**Chapter 4**

**Work–life balance and austerity: Implications of new ways of working in British public sector organisations**

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An already diminished public sector continues to face the demand for greater budget cuts, following the UK election of the Conservative government in May 2015 and its pledge to maintain its post-recession austerity programme, developed during the previous Coalition government of 2010–2015. Consequently, organisations are seeking ways to sustain service delivery with even fewer resources, for example, by reducing staff numbers or, as will be highlighted in this chapter, by the strategic use of flexible working arrangements (FWAs).

For many years, the British public sector has provided employees with opportunities for flexible working to increase individual autonomy in time and place of work (Gregory and Milner, 2009b), often offered as part of an overarching work–life balance (WLB) agenda. Whether or not FWAs do in fact support employee WLB is a point for debate, as discussed in other chapters (for example, Kinman and McDowall, Chapter 2). While the availability of FWAs as a whole increased prior to the 2008 recession (Kersley et al., 2006; Busby and James, 2011), analysis of data from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS; van Wanrooy et al., 2013) revealed some shifts in the availability of different types of FWAs, including increased homeworking and compressed hours and reduced job-sharing and part-time working (Stokes and Wood, Chapter 3). Nevertheless, it is unclear how the WLB agenda has been affected by the financial crisis.

In this chapter, we examine whether FWAs are under threat, or whether in fact they have been used to help public sector organisations manage the effects of the Government's austerity policies, by focusing on British local councils. Councils have statutory responsibilities for governing local services, including planning, housing, social services, education, environmental health and transport, and are especially relevant to this research as they are the most deeply affected by austerity cuts and among the most visible and publicly accountable public services (Den Dulk and Groeneveld, 2012). We also ask whether or not FWAs can maintain their benefit to employees, as well as to employers, in challenging economic times. In so doing, we distinguish between 'traditional' FWAs (such as flexitime, reduced hours and job sharing, which are usually assumed to be employee-led) and 'evolved' FWAs (the widespread, employer-led strategic use of remote working as part of wider workplace change initiatives to cut costs and maintain service delivery). We highlight the importance of the development of enhanced IT systems over several years within the public sector and consider whether this has impacted on the capacity of local government organisations to confront the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures. The chapter begins by outlining the development of FWAs in the British public sector, specifically from the New Labour administrations of 1997 onwards and the factors that have driven these initiatives. This is followed by a description of qualitative research undertaken with a sample of HR directors and managers from 12 local councils in Britain, focusing on whether or not FWAs have been used to manage austerity and perceptions of the impacts of the austerity programme on both employees and managers, as well as on service delivery. We use the term FWAs in our reporting – although participants often used the terms WLB policies and practices – as we question whether or not these flexible working initiatives are indeed supportive of WLB. Finally, we discuss some implications of these developments and

impacts for the triple agenda of individual employee WLB and well-being, workplace effectiveness and social justice.

**The implementation of flexible working arrangements in Britain**

There is evidence that FWAs and supportive organisational cultures can enhance employee well-being (Butts et al., 2013; Redman et al., 2009; Beauregard, 2010), while also benefiting organisations (Lewis and Cooper, 2005; Rapoport et al., 2002), and can thus potentially address a dual agenda of supporting employees and employers (The Work Foundation, 2016). However, their effectiveness in this regard depends on how they are implemented (Kim et al., Chapter 10), which in turn may reflect the reasons why they are introduced in the first place and the shifting pressures on organisations as contexts change (Lewis et al., 2016).

The adoption of FWAs is typically explained in terms of both institutional drivers (including legal and normative environments, equality arguments and pressures from women employees) and economic considerations (Applebaum et al., 2002). However, the absence of strong evidence of a link between FWAs and enhanced performance (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011), coupled with empirical support for institutional factors (Goodstein, 1994; Wood, 1999; Wood et al., 2003), has meant that priority has been given to an institutional approach in explaining the adoption of such initiatives (e.g., Kossek et al., 1994). Organisations continue to be concerned with maintaining legitimacy as a result of normative, legal and societal pressures, including increased female labour force participation and high levels of public attention to WLB issues (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Goodstein, 1994), as well as public visibility. For example, the relatively high level of formal FWAs in public sector organisations across Europe, supplementing legislation, has been attributed to their visibility in relation to government standards, the pressures to recruit and retain staff,

especially women returners, as well as the absence of a profit drive. Institutional pressures were found to be the major drivers for this trend, with little evidence of the effects of economic drivers (Den Dulk and Groeneveld, 2012). However, we might expect economic drivers of FWAs to be growing in importance in the British public sector as a result of the 2008 recession and associated austerity cuts.

In the British context, development of legislation has meant that the coercive, and not simply the normative, power of social pressures has played a role in increasing the adoption of some policies. As outlined by Stokes and Wood in Chapter 3, employment legislation developed by the Labour Governments of 1997–2010 attempted to balance fairness and economic concerns: for example, the introduction of formal FWAs was discussed in terms of both fairness *and* from an economic perspective, implying mutual benefit (e.g. Department for Trade and Industry, 1998). A key illustration of this is the legislation on the right to request flexible working, which employers can refuse to grant if it adversely affects their business. The focus on a broad notion of fairness suggests the awakening of a triple agenda, that is, to seek policies that benefit both employees and employers in socially just ways. Since the 2008 recession, however, there has been a renewed focus on the costs of FWAs and, as the 2010– 2015 UK Coalition Government's labour market policy developed, there was a rebalancing of the fairness–economy relationship, with an increasing focus on economic concerns. Consequently, for example, legislation has extended parental leave and the right to request flexible working from parents of young children to all employees, but doubts remain among some employers and policy-makers about the costs involved, particularly in small businesses (e.g., Beecroft, 2011). Nevertheless, intermediary organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2012) remain convinced of the mutual benefits of FWAs and imply that they could be functional in recession and austerity.

Running alongside this 'rebalancing' of the fairness–economy relationship has been a long-standing focus on reforms of the public sector, or New Public Management (NPM), facilitated by technological advances. For example, in a Cabinet Office report from 2005, 'Transformational Government: enabled by technology', the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, set out his vision "to seize the opportunity provided by technology to transform the business of government" (2005: 2). Within this vision, it was argued that "technology has a major part to play in the solutions to each of three major challenges which globalisation is setting modern governments — economic productivity, social justice and public service reform" (ibid). Mr Blair added that "this strategy has the potential for real transformation of public services…there is a real appetite for change and modernisation within the public services themselves" (2005: 1). Whether or not there was such an appetite for change, the report demonstrates that three years before the onset of the 2008 global recession, plans were well under way to transform the public sector to make it more streamlined and effective via the use of technology. A year later, Dunleavy and colleagues highlighted a new 'post-NPM' era of 'digital-era governance' (DEG), which progresses the "digitalisation of administrative processes" (2006: 467). The Varney Report (2006) further highlighted the continued need for public sector reform, citing the successful implementation of more online services such as NHS Direct Online and car tax renewals, and calling for further changes to "mak[e] the most of technological changes" (2006: 3).

We have seen in Chapter 3 that employees experiencing recessionary actions had higher levels of work–non work conflict and that in the public sector such employees were less likely to use certain FWAs. Recent research (Lewis et al., 2016) has demonstrated that public sector discourses of WLB can be sensitive to changing economic contexts. For example,

despite a continuing discourse of mutual benefits to employee and employer, there is also a distinct shift towards greater emphasis on the economic interests of employers during austerity. This chapter complements these recent findings by examining how councils use – and build upon – FWAs during a time of austerity and whether or not FWAs can maintain their benefit to employees, as well as employers, in challenging economic times.

**The qualitative study**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR directors and managers in 12 local councils across Scotland and the North, Midlands and South of England, to explore their organisational experiences of, and perspectives on, WLB and austerity. We chose to interview HR professionals because they are responsible for developing and implementing FWAs on a formal basis and therefore have a distinctive vantage point, although this means that we are relying on their accounts to highlight concerns around the impact on employees and line managers. All the councils are large, visible, and have a high proportion of women employees.

Semi-structured interviews asked participants to look back at the initial discussions and developments of WLB policies and practices over time, which in most cases pre-dated the participants' employment in the organisation. As a result, it is assumed that accounts reflect interpretations embedded in the organisation's history and culture and used in communications with employees. Questions included how WLB or similar issues were discussed in their organisation in the past and present, and at what level; formal WLB policies; why policies were adopted; how they were implemented in practice and any perceived implementation constraints; recent changes in WLB policies and their perceived future; and whether WLB considerations had any influence on the way the cuts were handled.

Interviews were carried out by the authors in 2011–12 and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed and NVivo was used to assist with data organisation and analysis. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data.

Below, we first discuss two themes that emerged in relation to the use of FWAs in public sector austerity. Firstly, we identified ambivalence about 'traditional' FWAs: these are considered to be embedded within the practices of the councils but HR professionals have reservations about their sustainability in the longer-term. Secondly, 'evolved' FWAs or new ways of working are being embraced to manage austerity. We then discuss two further themes relating to some of the HR professionals' concerns about the impact of changing approaches to flexible working on a) employees and b) line managers and service delivery.

**Ambivalence about traditional FWAs**

Most HR managers maintained on the one hand that FWAs were sufficiently embedded to withstand the pressures of austerity and indeed could be of some benefit to both the employer and to employees in facing these pressures, at least in the immediate future. For example, FWAs were viewed as being among the few benefits currently available to existing staff, helping to maintain employee commitment and engagement through the worst of the recession. On the other hand, some HR managers acknowledged the potential vulnerability of FWAs over the longer term, especially if the need for further austerity cuts increases. For example, one HR Director told us that FWAs in his council would probably remain for the rest of the year but after that, they may come under review. He went on to elaborate on the reasons why:

*I think what the council is probably saying at the moment is 'we have a good range of practices already in place, we have to focus now on delivering the savings and reorganising the services'. So actually, the sort of the positive work on work–life balance will probably go into a bit of a hiatus now, in my view (Council 1).*

The view that FWAs were potentially vulnerable in the future was primarily because of their focus on individual concessions. Participants shared concerns that there had been an over-emphasis in the past on individual rights and the needs of staff, rather than on service delivery needs:

*There is a fine balance between supporting the needs of our staff and delivering our services to the high standard that's expected of us (Council 6).*

Participants also reported that some line managers, who are under pressures of their own to cut costs and maintain service delivery, continued to be sceptical about the benefits of FWAs and considered them to be employee benefits with associated costs, unaffordable in the current economic climate. This could result in implementation gaps between formal policy and actual practice, manifested in managers' reluctance to support staff needs. Within these examples, FWAs were still being linked to WLB outcomes:

*I guess my concern is the extent to which managers who are under pressure to make cost reductions, but... sustain services, may start to see some of these things as 'nice to have' and therefore, possibly, can no longer afford, rather than at the core of what we offer as an employer. One of the things that I do think that we need to try and protect is that sense of being an employer which offers staff a good work–life balance. (Council 3)*

A large majority of the HR professionals saw FWAs as providing opportunities for adjusting costs in the current economic context, especially to avoid redundancies. FWAs were being actively promoted within the context of the threat to jobs, encouraging people to cut hours, and packaged as enhancing WLB. Again, tensions were evident in the ability to exploit traditional FWAs such as part-time working in a period of austerity, as the participants were aware of employees' fear of redundancy. The anticipation of reduced redundancy pay in the future thus undermined attempts to make savings:

> *People are afraid at the end of the day that if they opt for part-time hours there's no guarantee that we can't make them redundant next year, and their redundancy pay would be lower and their pension would obviously be affected, and other benefits. (Council 12)*

However, participants reported that savings from the use of traditional FWAs were limited, particularly when dealt with on a case-by-case basis. On the other hand, there was a growing acknowledgement by almost all participants that the greatest savings could be made through what we have called evolved FWAs, the widespread and strategic use of remote working as part of wider initiatives to cut costs, while at the same time maintaining service delivery.

**New ways of working are evolving and are embraced to manage austerity**

All 12 councils had implemented some form of mobile working programme, variously defined as "smarter", "modern" or "new". These involved a combination of remote working (from home or other dispersed locations such as coffee bars or 'hubs'), hot-desking, the implementation of new IT systems, job analysis and redesign, and restructuring within parts of the organisation, such as the centralisation of certain services. In several cases, these programmes had been developed prior to the recession to cut costs:

*I think the single biggest change that happened was the major IT infrastructure investment that they put in place from 2001 onwards, and that suddenly enabled people to work from home and access all the core systems they needed as well. It was at that point, a range of other complementary policies started to come in to place, such as term-time working and compressed hours. We used the opportunity to pilot things and then build policy and the overarching WLB strategy around that. (Council 1).*

The programmes were also justified by participants as not only maintaining, but actually improving, service delivery, supporting the arguments put forward for reform of the public sector over many years, with the use of increasing digitalisation (Dunleavy et al., 2006).

*As long ago as about 2006 the council was doing a project called project N, about…mobile working. And we used some technology, tablet PCs, for workers to get out and visit clients. And that whole kind of re-engineering of that service, of the way people worked, reduced process time from 6 weeks to 4 hours. The residents, the clients, absolutely loved the service because instead of getting a faceless letter from the council they actually got a visit…And it completely revolutionised the way we worked. (Council 7).*

Before the recession, such programmes had been designed to enhance employee flexibility and choice, as well as helping employers to cut costs (the 'mutual benefits' agenda). However, the austerity cuts spurred on the emergence and greater use of involuntary flexibility such as enforced remote working which had an explicit focus on essential cost-savings, going against the discourse of individual choice which used to be central to discussions of WLB (Lewis et al., 2016). Remote working practices were increasingly

foregrounded as the most effective means of saving money, as fewer people in offices meant fewer resources being used (e.g., heating, lighting) and fewer desk spaces required, and also allowed councils to sell off existing property. Others were streamlining their office space and relocating staff in shared accommodation with partner organisations in explicit efforts to save money. The mutual benefits of these evolved FWAs were acknowledged, but in many cases were increasingly side-lined in favour of employer need:

> *...there aren't enough desks for everybody [laugh] so we have hot desking theoretically to a greater or lesser extent but I mean theoretically if everybody came in at the same time there wouldn't be enough desks because we've actually then been able to sell some of the buildings that we owned or and also stop renting additional space and obviously that's a money-saving idea, so it's kind of it's based on a business need I suppose but actually is also seen as something which is of benefit to staff (Council 8).*

Some participants went on to acknowledge that this discourse of mutual benefits was being used to justify ways of making cuts through enforced flexibility, by using the language of support for employee choice and WLB, representing a 'reconstructed' meaning of mutual benefit, e.g., flexibility was increasingly employer-led but the mutual benefits agenda was still being referred to in order to make it more palatable to employees. This is further discussed by Lewis and colleagues (2016).

**The impact on employees**

Despite persistently referring to the mutual benefits of evolved FWAs, there were some worries expressed about the potential consequences for employees. This is of particular concern, as selling off resources such as office space means that there is unlikely to be a

reversal of such enforced remote working practices in this sector. The HR professionals acknowledged some resistance from employees to these evolved FWAs, although they largely dismissed this as inevitable resistance to change:

*...With any big change like this you always get people who resist and, you know, people put a lot of their own personal energy and emotion into their desk space; you'll see people with pictures of their children all over their desk and their own little knickknacks on their desk and they don't like those being taken away; you get people who like a particular desk near the window and when it's suddenly all hot desking, you know it's first come first served; so there's a whole series of resistance, people don't necessarily like having to carry their equipment around with them even though we provide them with the tools to be able to do that (Council 9).*

The same participant later voiced some concerns, however, about employees losing the social engagement aspect of work:

*....hot-desking breaks down some of those little social networks because you're used to sitting next to the same people and chatting and then suddenly it's somebody different next to you every day so that is a big adjustment for a lot of people. People need that social environment, social interaction, they need the personal physical attachment to places and we're breaking some of those down. (Council 9)*

Although resistance was acknowledged, the mutual benefits of flexibility argument used by the HR professionals continues to suggest the potential for enhanced employee WLB, even during austerity. However, while evolved FWAs were being used to cut costs and help reduce the number of redundancies necessary, some staff in all organisations were still being made redundant as part of managing austerity. Thus at the same time as this increase in remote

working, there was also a decrease in staff. Consequently, a number of participants expressed concerns about the impact on 'survivors' of the redundancies who were continuing to face job insecurity as well as work intensification, with additional cuts forecast. For example, there were concerns about employees reverting back to presenteeism (where remote working was not enforced) in efforts to be seen as committed and loyal:

*I definitely have a feel…an increasing sense of presenteeism is being built into the organisation. Absence levels were always historically low in [the council], but we could see that, where areas were being restructured or areas which were likely to be restructured, there was definitely an increasing longer-hours culture building again, for there were some concerns around personal well-being and health and safety of the workforce beginning to flag up, and I think that's going to become a more problematic outcome, and that would be a direct result of the cuts because people will become more uncertain, potentially more fearful about their work (Council 1).*

This was confirmed by other participants who reported that staff members were coming into work, even when sick, rather than risk being seen as weak or uncommitted to the organisation:

*I think that's a negative because I think what's happening there is that's a fear factor; people are fearful of taking time off in case it somehow identifies them as weaker than others and when any cull comes it's the weak ones who go so I think that's a negative and I'm not comfortable with that happening. If you're unwell, don't come to work! I don't want people dragging themselves in when they're not fit to come in (Council 6).*

As staff reductions meant that remaining employees were working longer hours in order to get the work done, participants observed that employees' WLB and well-being could ultimately be undermined by these unmanageable and unsustainable workloads:

*...we've reduced the number of posts by about 10% of the workforce, I think, and, yes, we are pretty well delivering the same number of services. In other words, staff are busier, much, much, much busier, so work–life balance has taken a tumble and staff are having to work harder (Council 4).*

*...well it's interesting because while we've been encouraging people to have a work–life balance, in some senses for the few staff that are going to be left I'm not sure how they're going to manage that if their workloads are going to increase. So the ideals and the reality are two different things aren't they? .... there's going to be fewer workers doing more work, you know, we're going to see a society where we have a massive number of people unemployed or working for nothing and then we're going to have the ones who are in work being so grateful that they're in work that they'll work flat out. (Council 10).*

While some HR professionals raised concerns about employees, others were less sympathetic and reverted to the rhetoric of New Public Management as a justification for reduced staff numbers and increased workloads for remaining staff, well aware that the culture of fear in an insecure job market would mean that staff were more likely to accept what was being asked of them:

*We're looking for introducing more innovative work practices, lean systems thinking, transformation practices to try and improve our process so we don't need as many people to deliver them.  So does that mean people are working harder?*

*Probably yes. I mean that's part of our strategy with our performance management framework to eliminate any potential waste from our system including non-productive time. So yeah, the expectation is that people will need to work harder and they realise that the alternative is not particularly a good one (Council 9).*

**The impact on line managers and service delivery**

The impact of such flexible working practices and reduced staff numbers affects not just the employees mentioned above but also the line managers having to cope with new ways of working and new ways of managing staff. The fourth WLB Survey of Employers (BIS, 2014) showed that in around a third of establishments, decisions about flexible working requests were the responsibility of line managers or supervisors. The crucial role of line managers in supporting flexible working or instilling a culture of presenteeism is widely acknowledged (e.g., McCarthy et al., 2013) and can, in some cases, be more important to an employee's overall well-being than the provision of formal FWAs (e.g., Allen, 2001; Behson, 2005). As highlighted earlier, HR professionals referred to continued managerial preferences for a more traditional style of management, in the face of increasing flexibility and the dispersion of staff:

*There are two areas of resistance (to mobile working) I'd say at the moment, one is from line managers, particularly middle management layers, where they don't like the loss of control that they've perceived from people not being office-based. So not physically being able to watch people and observe them working and so on is challenging for them (Council 9).*

Of course, line managers are employees too, with increasing work demands, as well as family and other non-work responsibilities (Ford and Collinson, 2011), and the difficulties for

managers were highlighted by many participants. Some participants maintained that flexible working had helped with such difficulties, while also acknowledging increasing responsibilities:

> *... where managers were taking on functions they hadn't previously managed, or who were having to work with teams who were geographically spread around, the fact that we had that approach to flexible working and people not always having to be, you know, people working in almost virtual teams at times, that had helped culturally prepare people for changing the way managers were working (Council 1).*

There were many reports of the requirement for managers to be retrained to enable them to manage virtual teams. Some appeared to be embracing that challenge and managing to make it work:

> *...the managers need quite a lot of education and support about different ways of managing that they are managing more by results and performance and less by being directly visible with the employees....Some enlightened managers really, really make it work and they're good then as sort of champion managers, advocate managers (Council 7).*

On the other hand, the HR professionals often referred to the difficulties for managers in trying to continue to deliver services under the austerity programme. Concerns about sustaining service delivery are problematic, given that 'new' ways of working programmes were partly justified as not only maintaining, but actually improving, service delivery:

> *And I think that we are, by and large, seeking to squeeze more out of a smaller resource base and I don't think that, whilst I'm sure managers have considered the*

*implications for the staff who remain and the impact of trying to spread work more*

*across a smaller number of people, I think they've been under quite a lot of pressure*

*themselves to achieve savings targets and to continue to deliver services of the same*

*number and the same quality but with fewer staff (Council 3).*

It is such concerns that prompted managers to question the sustainability of FWAs if roles are required to change radically, as a result of redundancies and restructuring:

*Yes, I think, as saving these 450 posts this year and as pressures build, managers*

*will be less inclined to have people working so flexibly in some parts of the*

*organisation. Indeed, they may even want to review how flexible working*

*arrangements are within their teams, because the team design itself may have to be*

*fundamentally different. So of course people who have flexible working now are*

*doing so on the basis of the role they're currently doing with a level of team*

*resource around them that enables that to work, but if team resource reduces, the*

*manager may have to revisit the flexible working arrangements (Council 1).*

**Conclusions**

In this chapter, we explore HR professionals' perceptions of change in public sector use of FWAs before the recession, during the recession and in subsequent austerity. Chapter 3 uses quantitative data to assess possible effects of the recession on the use of FWAs in the public and private sectors. We have used qualitative data in this chapter to examine evolved FWAs in more depth in British public sector local councils. We have highlighted an increasing focus, built up over a number of years, on enhanced IT, which was developed to streamline the public sector and cut unnecessary waste. Our findings demonstrate how evolved FWAs, significantly enabled by such technological advances implemented in advance of the 2008

recession, are being used in the management of austerity. Homeworking was one of the few FWAs which had increased during the recession (Stokes and Wood, Chapter 3), and we demonstrate how hot-desking and remote working emerged as the only real identifiable FWA that resulted in a clear financial benefit to employers. This was being increasingly promoted to all employees, and even enforced, justified within a mutual benefits discourse (Lewis et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the mutual benefits focus was increasingly – and explicitly – being side-lined in favour of the employer-led, business case focus, further justified by the growing effects of the austerity cuts. However, HR professionals had observed that pockets of resistance emerged from both line managers and other employees who valued the social interaction involved in coming to work. Meanwhile, there were also indications that the sustainability of some traditional FWAs such as reduced-hours working may be vulnerable in the longer-term. The HR professionals believed this was partly as a result of the increasing concerns of employers and managers around service delivery and also as a result of employees being either unwilling or unable to take up FWAs in the face of job insecurity.

Despite potential resistance on the part of some employees to the enforcement of remote working and the associated reduction in social engagement, it is possible that changes such as widespread remote working may provide benefits in the longer-term if the majority of staff are enjoying greater flexibility and as a result, a better WLB. Indeed, a Work Foundation report (2016) highlights the increased use of mobile working and the associated benefits for individual employees. FWAs such as remote working during recession and austerity may also herald more enlightened practices post-recession, with potential consequences for widespread acceptance of flexible working by men and women and greater gender equality both within the workplace and at home. This is an empirical and policy question for the future. However, in the public sector, alongside the rise in remote working, there has been a corresponding

increase in job losses and, consequently, more pressure on 'survivors' to deliver the same services with fewer staff. Although our findings could not explore this in great detail due to our reliance on the accounts of HR professionals, this suggests that employees were in fact less likely to achieve a WLB, findings supported by the WERS data on the differences between public and private sector employees reported in Chapter 3. Kinman and McDowall also reflect upon some of the negative impacts of FWAs on WLB in Chapter 2. Further research with public sector employees would provide greater insights into the consequences of evolved FWAs for individuals.

Our research participants also reported that many line managers were struggling to manage virtual teams working from home or in remote workspaces, although many were making attempts to make this new form of management work in practice. The increasing pressures placed on managers in the public sector have been previously reported (Ford and Collinson, 2011) and were certainly further highlighted in the reports in our research. Again, the reliance on HR managers in this research meant that we were unable to gauge the true impact of remote working on line managers trying to maintain the same level of service delivery with a reduced workforce.

The more negative aspects of increased remote working have also been raised recently (highlighted by Kim et al., Chapter 10), and CEOs of some high profile organisations appear to be bringing their employees back into the workplace and reducing opportunities for greater work flexibility. For example, senior management in large US organisations such as Yahoo have argued that collaboration is important during austerity, increasing the need for staff to be working closer together and to be present in their offices in order to increase productivity. This may or may not provide a temporary solution to the impact of austerity and further

(optional or otherwise) remote working seems likely in the future. In the case of the British public sector, however, selling off resources such as office space means that there is not likely in the immediate future to be a reversal of enforced FWAs. The decisions made during austerity are therefore likely to have long-lasting effects on employees and on line managers and are very unlikely to be merely a reversible test-case.

In the face of increased pressures among remaining employees working harder and, in many cases, without the support and camaraderie of friends and colleagues when working remotely, the corresponding impact on individual well-being and service delivery is also of concern. Indeed, the long-standing association between flexible working and WLB is called into question by our findings. Assessed in terms of the triple agenda, evolved FWAs serve the interests of employers, potentially enhancing workplace effectiveness. However, while widespread remote working may provide some benefits, enforced remote working that does not take account of employees' needs or perspectives may be detrimental to individual employee WLB and well-being. In such cases, the pursuit of social justice seems to have been swept aside as a consequence of austerity programmes.

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