be a permanent feature or merely a temporary one during a period of adjustment. It might be that wages of the lowest paid in a mature information age society might rise from an initial low as the checks and balances of the market place and political intervention take hold. In relation to the latter, some think that even in a global economy the power of governments to intervene is not as circumscribed as is sometimes suggested (Glyn 1998, Matthews 1998), and it is possible to point to a parallel with early industrial age relative earnings rising over time.

Finally, but by no means the least significant, some researchers point to differences between new and old economy organisational styles, cultures and management structures. For example, Mahlon Apgar IV distinguishes 'informational' organisations and 'industrial' organisations with the distinction referring to management style and philosophy rather than to an economic sector or customer base (Apgar 1998). Similarly, Gregory Dess et al discuss and distinguish three innovative types of organisation which they call 'modular', 'virtual' and 'barrier-free' (Dess et al 1995). (A trend away from industrial management styles and organisations being supplanted may be evidenced by the findings of the Labour Force Survey discussed above, that is that the fastest expanding teleworking occupation is management.)

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The 1970s economic shock resulted in higher levels of unemployment in most industrialised countries than had been seen for a generation, certainly since the depression years of the 1930s. Those countries which during recent years have more obviously succeeded in bringing down their levels of unemployment - for instance the United States, the Netherlands and Great Britain - have managed to achieve substantial growth in more qualified jobs in the industrial and service sectors while at the same time boosting the number of jobs in the low-wage, intensive service sector. As the research cited above shows this has been accompanied by an increase in flexible working and there is at least a prime facie case that the two are related.

The research shows too that working life is changing and change is continuing. There seems no reason to doubt that the service sector will continue to increase its relative share of people in employment. For traditional manufacturing industry intense cost pressure and price competition may well result in more outsourcing of simpler tasks within the industry to subcontractors, and a continued reduction of 'normally' employed people. The jobs that will increase are likely to be those requiring relatively high skills or qualification and jobs with a high service content.

It follows therefore, that existing research needs to be re-evaluated against an over-arching principle. This is that what used to be true may no longer be true, and the target which researchers are trying to hit is moving, and moving quickly. Research into flexible working often does not recognise that there is a paradigm shift taking place resulting from these changes. Rules, attitudes and values that applied in industrial age society are not adequate or appropriate to a post industrial age one. It is suggested that only by distinguishing new economy flexible working from old economy flexible working will insights be gained which are useful in development of new rules, attitudes and values.

Technology is the enabler but the key drivers for growth of interest are economic and social. Employers see flexible working as a way of remaining competitive in the globalised e-enabled 24/7 society. Successful enterprises must be able to respond quickly to changing conditions (Porter 1996, Kelly 1998), a need satisfied in part by the move to more flexible relationships with individuals, but which in the future is also driving the development of 'virtual organisations'. Social and personal drivers arise from the breakdown of the two parent, one income nuclear family (Booth 1996, Future Foundation 2000, Hogarth 2000), and the desire to reduce commuting, which itself has continued to grow at an exponential rate, wasting time, money and energy and causing pollution.

Flexible working does not raise many new questions. Those which are often raised in this context such as: how are people motivated? or how may a corporate culture be nurtured in individuals employees? or how can the organisation ensure that the knowledge and skills of those individuals passes into the collective learning of the organisation? or how can staff, used to having their time managed and supervised, learn how to manage their own time and way of working? are all questions that apply to any business, but may not be asked in traditional organisations being obscured by established practices and structures which

everyone takes for granted. Of course, although these questions are not new, the answers or solutions are, and some questions assume a greater importance than before. In particular, people working at home may suffer feelings of isolation, not just in social terms, but also in relation to career opportunities and the absence of an office grapevine from which they have traditionally gleaned useful information about the development of the business.

To address these issues researchers need to free themselves from pre-conceptions of the 'norm'. Stereotyped views of flexible working as either a means of exploitation of a reluctant (largely female) workforce or as an abnormal way of working need to be discarded, or at least, re-evaluated. Researchers must distinguish between the old and the new paradigms in their research subjects, admittedly a difficult task because they co-exist, and many cannot or do not search for the distinction or even acknowledge its existence. Nevertheless, it is argued that the distinction must be made, and the paper has attempted also to make a contribution towards a debate on how to do so.

REFERENCES

Anderla G, Dunning A & Forge S 1997 Chaotics: an Agenda for Business and Society in the 21st Century Adamantine Press; ISBN: 0744901375

Apgar M (1998) The alternative workplace: Changing where and how people work. Harvard Business Review, Boston May/June pp 121-136

Atkinson J (1985) Flexibility, Uncertainty and Manpower Management, IMS Report No 89. Brighton: Institute for Manpower Studies. Brighton ISBN 0904744841

Atkinson J and Meager N (1986) Flexibility in Firms: A Study of Changing Working Patterns and Practices. Institute for Manpower Studies. Brighton:

Beatson M (1995) Labour Market Flexibility. London: Employment Department Research Series No 48. Sheffield ISBN 0863924484

Booth C (1996) Foreword in The Work Family Challenge, Lewis & Lewis (eds) Sage, London ISBN 0803974698

Brannen J et al (1994) Employment and Family Life: A Review of Research in the UK. London: Employment Department Research Series No 41

Callender C, Milward N, Lissenburgh S, Forth J (1997) Maternity Rights and Benefits in Britain 1996. DSS Research Report No 76

Casey B, Metcalf H, and Millward N (1997) Employers' use of flexible labour Policy Studies Institute ISBN 0853747121

Castells M (1996) The Rise of the Network Society. Blackwell, Oxford ISBN 1557866171

Collins M (2000) Future Aftershock. Insurance Research & Practice Vol. 15 Part 2 July, pp 5-13, ISSN 14691000

Coyle D (1998) The Weightless World: strategies for managing the digital economy. MIT Press ISBN 1841120170

Crichton R (2001) Broadband to the home. HOP Associates 'Flexibility' web site http://flexibility.co.uk/flexwork/tc.broadband.htm

Dess G, Rasheed A, McLaughlin K & Priem R 1995 The new corporate architecture Academy of Management Executive Vol 9 No 3 pp7-19

Dex S (1999) Families and the Labour Market: Trends, Pressures and Policies. Family Policy Studies Centre (FPSC) and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

DTI (2000) Work and Parents: Competitiveness and Choice UK Govt. Department of Trade and Industry Green paper CM5005 http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/review.htm

Fairweather N, Rogerson S (2000). Social Responsibility in the Information Age. De Montfort University Centre for Computing and Social Responsibility, Leicester. ISBN 185721349

Felstead A & Jewson N (eds) (1999) Global Trends in Flexible Labour. MacMillan, Basingstoke ISBN 0333729994

Forth J, Lissenburgh S, Callender C and Millward N, (1997) Family-Friendly Working Arrangements in Britain, 1996, DfEE Research Report No 16

Friedman T (1999) The Lexus and the Olive Tree. Harper Collins, London ISBN 0002570149

The Future Foundation (2000) Complicated Lives. A report by the Future Foundation, London, for Abbey National; October

Glyn A (1998) Internal and External Constraints on Egalitarian Policies, in Globalization and Progressive Economic Policy, Cambridge University Press, ISBN 0521643600

Gooday (1998) The Location and Nature of Work in the Information Age. http://www.ccsr.cse.dmu.ac.uk/conferences/ESRC/locwork/gooday.html

Gordon G (2001) Turn IT off, Nicholas Brealey Publishing. London. ISBN 1857883004

Hakim C (1987) Trends in the Flexible Workforce, Employment Gazette, pp549-560, November. London: HMSO

Handy C (2001) Tocqueville Revisited. The Meaning of American Prosperity. HBR January pp 57-63

Hartman R, Stoner C, Arora R (1992) Developing Successful Organisational Telecommuting Arrangements: Worker Perceptions and Managerial Prescriptions. SAM Advanced Management Journal. Summer 1992 pp35-42

Hochschild A Russell (1997) The Time Bind. Henry Holt & Company. New York, ISBN 0805044701

Hogarth T, Hasluck C, Pierre G (2000) Work-Life Balance 2000: Base line Study of Work-Life balance practices in Great Britain. DfEE/IER Research Report RR 136

Hunter L and Maclnnes J (1991) Employers' Labour Use Strategies - Case Studies. London: Department of Employment Research Paper No 87

Huws U (1990) Monitoring the Flexible Workforce in Labour Market Statistics for the 90's. Statistics Users Council http://dialspace.dial.pipex.com/town/parade/hg54/statuse.htm

Huws U, Jagger N, Bates P (2000) Analysis by Institute of Employment Studies of HMG Labour Force Survey 2000 http://dialspace.dial/pipex.com/town/parade/hg54/twstats00.htm

Jackson P (1999) A Crisis of identity or too many hats? The challenge for the modern teleworker. Proceedings of Telework 1999 Aarhus pp 45-52

Jensen R (1999) The dream society: how the coming shift from information to imagination will transform your business. McGraw Hill ISBN 0070329672

Kelly, K: (1998) New Rules or the New Economy - 10 Radical Strategies for the Connected World Penguin (USA) ISBN 1857028929

Lau L (1998) The Important Social Responsibility Issues Associated with how Work is being affected by Information and Communications Technology (ICT). http://www.ccsr.cse.dmu.ac.uk/conferences/ESRC/locwork/lau.html

Magnusson L 2000 The New Labour Market and the Third Industrial Revolution. TUTB-SALTSA Conference proceedings pp 3-11. Brussels

Matthews R (1998) The myth of global competition and the nature of work, Journal of Organisational Change Management Vol II No 5

McGregor A and Sproull A (1991) Employer Labour Use Strategies: Analysis of a National Survey. Sheffield: Department of Employment Research Paper No 83

Pollert A (1988) The Flexible Firm: Fiction or Fact? Work, Employment and Society, September, pp281-316.

Porter M (1996) What is Strategy? Harvard Business Review Nov-Dec

Robinson P (1999) Explaining the relationship between flexible employment and labour market regulation, in Felstead A & Jewson N (eds) (1999) Global Trends in Flexible Labour. MacMillan, Basingstoke ISBN 0333729994

Rosenberg S and Lapidus J (1999) Contingent and Non-Standard Work in the United States: Towards a More Poorly Compensated, Insecure Workforce in Felstead & Jewson (eds) Global Trends in Flexible Labour. MacMillan, Basingstoke ISBN 0333729994

U.S. Department of Transportation (1992) Transportation Implications of Telecommuting

Wood D and Smith P (1989) Employers' Labour Use Strategies - First Report of the 1987 Survey. Sheffield: Employment Department Research Paper No 63