

Juliet Webster

Research & Consultancy in Work &
Employment

22 Northchurch Terrace
London N1 4EG, UK

Telephone: +44 20 7249 2504

Fax: +44 20 7249 2504

Internet: Juliet.Webster@btinternet.com

***RECONCILING ADAPTABILITY
AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
IN EUROPEAN WORKPLACES***

**Report for DG-Employment of the
European Commission**

**Juliet Webster
Research and Consultancy
in Work and Employment**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is twofold. First, it sets out to examine the equal opportunities dimensions of organisational change, and the ways in which such change might advance or inhibit gender equality. Second, it identifies the potential synergies between the two pillars of ‘adaptability’ and ‘equal opportunities’ in the European Employment Guidelines and the actual extent to which the two pillars are treated coherently in the EU member states’ National Action Plans (NAPs).

The introduction to this report sets the scene for the discussion, identifying the reasons why we should be at all concerned to achieve a better harmonisation between work organisation and equality policies. In Section 3 of the report, the gender dimensions of organisational change are examined. The report focuses on six key areas of work organisation:

- Teamworking, groupworking and delayering
- Skills, training and intelligent working
- Total Quality Management and Innovation
- Woman-friendly working time arrangements
- The relocation of work - teleworking
- The importance of integrating HRM within corporate strategy

In relation to these aspects of organisational change, the report identifies both positive and negative implications for equal opportunities, and it identifies actions that might be taken to increase the positive potential of these forms of organisation.

Section 4 of the report provides a brief background to the policy debate in this area, focusing on the emergence and development of the European Employment Strategy in the context of previous key policy documents emanating from the European Commission, in particular, the White Paper on *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* and the Green Paper on *Partnership for a New Organisation of Work*.

Section 5 of the report turns to an analysis of the challenges to be faced in attempting to reconcile the two pillars of adaptability and equal opportunities. It identifies four general issues to be addressed:

- Adaptability is still seen as a gender-neutral issue
- The promotion of equal opportunities is often treated as an extra-organisational issue
- Equality practitioners are not strongly involved in the drawing up of the member states' NAPs
- Reliable indicators of equality policy implementation are rare

In this section of the report, the NAPs for 1999 are scrutinised for their integration or otherwise of the two pillars, and in particular for their attention to the equality issues raised in their adaptability strategies and practices.

The report contains the following key policy messages:

- The impact of teamworking and groupworking on gender equality in the workplace over the longer-term is still unclear, but systematic assessment of its impact on the skills and prospects of women in different settings would be extremely helpful.
- It is important that the social partners ensure that, in facilitating lifelong learning for IT skill development in their enterprises, they take into account the particular needs and requirements of both sexes.
- If knowledgeable work is to be open to both sexes on an equal basis so that they can both equally contribute to innovation and economic performance in Europe's organisations, company training and human resource development policies need to be designed with this explicit objective.
- The role of the social partners in designing 'Equality Driven Total Quality' and in ensuring the participation of female employees in TQM is central to its effectiveness in utilising the full range of organisational resources and talents.
- A simple way in which organisations could begin to develop woman-friendly working time patterns would be to design jobs so that long hours of work are not necessary in order to do them effectively. This might be done through workload reductions, through changes of priority, or through culture change.
- At a policy level, agreements between social partners in the development and implementation of working time innovations are to be encouraged, particularly where they allow individual women control over their working arrangements at all levels of companies, including senior and managerial levels.

- There is a strong case for a systematic evaluation of the relative costs – both financial and those related to the quality of working life – to firms of implementing a range of equality policies in the context of organisational change. The costs of implementation, for example of woman-friendly training schemes and employee development programmes - could be set against those of higher labour turnover, recruitment, training, retraining, low morale and low performance.
- Greater inclusion of equality organisations and mechanisms, including women’s NGOs, would probably improve the coverage of equality issues and the implementation of equality objectives in the NAPs.
- Qualitative policy indicators might be appropriate for evaluating the progress of organisational changes in achieving equality objectives, for example, assessing the contribution of new training or employee development practices in firms to women’s and men’s career progression and thus to labour market desegregation. In addition, maximum use needs to be made of the labour market and other statistics collected by Eurostat which are now disaggregated by sex.

2. INTRODUCTION: WHY TRY TO SYNTHESISE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND THE ORGANISATION OF WORK?

It is a general rule that policies for modernising work organisation and those for addressing equal opportunities are rarely talked about in the same breath. Usually, the two issues are treated as distinct policy concerns residing in different policy domains. Yet there are some very compelling reasons why it is important to address the two issues together, and to consider them as mutually complementary and mutually reinforcing. Recent developments in European employment show that, for the modernisation project to succeed and for Europe's enterprises to operate effectively in today's economy, gender equality objectives must be placed at the centre of innovation programmes. Why is addressing equality objectives central to achieving the potential of Europe's enterprises?

- Europe's organisations are becoming feminised. It is well-known that women began to enter the labour market in significant numbers after World War II, but in recent years, their participation levels have risen very decisively indeed. Between 1994 and 1999, almost two-thirds of the 6.8 million jobs which were created across the EU went to women. In some countries during this period, women accounted for the entire employment growth.¹ Women's entry into the labour market on this large-scale has profound implications for the way in which work is organised and carried out, for the skills which are demanded and used, and for the nature of the products and services which are offered to the customers of Europe's enterprises.

Despite their entry into the labour market in increasingly large numbers, women remain clustered in a narrow range of occupations and at the bottom of occupational ladders. So, in 1999, nearly 60% of women were concentrated in the 6 sectors of health and social services, retailing, education, public administration, business services, and hotels and restaurants. This is, moreover, an *increase* in the level of women's occupational segregation. In addition, although most women work in non-manual jobs, they are in less senior positions in their organisations than men, and they progress far less in their careers.

¹ European Commission (2000a) *Employment in Europe 2000*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Even in the sectors where women outnumber men, there are still more men in senior positions than women.² The glass ceiling restricting women's career and development prospects, in particular their seniority and responsibility, remains firmly in place. Sex segregation in the labour market, then, is a depressingly persistent problem, but it is also one which threatens the effective performance of employing organisations, for it signals a massive under-utilisation of women's skills and wastage of their abilities.

- We are apparently in the midst of a transition to a 'knowledge society', in which work is much more reliant upon information and information technologies, in which educated human capital is much more central to organisational performance and in which creation and innovation make up for a large share of the value of many contemporary products and services. It is widely agreed that the ability of workers and their organisations to learn and to adapt to the demands of a changing working world is critical to the success of Europe's economies. In principle, a period of transition such as this offers excellent opportunities for addressing gender equality through organisational change, because established practices and patterns of segregation can be replaced with new, more equitable social forms. In practice, however, it seems that this potential is not being fulfilled – women have not gained as much as they should from the labour market restructuring which has accompanied the move to the 'knowledge society'.³ Across the EU women are numerically superior to men in sectors which are felt to be central to the 'knowledge society', sectors for which high levels of education are needed (research and development, education, computing, business services, health and social services). Despite this, they tend to get stuck in the lower echelons of these sectors whilst their male counterparts dominate in the highest-level occupations. And, at the bottom of the labour market – in elementary manual and low-skilled non-manual jobs such as office workers and sales assistants - women remain the majority of employees as they have always been. It is clear, then, that the opportunities for overturning established gender divisions of labour offered by this technological and organisational sea-change have yet to be realised.

² *Employment in Europe 2000*, already cited.

- The equality dimensions of organisational change and innovation have not been extensively explored, either in the member states' employment strategies or in the strategies of firms. As research shows and as we shall see in Section 2 of this report, organisational changes can fundamentally affect the gender relations of work, and can therefore be used to pursue equality objectives. However, as Section 3 of this report makes clear, the possibilities for improving gender equality, and at the same time increasing organisational performance, are not widely recognised or incorporated into change strategies.
- Achieving gender equality is often approached primarily as a question of improving the numerical representation of women in the labour market. It is often supposed that equality between women and men will be achieved when women's participation in the labour market equals that of men, and particularly when women are found in senior managerial and entrepreneurial positions in the same proportions as men. An illustration of this approach is evident from the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, where a target of getting 60% of European women into the labour market by the year 2010 was set. Improving women's *numerical* representation in the labour market is a necessary condition for achieving gender equality, but it is not a sufficient one. Achieving gender equality also requires major improvements in the *nature of the jobs and the conditions of work* which all women do, if they are not simply to be stuck in 'bad jobs' with poor prospects for progression. It is therefore vital that, within organisations, the preconditions for women to progress in the labour market are created, through good work design, through training, through skill enhancement, through employee development strategies, and through woman-friendly working time arrangements. Thus, the effective prosecution of equal opportunities depends as much upon improving the employment practices of individual organisations in relation to their female staff as it does upon effecting changes in the wider workings of the labour market.
- Successive evaluations of the National Action Plans on employment developed by the EU member states show that much more work needs to be done both to advance the work

³ Webster, J. (2000) 'Today's Second Sex and Tomorrow's First? Women and Work in the European Information Society', in Ducatel, K., Webster, J. and Herrmann, W. (eds) *The Information Society in Europe: work and life in an age of globalization*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield.

modernisation project (outlined in Pillar III of the European Commission's Employment Guidelines to the member states), and to promote and mainstream equal opportunities (outlined in Pillar IV of the Guidelines). This presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Since the member states need to augment their activities, they are provided with the ideal opportunity to synthesise the two areas of work by incorporating equality activities within their modernisation efforts in a thoroughgoing and programmatic fashion. The next section of this report considers how gender equality issues intersect with the modernisation of work and how equality strategies might be pursued through new forms of work organisation.

3. WHAT ARE THE GENDER ISSUES IN THE MODERNISATION OF WORK AND THE REORGANISATION OF WORKING TIME?

Before examining the equality dimensions of work modernisation and work reorganisation, it is worth briefly clarifying our approach to these concepts. The OECD understands the reorganisation of work as encompassing "the implementation of new work practices such as team-work, flatter management structures and job rotation", but stresses that the economic growth potential of work reorganisation will only be realised through an adequate supply of skills and competencies, and through improved employability of labour.⁴ Innovations in process organisation of within firms therefore form one element of work modernisation, and this necessarily includes the design of work and the formation of skills. It has been argued, however, that effective work modernisation projects often also entail innovations in working time, since flexible work systems cannot be effectively implemented when rigidities in working time remain.⁵ In addition, it is worth noting that an important element in contemporary work reorganisation projects is the relocation of work activities outside of the traditional workplace, for example, through various forms of teleworking and distance working. This report therefore focuses on the following aspects of work reorganisation:

⁴ OECD (2001) *Knowledge, Work Organisation and Economic Growth*, Paris, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

⁵ Bosch, G., Webster, J., and Weissbach, H. (2000) 'New Organizational Forms in the Information Society', in Ducatel, K., Webster, J. and Herrmann, W. (eds) (2000) *The Information Society in Europe: work and life in an age of globalization*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield.

- Organisational innovations within workplaces, such as teamworking, or multi-skilling.
- Working time innovations such as the introduction of flexitime, job sharing, and career breaks.
- Changes in the location of work, through, for example, teleworking or call centre working.

It is, however, important to remind ourselves that these elements of work reorganisation have much broader social policy implications than just those directly connected with the behaviour of enterprises or with the implementation of equal opportunities. Women may now have increased their labour market participation, but they still work within systems of tax and welfare which accord them social citizenship only through the family and dependent on men.⁶ Changes in working time also impact upon systems of social protection, particularly pensions arrangements and provision, and upon the provision of career break training and learning by member states. Changes in skills requirements obviously affect the provision of education and training by member states. The inter-relationships between these different policy domains are worth bearing in mind, for they will ultimately affect the feasibility of different adaptability and equality strategies themselves.

This report, however, is concerned with the more specific relationship between the modernisation of work and the achievement of equal opportunities in European workplaces. Has increased flexibility given women new opportunities and more choice of employment arrangements, or has it led to a deterioration in their terms and conditions of employment? Have innovations in work organisation led to improved prospects for women to gain and skills and have those skills recognised? Have training and progression opportunities been democratised? And how, if at all, have changes in the gender relations of employment contributed to the improved performance of Europe's organisations? How have they enabled them to address the current skills shortages which face them, or to operate more effectively in a 'knowledge society'? How, in other words, do the twin processes of work modernisation and equal opportunities potentially benefit one another? In this section of the

⁶ Duncan, S. (1996) 'Obstacles to a Successful Equal Opportunities Policy in the EU', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 3, 4: 399-422.

report, I examine the gender dimensions of some key innovations in work organisation, and assess their potential for improving gender equality in Europe's workplaces.

3.1. Teamworking, groupworking and delayering

Teamworking and groupworking are innovations which devolve both the conception and execution of tasks to local work units, and abolish hierarchical and centralised forms of work design, task allocation and detailed work supervision. The purpose of teamworking is to allow enterprises to respond rapidly and flexibly to alterations in market demand for their products or services. Such innovations also carry the potential for disturbing established gender relations in workplaces.⁷ Because teams are generally implemented within flattened organisations, teamworking can allow women to move more easily into junior managerial roles, like the role of group speaker or team leader. Because organisational layers are removed, they can also move more easily and rapidly into more senior positions.⁸ Teamworking also facilitates employees' access to advanced training programmes in order to develop both technical skills and social competencies for autonomous working; this is often particularly important for women who do not conventionally enjoy the same access to training as their male counterparts. Groupwork has been similarly found to reduce gender hierarchies in organisations and to allow relative improvements in the position, earnings and job satisfaction of women, both in manufacturing and in services. This is particularly the case where men undertake tasks previously carried out only by women, while women take on 'men's work', so that the gender system of activities is partly reshaped. There are competitive as well as equalities advantages to these arrangements. When women's skills, expertise and opportunities improve and professional perspectives develop, women become much more active participants in innovation processes, and contribute much more added value to the work of enterprises. Tapping the expertise potential of female employees is what now underlines forward-thinking human resource management approaches in many European enterprises.⁹ This approach is exemplified by initiatives such as the European

⁷ Goldmann, M. (1995) 'Industrial Rationalization as Gender Politics', *International Journal of Political Economy* 25, 4, 65-90.

⁸ Gunnarsson, E. (1994) 'Women and men - Different rationalities?' in Gunnarsson, E., and Trojer, L. (eds) *Feminist Voices on Gender, Technology and Ethics*, Luleå, University of Technology Centre for Women's Studies.

electricity supply industry's network on equal opportunities, the UNIPEDE EURELECTRIC network on equal opportunities. This is a managerial initiative to improve gender equality in the industry in order to make the most of the abilities of its female employees.¹⁰

The form and context of teamworking is very important to both its competitiveness and its equality outcomes, which are by no means assured. In some working environments, it is principally used as a motivational term intended to convey an *impression* of greater employee participation and democratisation. In call centres (forms of work organisation which are at the very centre of the 'new economy'), for example, the term 'teamworking' is very widely used to denote the groupings of employees around specialised tasks. However, there is often no localised autonomy of working practices, and many call centres have very rigid, centralised systems of work design. In this context, the employee has no discretion or decision-making opportunities over the work process, and indeed call centre working is the antithesis of collective working as the very nature of the work atomises and segregates employees from one another.¹¹ The career prospects in call centres are also limited: agents can not generally aspire to a higher position than a 'team leader' role (which is comparable to the typing pool supervisor of 20 or more years ago). In manufacturing, teamworking can be more beneficial to men working in capital-intensive, skill-intensive areas, than to women working in labour-intensive, unskilled areas.¹² As in many call centres, the collective nature of some production lines defines them as teams, even without the implementation of innovations in work organisation. But here the work is highly repetitive and specialised, as it is for many women working in semi-skilled manufacturing jobs, and the task rotation that is practised simply moves female employees between very repetitive activities.

⁹ Olgati, E., and Shapiro, G. (2001) *Promoting Gender Equality at the Workplace*, Report for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin.

¹⁰ European Commission (2000b) *Gender equality in the European Union: Examples of good practices (1996-2000)*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, p.34.

¹¹ Belt, V., Richardson, R. and Webster, J. (1999) *Work Opportunities for Women in the Information Society*, unpublished Final Report to the European Commission, CURDS, University of Newcastle.

¹² Pollert, A. (1996) 'Team Work' on the Assembly Line: contradiction and the dynamics of union resilience', in Ackers, P., Smith, C., and Smith, P. (eds) *The New Workplace and Trade Unionism: Critical Perspectives on Work and Organization*, London, Routledge.

Teamworking may also reduce working time flexibility in ways which are likely to be problematic for women. Where full responsibility for work processes is delegated to a team, team members often have to be present in the workplace to see this responsibility through. This may reduce the opportunities for flexibility of working time. Indeed, it poses similar problems for women that managerial work often does: namely, they find it harder to organise their working hours in line with the demands of their domestic responsibilities, because they are required to be in the workplace for set, and often long, working hours. Overall, this mixture of positive and negative implications of teamworking shows that the impact of teamworking on gender equality is strongly related to the organisational context in which it is implemented, and to the strategic objectives of management.

Policy Message

The impact of teamworking and groupworking on gender equality in the workplace over the longer-term is still unclear, but systematic assessment of its impact on the skills and prospects of women in different settings would be extremely helpful.

The flattening of organisational hierarchies has complex implications for gender equality. On the one hand, it has removed the obstacles to promotion for women in manual and clerical jobs, where in hierarchical organisations few promotion opportunities existed. This is particularly apparent in call centre environments which are very flat organisations; as we have seen, it is now much easier for women to progress into supervisory and managerial roles than in the past.¹³ On the other hand, it has led to the truncation of career structures, including the career structures of many traditionally female professions, most notably in nursing and other health care professions.¹⁴

Good Practice: the case of the Regional Government of Emilia-Romana

The Regional Government of Emilia-Romana has initiated a project to modernise its working methods along woman-friendly lines. The impetus was to improve efficiency and the quality of working life for the large numbers of women employed in administrative positions, and the government has chosen to tackle these two issues in an integrated fashion, and in partnership with unions. This has involved an examination of the formal work structures and practices of the organisation, and of the informal processes at work, including the informal promotion systems. "Improvement Groups" of employees, effectively teams, have been established to review work tasks, responsibilities and performance. The hierarchy has now been simplified to create a flatter, more 'feminine' structure, and work responsibilities are shared between employees. The culture of the organisation is also gradually being reshaped to promote a stronger culture of learning, training and process improvement.

¹³ Belt, V., Richardson, R. and Webster, J. (2000) 'Women's Work in the Information Economy: the case of telephone call centres', *Information, Communication and Society*, 3, 3: 366-385; Webster, J. (2000) *Thematic Report on Financial Services*, Project SERVEMPLOI: Innovations in Information Society Sectors – Implications for Women's Work, Expertise and Opportunities in European Workplaces', Dublin, Trinity College, available on www.tcd.ie/erc/servemploi/

¹⁴ Coyle, A. (1995) *Women and Organisational Change*, EOC Research Discussion Series No. 14, Manchester, Equal Opportunities Commission.

3.2. Skills, training and intelligent working

Women and men do not have equal access to skilled work, to skilled status or the pay and prospects that go with such work. There is a double gender disadvantage in operation here, and it signals a wastage of the abilities of nearly half the European workforce. Not only are women occupationally segregated - as Table 1 shows - often in unskilled jobs, so that their potential for skill use is curtailed, but they are often excluded from skilled status even where their jobs do demand the use of competencies.¹⁵

**Table 1: Women's occupational segregation in the EU-
The occupational groups employing the largest proportions of women**

Secretaries & keyboard clerks
 Librarians
 Health technicians
 Client information clerks
 Domestic & waitresses
 Shop saleswomen
 Textile & garment workers

Source: Adapted from European Commission (2001) *Bridging the Gender Gap: Reducing segregation in the Labour Market*, A joint working document of the European Commission and the Member States, Brussels, European Commission.

The first part of the double problem results in women being excluded from skilled jobs and from the training which might help them to access these jobs. There are many reasons for this state of affairs, ranging from discrimination in education and training systems, to workplace practices. It is in part due to many employers' belief that women are not worth skilling, because they are unlikely to remain in the workplace. 'The expectation that women

¹⁵ Cockburn, C. (1987) *Two-Track Training: Sex Inequalities and the Youth Training Scheme*, London, Macmillan; Rees, T. (1998) *Mainstreaming Equality in the European Union: Education, Training and Labour Market Policies*, London, Routledge.

will depart from the labour force (especially the full-time labour force) on childbirth is likely to limit their acquisition of human capital ... even before maternity.¹⁶

So, increases in women's participation in the labour market have been accompanied by a "polarisation of qualifications", in which large numbers of women are trapped in jobs requiring little in the way of qualifications and offering few career prospects.¹⁷ The second part of it means that they do not receive the recognition or rewards which would attach to their skilled work if they were male.

One particular area of skill to which women routinely find it difficult to gain access is the area of IT-related skills. IT skills are particularly essential for work in the digital economy, and are now in strong demand.¹⁸ However, women encounter barriers in gaining such skills before they even enter the labour market. Therefore any attempt to improve to overcome the 'skills disparity' in order to make the best use of the full abilities of all members of the workforce, has to operate both inside the labour market and outside it - within organisations and in the education system. Barriers to women's skill acquisition exist in the education system and the numbers of women entering Information Technology training in higher education is declining throughout Europe. Women are then discouraged from taking up IT-based employment because of the working conditions, long working hours and masculine culture of this type of work.¹⁹ Improving women's access to IT skills and work – on terms which are not inimical to their daily and domestic lives - is therefore a particularly pressing challenge. One way of promoting women's access to IT skills is through lifelong learning and e-learning schemes, in which learning opportunities are available to fit in around the constraints of their paid and unpaid working lives.

¹⁶ Joshi, H., and Davies, H. (n.d.) *Mothers in Employment*, UK Employment Committee, Volume 3, Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence.

¹⁷ French Presidency of the EU (2000) *Follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action on the relationship between family life and working life*, Brussels, European Council.

¹⁸ This has been recognised as a pressing issue in the Commission's Communication, *e-Learning – Designing Tomorrow's Education*, Brussels, European Commission, COM (2000) 318 Final.

¹⁹ Miller, J.E and Jagger, N. (2001) *Women in ITEC Courses and Careers*, Brighton, Science Policy Research Unit/Institute for Employment Studies.

Policy Message

It is important that the social partners ensure that, in facilitating lifelong learning for IT skill development in their enterprises, they take into account the particular needs and requirements of both sexes.

The availability of training courses to improve women's IT skills and employability is now growing as member states recognise the problem and make support available for women. But more than IT skills are necessary for European enterprises to take the 'high road' to innovation, and for their women employees to be able to work intelligently (in the widest possible sense of the word). A range of skills is increasingly important for contemporary working life, some of which are likely to be technical, others organisational and interpersonal. Providing for this requirement for a range of skills involves recognising that many women are trapped in low-skill ghettos which do not offer the chance for varied skill acquisition, and adjusting access to training and skill formation accordingly.

Good practice: getting women out of low-skilled ghettos in a Greek garment manufacturer

FANCO is a Greek Sportswear Manufacturer which has introduced a new strategy titled Safeguarding Employment. This strategy has emerged out of special efforts undertaken to balance employment between capital intensive departments and work intensive departments. Low-skilled female personnel from work intensive areas of the production process are offered special training and assessment programmes which help to improve their own internal promotion prospects into capital intensive areas of the factory, as well as improving their general employability.

Once training is accomplished, it is critical that the design of work supports this by allowing people to draw upon and exploit the skills they have acquired. How can work be reorganised to maximise its overall skill and expertise content? What would this mean for the development of women's skills? Can innovations in work design like multi-skilling help to develop women's skills in previously unskilled work?

Through systematic training programmes and multi-skilling, women may develop skills they were never previously able to do, and more importantly, to develop a panoramic view of the

work they do in the context they do it in. This has been achieved in a small number of manufacturing and retailing companies which have been concerned to make best use of the female resources at their disposal.

Good practice: training for women in a large supermarket chain in the UK

UK Supermarket recognises that 80% of its female staff are trapped in the lowest grades of the organisation, and regards this as a wastage of potential ability. To overcome this problem, it has embarked on a number of equality-conscious innovations. With regard to training, it operates a suite of highly-formalised personal development schemes for staff at different levels of the company, so that training and progression routes are clear and are obviously linked to one another. At store level, there is a 'Framework' training programme for all staff. This involves an initial induction package, followed by a modular competency system covering the core skills required for different areas of shop work. Trainees in each area can progress through three levels of competency, from Bronze to Silver to Gold. At each level, staff are multi-skilled and can perform a variety of shop-based tasks. This means that they can work intelligently and flexibly where and when they are needed, and so provide a very effective customer service, and it also makes their work more interesting to do.

Training requirements of staff are established through regular staff appraisals, in which individual staff and their line managers agree on appropriate training options and a personal development plan, which is then driven by the individual employee. For employees who wish to progress to management positions, there is an 'Options' personal development programme which is an individually-tailored and experience-based scheme. All training is handled in-house and is job-based rather than person-based, so all retail staff go through the Framework programme.

The general importance of knowledgeable and intelligent working for the competitiveness of the economies of Europe is widely acknowledged. It is clear that in human resource terms, companies are looking for highly skilled staff with strong social-relational abilities, who can constantly adjust their existing skills to new working situations. Indeed, it has been found that employees' ability to fine-tune their skills is becoming more sought after than certifiable and transferable skills.²⁰ Yet despite their often excellent abilities in this respect, women are under-valued and under-exploited in organisations where such skills are at a premium. They are under-represented in skilled job grades and in workplace-based training, their actual

²⁰ Regini, M. (1997) 'Different Responses to Common Demands: Firms, Institutions and Training in Europe', *European Sociological Review*, 13, 3: 267-282.

abilities are often under-valued and under-recognised²¹, and their potential skills are therefore under-exploited. What action, if any, is necessary to ensure equality of access to knowledgeable work and its attendant benefits, to reduce wastage of ability and improve employability in the labour force, and thus to enhance the prospects for European competitiveness?

There is also a case for re-evaluating women's existing skills. In UK public authorities, moves are now being made to re-grade women's manual jobs (such as home helps and school cooks) on par with men's to achieve pay and status parity, and this means recognising the supervisory and administrative skills, as well as the knowledge content, which characterises these jobs. Throughout Europe, customer-facing service organisations such as retailers, banks, insurance companies, and utility companies now place increasing importance on social skills, interpersonal skills, and communications skills, and incorporate these skills in their training, employee development and remuneration packages.²² As organisations become more oriented towards the effective delivery of customer service, the skills necessary to do so will become more central to their activities. This is potentially promising for equality of status between men and women, and for women's development in organisations. This equality potential will only be realised if these skills are not taken-for-granted because they are "women's skills", as has happened in the past.²³ They need to be clearly recognised, accredited and rewarded if adaptability is to be associated with equality.

²¹ Not least through the mostly widely-used job evaluation schemes, such as the Hay system, which systematically under-value the components of women's jobs and over-value those of men's jobs.

²² However, there is a tendency for some organisations to make essentialist assumptions that social and interpersonal skills are the 'natural' province of women. This can be negative for equal opportunities when this is then used as a reason to ghettoise women in low status work. In the past, similar assumptions were made about women's natural propensity for manual dexterity and 'nimble-fingered' work, or for work requiring 'patience'. These associations were used to justify the employment of women in repetitive, sweated labour, for example, in textiles and in unskilled assembly work. The transition to the 'knowledge society' has done little to change this state of affairs. In many European inner cities, the garment industry still relies on low wage, low-skill female labour; higher up the scale of knowledge-based activity, the IT industry still employs young, low paid SE Asian women for eyesight-destroying assembly work on semi-conductors.

²³ Phillips, A. and Taylor, B. (1980) 'Sex and Skill: A note towards feminist economics', *Feminist Review*, No 6, 79-88; Poynton, C. (1993) 'Naming women's workplace skills: Linguistics and power', in Probert, B.

Policy Message

If knowledgeable work is to be open to both sexes on an equal basis so that they can both equally contribute to innovation and economic performance in Europe's organisations, company training and human resource development policies need to be designed with this explicit objective.

Several issues are important here. First, all jobs should be designed so that the mixture of tasks and skills is genuinely varied in nature and level. Second, this implies that employees should have access to jobs which give them a full view of their work in the context of the organisation as a whole, and ideally, a clear career path through it. Third, it also implies that their abilities and competencies are properly recognised and rewarded. Fourth, organisations will need to find ways of encouraging and rewarding self-learning in the context of this type of job and skill design. It is not yet clear whether many organisational change programmes have been designed to incorporate these criteria, and therefore whether they make a significant contribution to gender equality.

Investigating the Opportunities for Moving Women into 'Good Jobs' - Project SERVEMPLOI

This project brings together companies, unions, female employees and researchers, to assess women's work and opportunities in information-intensive service sectors across the European Union. Two sectors form the focus of the project: retailing and retail financial services. Both sectors have very substantial proportions of female employees, particularly clustered in junior positions – as clerks, checkout operators, customer assistants and call centre agents. Both are customer-facing and increasingly rely on their female staff for the quality of the service they provide to their customers. Both are highly competitive sectors.

The project examines the work design, training and employee progression opportunities offered by companies in these sectors, and it investigates the resulting 'employability' of female staff. It identifies a series of inter-related innovations in work organisation, working time, and employee development which the social partners can use to help women move

into 'good jobs', and it simultaneously identifies the likely performance benefits for the companies concerned.²⁴

3.3. Total Quality Management and Innovation

The competitive advantage of Europe's enterprises will increasingly depend upon the quality of goods and services which they can produce, and in order to maximise this quality, organisations will need to develop their own internal creativity and learning. Employees will be resources at the centre of organisational innovation strategies, and the competitive edge of a firm will increasingly depend on its ability to utilise and develop its human resources of both sexes. Total quality management has already been widely implemented as a means of achieving improved organisational performance.

In theory, total quality management (TQM) allows the full involvement of all employees and the full use of their skills and abilities in the project of enhancing organisational performance for competitive advantage. This implies that women's and men's skills are equally utilised, and that they are equally drawn into organisational projects for quality improvement. In practice, however, total quality management is rarely implemented in an equality-conscious way and women tend to remain marginal to most total quality management initiatives. This, then, is another way in which the potential of a significant and growing proportion of the European workforce is not fully utilised.

Unfortunately, despite the obvious potential benefits of drawing women employees into TQM initiatives in enterprises, they remain largely excluded from consultation and involvement in organisational learning programmes.²⁵ Because of the positions they occupy, they tend to be regarded as peripheral to innovation processes, the recipients rather than the shapers of

²⁴ This is a project supported by the European Commission under its TSER programme. For further information, see www.tcd.ie/erc/servemploi.

²⁵ Schnabel, A, and Webster, J. (1999) *Participating on Equal Terms? The Gender Dimensions of Direct Participation in Organisational Change*, Report for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

innovations.²⁶ Nor, as we have already seen, are they equitably represented in training and skill development initiatives.

The contradiction between the need for organisational learning in enterprises and the exclusion from this process of a large proportion of their employees raises the question of how, if at all, TQM initiatives can be designed with equality as well as competitiveness objectives. In organisational learning programmes, where does learning actually take place, and how can women participate in and benefit, as individual employees, from this process? How does Total Quality Management relate to some of the more routine areas of work in which many women are still to be found working, such as supermarket checkout work, telephone marketing work, and routine back office work? Can women in these jobs contribute to organisational innovations and the day-to-day improvement of processes, if they are not party to consultation, shared information, skilled work, training, and rewards? Can they be empowered if the very basis for their work is the reverse of total quality - work fragmentation and the reduction of employee discretion? Clearly, the two types of work design are antithetical to one another, and the use of routine workers seriously undermines the ability of an organisation to develop its own internal learning through the knowledge and expertise of its employees.

²⁶ Game, A. and Pringle, R. (1984) *Gender at Work*, London, Pluto Press; Webster, J. (1996) *Shaping Women's Work: Gender, Employment and Information Technology*, London, Longman.

Good Practice – Equality Driven Total Quality

There is a total quality methodology through which gender equity can be achieved in organisations which are simultaneously pursuing strategic organisational improvements.²⁷ This is called 'Equality Driven Total Quality'. Like conventional TQM, it rests on four essential organisational pillars: information sharing and communication, knowledge and skills development through training, rewards for employees, and empowerment of employees through the diffusion of decision-taking authority downwards through organisations, but is explicitly directed towards equal opportunities objectives as well.

Policy Message

Here it would seem that the role of the social partners in designing 'Equality Driven Total Quality' and in ensuring the participation of female employees in TQM is central to its effectiveness in utilising the full range of organisational resources and talents.

3.4. Woman-friendly working time arrangements

What are the equality dimensions of new working time arrangements? 'Flexible' working time arrangements, as they are sometimes known – part-time working, temporary working, shiftworking and other forms of non full-time, non lifetime employment – have a very clear gender dimension and can be actively used to implement equality objectives.

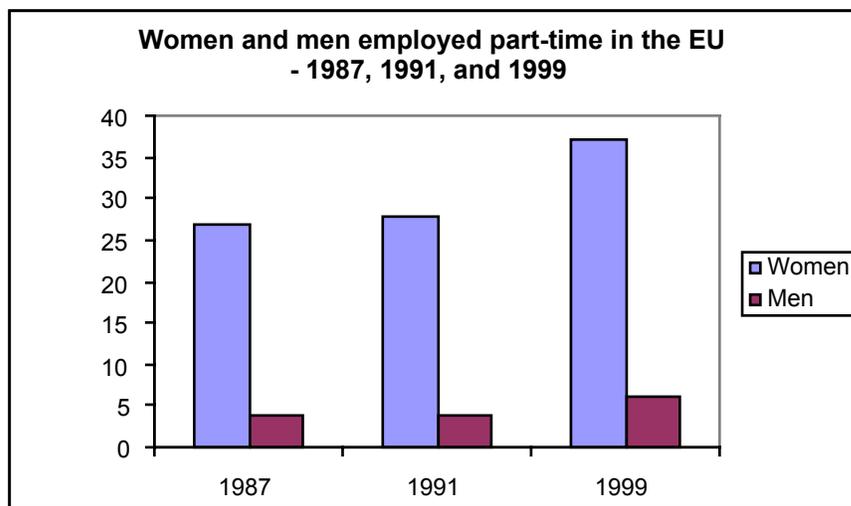
Women in many countries have participated in the labour market by working flexibly, particularly in countries where a gender culture of married women with children working primarily as housewives predominates (as in Germany and the Netherlands), or where childcare is not widely available or affordable (as in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and the UK). Across the EU, therefore, women today account for 80% of part-time workers, and 13% of women are employed on short-term contracts.²⁸

²⁷Shapiro, G., and Austin, S. (1996) *Equality Driven Total Quality*, University of Brighton Business School Occasional Paper Series No 3.

²⁸ European Commission (1999) *Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union 1998*, Brussels, European Commission, COM (1999) 106 Final.

It has been suggested that modernised forms of work organisation, such as teamworking, must be closely linked to innovations in working hours if they are to operate effectively.²⁹ But what are the implications of flexible working time arrangements for equal opportunities? What has been the experience of flexible working? And in what circumstances could flexibility and equal opportunities serve each other?

First, it is often supposed that flexible working time arrangements have enabled women to enter the labour market, for it is they who appear to have benefited from the growth in part-time, and to a lesser extent, temporary working.



Source: Adapted from *Employment in Europe 2000*.

Indeed, the European Commission's Employment Guidelines emphasize the importance of improving women's labour participation across the EU, and one of the outcomes of the Lisbon Summit was a target of getting 60% of women employed by 2010. However, Hakim shows in relation to the UK that the increase in women's labour market participation has not been as dramatic as it would seem. In terms of hours worked, there was no increase in women's employment in Britain from 1851 up to 1988. All that happened was that part-time

²⁹ Bosch, G., Webster, J., and Weissbach, H. (2000) 'New Organizational Forms in the Information Society', in Ducatel, K., Webster, J. and Herrmann, W. (eds) (2000) *The Information Society in Europe: work and life in an age of globalization*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield.

work simply replaced full-time work.³⁰ Her conclusions are partially supported by the most recent *Employment in Europe* report for 2000, which shows that between 1994 and 1999, the majority of new jobs created were part-time jobs.³¹

Nevertheless, part-time working has a number of advantages for women entering the labour market. In particular, it allows them to balance their paid work with their domestic unpaid work, especially in countries where there is little by way of state support for childcare or care for the elderly. In the right circumstances, it also allows them to balance their working lives and their private lives, regardless of whether they have family responsibilities. In fact, this is a positive state of affairs for all employees – male and female - in an economy, large parts of which increasingly operate on a 24 hour, 7 day basis. For family and domestic labour is not only an issue for women. Working time flexibility is an issue of growing concern to all members of the labour market.³²

However, part-time working has some widely-acknowledged shortcomings, and as such it exacts a high price from the women who perform it.³³ Part-time women are caught in the trap of occupational segregation, for part-time work is more likely to be a feature of unskilled sales and service occupations and is rare in skilled professional and managerial jobs. Part-time work is thus work that is usually low-grade, low-paid, and without substantial career prospects. Indeed, it is often argued that senior and particularly management positions cannot be held on a part-time basis, because the requirements of such work demand that the job-holder is present full-time in the workplace. Part-time workers also find it hard to get access to on-the-job training when their employers organise training only for full-timers, organise it around full-time hours, or assume that part-timers do not have training or learning

³⁰ Hakim, C. (1993) 'The Myth of Rising Female Employment', *Work, Employment and Society*, 7, 1: 97-120.

³¹ European Commission (2000a), already cited.

³² Latta, M., and O'Conghaile, W. (1999) *Aspirations, Restrictions and Choices – How Women and Men Combine Life and Work in the EU*, Dublin, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, background document to the speech in the Ministerial Conference on Equality for Women and Men in Employment Policies, September.

³³ O'Reilly, J. and Fagan, C. (1998) *Part-time Prospects: An International Comparison of part-time work in Europe, North America and the Pacific Rim*, London, Routledge.

requirements. Employee development prospects for part-timers are usually inferior to those offered to full-timers, as it is often assumed that part-timers do not have career aspirations. Because they are often out of the mainstream of organisations and invisible to their colleagues and managers, part-time workers miss out on a wide range of skill enhancing organisational measures which might well assist their progression into more knowledge-based areas of work. Thus, there is often a cycle of disadvantage in which part-timers become trapped, which simultaneously wastes their potential contribution to organisational effectiveness.

What are woman-friendly working time innovations? How can flexibility of working time be organised to ensure that organisations achieve the responsiveness to customer markets which they seek through flexible working time, without doing so at the expense of the skills, training and progression prospects which go to create a rich quality of working life for their female employees? A number of surveys of the working time preferences of employees indicate that, for women, the paramount preference is not so much for particular working arrangements, but for *control* over their working hours.³⁴ They prefer to be able to choose from a 'menu' of working hours according to the demands of their domestic lives. The possibilities are varied, depending on the type of organisation and the type of work they do, and depending also on the working patterns of their partners. Whereas employers are likely to favour annualised hours arrangements which allow them to increase their operating hours and decouple these from individual working time arrangements of employees, women employees favour flexitime, career breaks, job sharing and part-time working arrangements. Flexitime systems enable women to manage their work around school hours, as do long part-time hours. Career breaks and leave arrangements allow women to temporarily reduce their working time, particularly to care for pre-school age children or for sick relatives. Job sharing and part-time working allow women to continue working without withdrawing from the labour market. One of the most important messages to emerge from surveys into working time preferences is that women who are mothers want to be able to decide changes

³⁴ TUC (1998) *The time of our lives: a TUC report on working hours and flexibility*, London, Trades Union Congress; Sjørup, K. (1997) *Employment and Working time policies: A Gender perspective*, European Commission Network of Experts "Gender and Employment", Brussels, DG-V Equal Opportunities Unit; European Foundation Employment Options of the Future Survey.

in their working hours for themselves, and they want to be given the possibility to return to full-time work once demanding family commitments are over.³⁵

Despite this clear message, working-time patterns are still predominantly being decided and implemented at company level, with little opportunity for employee control. Women are therefore still usually employed in working time arrangements into which they have involuntarily been drawn, in order to meet the needs of their organisations. It is still unusual for negotiations to be made between the needs of the organisation needs and the needs of the woman employee. It is also unusual for woman-friendly arrangements to be available to women working in senior and managerial positions in organisations. The availability of part-time working and job sharing diminishes substantially the higher up an organisation the employee is found, and women managers in particular have severe difficulties in getting their organisations to organise working time in ways which allow them to meet the demands of their family lives. There is a “long hours culture” which operates at the top of most European organisations, predicated on the assumption that management staff have to work long full-time hours to be effective in doing their jobs, and this culture is hostile to family and indeed to private life in general.

Although women do reach managerial positions while working flexibly - part-time, for example - experience often shows that unless the nature and organisation of managerial work is modified to take account of flexible working time, then it becomes impossible for such women to sustain their jobs on this basis. When this dilemma becomes apparent, part-time women managers sometimes choose to leave their jobs altogether, preferring this option to ‘failure’ which they take to be their personal inability to meet the expectations and workloads they face. This is damaging not only for these women but also for the organisations for which they work.

There is also growing evidence to show that women are choosing not to enter managerial work, precisely because they are aware of the long hours which they are likely to be required

³⁵ Bettio, F., Del Bono, E., and Smith, M. (1998) *Working Time Patterns in the European Union: Policies and Innovations from a Gender Perspective*, Report of the European Commission’s Group of Experts on “Gender and Employment”, European Commission, Brussels.

to work, which they know they cannot do. The quotation below comes from a woman in junior management in a leading UK retailer, faced with the prospect of promotion to middle management.

The Problems Women Encounter in Working Flexibly in Senior Jobs

“I could do such a good job being in Senior Team, I have got so much to give. I have been here 16 years. But it is just that something is holding me back. The Regional Director has asked me to go to a new store ... and open their Stock Control team, because they want the best people around to go and open the store. I can’t do it, because I will be working the same hours as when I opened here. I didn’t have my son when I opened here. I have got my son now.

...I don’t want to go through all that stress and pressure of knowing that the manager doesn’t like me leaving at a certain time. I have seen it happen to too many people. It is the commitment. They think you just haven’t got the commitment if you need to go home at a certain time. You don’t care. But I care more than anybody in this store.”³⁶

Policy Message

A simple way in which organisations could begin to develop woman-friendly working time patterns would be to design jobs so that long hours of work are not necessary in order to do them effectively. This might be done through workload reductions, through changes of priority, or through culture change.

Good practice: the case of French local government

‘As the largest employer of women in the city, the municipality of Rennes in France has been implementing an ambitious equal opportunities plan since 1991. One of the themes is the rescheduling of working time for women managers, many of whom hesitate to choose the standard part-time option for fear of negative repercussions on their careers, alternative proposals are being examined, ranging from time-banking, to a shorter week (four and a half days) to innovative forms of part-time work. Parallel efforts are being made to challenge consolidated practices that disadvantage women, such as the scheduling of meetings in the late afternoon or the evening.’³⁷

³⁶ From an interview with a female junior manager in a large UK retailer, conducted for TSER project ‘SERVEMPLOI’. (For further information, see www.tcd.ie/erc/servemploi).

³⁷ Silvera, R. and Eydoux, A. (1997) *Employment and Working Time policies. A gender perspective: France*, Brussels, European Commission Network of Experts on “Gender and Employment”.

Policy Message

At a policy level, agreements between social partners in the development and implementation of working time innovations are to be encouraged, particularly where they allow individual women control over their working arrangements at all levels of companies, including senior and managerial levels.

“The Time of Our Lives” project is an experiment in the development of positive flexibility in local government organisations in Italy, the Netherlands and the UK. The idea is to allow staff to work at times that better met their preferred balance between paid work and the rest of their lives, while also providing effective services at better times and in better places from the point of view of users.³⁸ Surveys and focus groups have shown that there is a demand for change from both women and men, and a variety of ‘flexible’ working time arrangements, including self-managing rosters and staggered leave years, have been considered. There is also a demand from management, in order that service delivery can be organised in ways which are more responsive to needs of users.

However, the development of new forms of working time is not only relevant to women with children, but also to those with other caring responsibilities such as for elderly relatives. Indeed, it goes beyond this to affect *all* employees – male and female - who want to manage their lives differently. But it is also worth pointing out that working time flexibility is unlikely to be positive for women if it simply serves to reinforce and increase their burden of unpaid labour. Ideally, new working time arrangements need to be accompanied by wider social policy changes which support women and men in re-drawing the gender contract for their roles in the domestic sphere.

Good Practice in Italian city services

Modena was the first Italian city to develop new practices on working time and working hours and to develop a network of services from kindergartens to the care of elderly people within this structure. The female Mayor was central to developing the project.

³⁸ TUC (1999) *The Time of Our Lives in Bristol: developing positive flexibility for employees and services*, London, Trades Union Congress.

The Modena experiment aimed to change the opening hours of the city's shops, businesses and services to better meet citizens' needs. Working hours were reorganised, co-ordinated by the local authorities, and a mobility pact for an integrated transport strategy was signed by state bodies and the trade unions. Trade union involvement in the project was positive and led to strategies for greater flexibility and mobility of workers. The restructuring of services towards more team work and proper rewards in management led to greater efficiency and more responsive services. Employees providing a better quality of service received recognition for it, through bonuses, training and feeling valued. The value and quality of public services was improved.

3.5. The relocation of work - teleworking

Teleworking is an important way in which organisations can increase flexibility of the location of their activities, and it is also often promoted as offering women the opportunity to combine childcare with paid work. Teleworking refers to many different phenomena, but five different categories of teleworking have been identified: i) work based partly in an office and partly at home, ii) work carried out in the home for a single employer, iii) freelance telework – work carried out in the home for several employers, iv) mobile telework done from different sites using portable equipment, and v) work done in a relocated back office at a distance from the employer's premises.³⁹

There still seems to be more rhetoric than reality attached to teleworking, for its take-up in the EU has been much less significant than was hoped for by former Commissioner Bangemann in his report on the European Information Society.⁴⁰ However, if teleworking holds considerable and obvious advantages for computing and telecommunications corporations, it seems to be less clearly advantageous for women employed in teleworking jobs. In the first place, teleworking is particularly prevalent in sectors which are information-intensive - in media, telecommunications, computing, financial services, printing and publishing, marketing and sales, consultancy and business services, and government. The bulk of teleworkers are therefore involved in the handling of information: consultants, management specialists, computer professionals, media professionals, clerical workers and data processing workers. Because of the patterns of occupational segregation which we

³⁹ Gillespie, A, Richardson, R., and Cornford, J. (1999) *Review of Telework in Britain: Implications for Public Policy*, Report prepared for the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies.

⁴⁰ Bangemann Group (1994) *Europe and the Global Information Society: Recommendations to the European Council*, Brussels, European Commission.

have identified above, many female teleworkers are employed to perform very routine information handling tasks: data entry, computer programming, call centre sales and service work, typesetting, statistical analysis, book-keeping and secretarial work.

Thus, sexual divisions of labour in conventional jobs are often replicated in teleworking jobs. A survey of teleworking by one of the Swedish white-collar unions found the majority of teleworkers there to be professional men, teleworking through their own choice, and in a very strong labour market position. They generally take up teleworking in order to better meet the demands of their jobs.⁴¹ In other surveys, it has been found that women who telework are predominantly in their 30s, performing clerical, data entry or telephone sales and service work, and teleworking in an attempt to manage their childcare and other domestic responsibilities.

The fact that most teleworking women are employed in routine white-collar jobs means that these women invariably do not have access to the kind of training, skills formation and career development opportunities which might improve their employability. Such benefits are not widespread in this kind of work, wherever it is performed. In addition, the very nature of teleworking itself militates against employee development, for employees who are based in the home, or in back offices and call centres, are outside of the mainstream of organisations and may suffer in development terms from lack of visibility to management. There is also the danger that informal employee learning through contact with other employees decreases in teleworking arrangements; the competitiveness of the employing organisation may thus be reduced. Human resources policies have to be very explicitly and consciously geared to the employee development of distance workers, if there are not to be negative consequences arising from their remoteness from the core of the organisation.

There is a further gender dimension to teleworking, which lies in the motivations which female employees have for taking it up. They usually do so because many forms of teleworking, particularly call centre working and home-based teleworking, allow them combine childcare with work where affordable and available childcare is not available.

⁴¹ Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation (TCO) (1987) *At a Suitable Distance - Distance Work, Pro et Contra*, Stockholm, TCO.

Survey after survey reports women as putting childcare as the central motivation for taking up teleworking, whereas it is simply not a motivation for men.⁴² However, home-based teleworking in particular confuses women's domestic labour with their paid labour. It is often promoted by employers because of the possibilities which it offers for women to handle better the double burden of paid work and domestic responsibilities. Yet the double burden is not eliminated. Women continue to carry out the two types of labour every day of their lives, and teleworking appears at first glance to ease this burden. Many women, however, find it very difficult to separate their paid labour from their domestic labour when they telework; they are constantly torn in several directions as they try to juggle the demands of home, children or elderly dependants, and work which do not neatly dovetail with one another. To cope with this double burden, teleworking women work extremely diverse and unpredictable hours, as they seize opportunities when their children are at school or in bed to work without interruptions.

3.6. The importance of integrating HRM within corporate strategy

A key lesson to emerge from experiences in implementing 'high road' strategies for innovation is that, for these to be positive for equal opportunities, human resource management must be central to their conception and execution. This means that human resource management and corporate strategy must be carefully integrated and continually interactive. The aim of many organisational change programmes is, after all, to create what we might call a "workplace culture of value", where employee skills and competencies are central to the performance of the organisation.⁴³ In this project, equal opportunities has to be treated as an issue of strategic importance, rather than being an 'add-on' to other more central organisational concerns.

⁴² Fothergill, A., (1994) 'Telework: Women's Experiences and Utilisation of Information Technology in the Home', in Adam, A., Emms, J., Green, E., and Owen, J. (eds) *Women, Work and Computerization: Breaking Old Boundaries - Building New Forms*, Amsterdam, North-Holland; Phizacklea, A., and Wolkowitz, C., (1995) *Homeworking Women: Gender, Racism and Class at Work*, London, Sage; Gillespie, A. et al (1995), already cited.

⁴³ Garibaldo, F. (1996) 'Work Place Innovations: The making of a human-centred industrial culture', in Gill, K. (ed.) *Human Machine Symbiosis*, London, Springer.

A number of studies of individual enterprises have underlined the strategic importance of making equal opportunities a core goal of effective human resource planning, and of integrating this planning with corporate strategy.⁴⁴ To support this, a recent survey of equality actions in a range of European workplaces shows that the most effective actions are those in which HRM plays a strategic role in the organisation and can thus advocate the pursuit of equality objectives:

Synthesising Equality within Strategic Concerns – the case of a French food preparation and packaging company

*A structural link of the equality plan with the strategic goals of the firm has been also instrumental to the achievement of effective equality outcomes. The equality plan is integrated in a full-fledged strategic action plan that has articulated economic, commercial, human resource, training policies and professional equality. It can be considered that professional equality was integrated in the “mainstream” of the firm’s strategic development.*⁴⁵

The linking of equality to organisational strategy through HRM has significant advantages in attaining and sustaining equality in organisations. By acknowledging the centrality of achieving equality to achieving core strategic goals, it is more likely that equality will be considered by organisations when they are implementing change. In addition, this may provide a stronger motivation for them to continue pursuing equality actions where necessary.

Creating a Workplace Culture of Value – The Case of Happy Computers, London

Happy Computers is an IT training company with a human culture, employing 40 people. It has adopted working time flexibility and a work-life agenda. Staff choose their own job descriptions, and mistakes are seen as a chance to learn from failure. They are encouraged to try out each other’s jobs in order to understand how the whole organisation works, and all are encouraged to join a union. Staff of both sexes work flexible hours,

⁴⁴ See European Commission (2000b) *Gender equality in the European Union: Examples of good practices (1996-2000)*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Coyle, A. (1995) *Women and Organisational Change*, EOC Discussion Series No. 14, Manchester, Equal Opportunities Commission.

⁴⁵ Olgiati, E., and Shapiro, G. (2001) *Promoting Gender Equality at the Workplace*, Report for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin.

including part-time, and term-times. One spends Thursday mornings in his children's school.

Happy Computers' experience is that a modernised workplace boosts profits. Reduced labour turnover and recruitment costs have saved the company £40,000 in the past 12 months. Turnover is up 37%.

4. RECONCILING ADAPTABILITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: A BRIEF POLICY BACKGROUND

Like any other social process, the reorganisation of work is a gendered process, involving and affecting women and men in very specific ways. As the foregoing discussion makes clear, it has both positive and negative implications for gender equality, largely deriving from the context and manner in which change is designed and implemented. Nevertheless, what is also clear is that there are abundant opportunities for advancing gender equality in the context of organisational change programmes which are designed to advance the overall performance of the organisation. How has the integration of organisational change with gender equality strategies been treated in the policy process?

The European Commission's White Paper on *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment*, published in 1993, set in motion the debate on the state of the European economy and its ability to respond to the imperatives of international competitiveness⁴⁶. The White Paper outlined the development of measures necessary to improve the innovative and competitive qualities of Europe's organisations, and identified a series of challenges to European organisations ranging from the development and implementation of new technologies to the adaptation of education and training systems to improved exploitation of environmental resources. The paper also recognised the need for a strengthening of equal opportunities for women and men in employment.

⁴⁶ European Commission (1993) *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment: the challenges and ways forward into the 21st Century*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

The European Commission's subsequent Green Paper, *Partnership for a New Organisation of Work*⁴⁷, considered the dynamics currently underway within European organisations, and argued that these are undergoing a transition from 'Fordist' working arrangements to 'post-Fordist' ones - i.e., a transition from mass production of goods and services for mass markets to flexible production of customised products according to customer requirements. The industrial system of mass production, which had dominated European industry for well over one hundred years, was becoming decreasingly well suited to the circumstances of late twentieth century European economies. Hierarchical organisations, with highly specialised and simplified functions, did not provide enough potential for innovation and creativity in European firms, and new ways of improving productivity and working conditions were sorely needed. This need became more pressing with the increasing importance of knowledge-based work to the competitive advantage of European economies, with the growing sophistication of customer markets, and with an increasingly rapid rate of technological innovation. New forms of work organisation were seen as offering important opportunities for addressing the key challenges facing European employers and employees, and two questions were raised in connection with the equal opportunities dimensions of organisational change. The first question was concerned with what more could be done to ensure a better gender balance through the development of a new organisation of work. The second was concerned with how far women's growing participation in the labour market might be expected to have an impact on work organisation.

Out of these discussions emerged the European Employment Strategy, enshrined in the Amsterdam Treaty. This was operationalised at the Luxembourg Employment Summit in late 1997, where member states adopted a series of guidelines to assist them in developing national action plans (NAPs) for employment. These guidelines included the two pillars with which this report is concerned: a guideline encouraging adaptability of businesses and their employees (pillar III) and a guideline for strengthening equal opportunity policies for women and men (pillar IV). In addition to the specific guideline on equal opportunities, member states are asked to mainstream equal opportunities objectives into all policy and practical measures.

⁴⁷ European Commission (1997) *Partnership for a New Organisation of Work*, Brussels, Commission of the European Communities, COM (97) 128.

It is clearly recognised that one of the challenges of implementing the European Employment Strategy is ‘the need to integrate equal opportunities objectives systematically into labour market policy.’⁴⁸ However, challenges remain in bringing together the two pillars and in developing strategies which address both policy domains. As a result the adaptability potential of Europe’s workplaces may well be under-fulfilled, whilst a raft of opportunities for pursuing equality objectives remain ungrasped.

5. RECONCILING ADAPTABILITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES – WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

5.1. Adaptability is still seen as a gender-neutral issue

Pillar III of the European Employment Strategy - the adaptability pillar – focuses on the practices of enterprises and employees. It is particularly concerned with encouraging the modernisation of work organisation within companies, and with supporting the upgrading of skills to cope with new, flexible working arrangements. As such, this pillar is designed to influence the workplace and collective bargaining practices of employers, employees, and trade unions, and to encourage legislative and regulatory changes at national level.

New forms of work organisation are principally regarded and promoted in terms of their beneficial effects upon economic performance and competitive advantage. Modernising work organisation is generally regarded as a competitiveness issue – one which is concerned with the ability of businesses to reorganise their internal practices to better respond to the competitive imperatives operating in contemporary European and world markets. As such, adaptability is interpreted as an issue operating at the level of the firm, and negotiated and implemented through agreements between the social partners. But this results in the potential equality benefits being overlooked. As we have seen, new forms of work organisation fundamentally involve employees, and are not therefore gender-neutral. Women and men are segregated by sector as well as by occupation, with women clustered

⁴⁸ European Commission (1999) *Implementing the European employment strategy: The challenges of integrating young people into the labour market, long-term unemployment and equal opportunities*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities (p. 140).

in service jobs and men predominating in manufacturing sectors. Different sectors implement new forms of work in different ways.

Within organisations, too, innovations in working arrangements have differential effects. A differentiation between the implementation of organisational change at the firm level and its implications for the two sexes in the workforce is rarely made, and it is often assumed that the implications of modernised work will be uniform across enterprises. But, for example, although the adaptability guidelines emphasise the importance of training and retraining, it is widely acknowledged that this is not equally available to all employees on the same terms, nor are their resulting contributions to organisational competitiveness identical⁴⁹. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge the ways in which women and men are differentially affected by organisational innovations, and also the ways in which they are consequently able to contribute to the process of innovation and improved organisational performance.

The challenge of integrating equal opportunities into labour market policies has therefore yet to be properly met. Equal opportunities objectives remain poorly articulated in member states' strategies for adaptability, and the two sets of policies are barely, if at all, integrated. In fact, this is a stubborn problem which has remained unresolved for the past five or more years, despite continually being highlighted in the European Commission's assessments of member states' employment plans. For example, most of the measures in the member states' 1995 and 1996 multi-annual employment programmes were in general presented as being gender-neutral, and the majority of the programmes did not explicitly state how the member states intended to tackle the promotion of equal opportunities. The European Commission's own analysis of these programmes concluded that

... too little attention is still being given to the integration of equal opportunities policy and, in particular, to women's issues (EC1999: 160).⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Schnabel, A, and Webster, J. (1999) *Participating on Equal Terms? The Gender Dimensions of Direct Participation in Organisational Change*, Report for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

⁵⁰ European Commission (1999), already cited.

Despite this failure to address the equality dimensions of employment strategy, in the National Action Plans (NAPs) for 1999, all member states stated that they planned to apply, or had already applied, a gender mainstreaming approach. In theory, this would mean that equality issues would explicitly inform their strategies for pillar III, as they would inform those of the other pillars in the Employment Guidelines. In the member states' plans, however, the adaptability pillar was still largely being articulated as a gender-neutral issue. Table 2 shows the lack of fit between the two pillars in the NAPs for 1999. The second column of the table summarises the key elements of the adaptability pillar in each member state's NAP, and highlights the *potential* equal opportunities dimensions of the measures. In the third column, these potential equality dimensions are presented in more detail, and in the fourth column, the table shows whether and how these issues were actually mainstreamed into the adaptability measures. Finally, the last column of the table summarises each member state's approach to the pillar on equality and gender mainstreaming, in order to underline the mismatch between approaches to the two pillars. The table shows that most of the NAPs treat adaptability and equal opportunities as entirely separate issues, and do not provide for the specific circumstances and requirements of women employees when developing strategies for organisational change.

Table 2 – The Lack of Fit between Adaptability and Equal Opportunities in the 1999 NAPs

Member State	Focus of Adaptability pillar in the NAPs	Potential Relevance for Equal Opportunities (EO)	Are EO issues clearly mainstreamed into the Adaptability pillar?	Focus of EO pillar in the NAPs
Austria	Efforts to make <i>part-time work</i> more attractive. Encourages in-house <i>training</i> through tax reforms.	Women are the principle holders of part-time jobs, therefore their requirements of part-time work should be paramount in these efforts.	No. The plan could have attended to the issues of pay, training and progression facing women who work part-time. It could also have prioritised training for women.	Gender gap in employment through childcare improvements.
Belgium	<i>Flexible working time organisation: career breaks, part-time, temporary work.</i>	Career breaks & part-time working are particularly useful to women who need to reskill or fulfil outside responsibilities.	No. Flexible working time could be explicitly designed to allow women to reskill or improve their work-life balance.	Gender gap in employment. Mainstreaming.
Denmark	Balance between <i>flexibility & security</i> . <i>Continuous training</i> of adults.	This balance is critical for women, who tend to suffer disproportionately from negative flexibility, especially low pay & insecurity. Women's access to training is lower than men's, so continuous training can promote gender equality.	No. Pay, welfare and tax regimes could be explicitly designed so that lack of full-time or continuous employment does not impoverish women. Continuous training needs to be carried out at times and places that women can access.	Impact of equal rights legislation to be monitored.

Finland	National Workplace Development Programme. Schemes for <i>life-long learning</i> & ageing workers.	Lifelong learning is an important means of overcoming women's traditionally low access to vocational & workplace-based training & skill development. Training & learning mechanisms need to be designed in accordance with women's employment circumstances. The timing and mode of training is critical for women.	Yes. Due to the implementation of assessment and evaluation procedures, the extent of gender mainstreaming in the National Workplace Development Programme is likely to be evaluated. The gender dimensions of life-long learning programmes are also likely to be assessed.	Assessment and evaluation of gender mainstreaming.
France	Reduction of <i>working time</i> agreements encompass organisational flexibility.	Men & women look for different forms of working time reduction in order to meet different personal/professional needs.	Yes. This plan has objectives for incorporating EO into the adaptability pillar. These may be met in part by identifying the forms of working time reduction most appropriate to women and men.	Objectives set for incorporating EO into the other pillars.
Germany	Alliance for Jobs – favourable regimes for <i>part-time work</i> & enhancement of <i>training</i> .	Part-time working can be particularly favourable for women, provided the conditions of work do not create disadvantage (see above). Training enhancements help women progress & improve their potential contribution to firm competitiveness.	Yes. The Alliance for Jobs incorporates a 'Women and Work' programme, which allows for the implementation of part-time working with adequate pay and protection, and for training geared to the requirements of female employees.	Gender gap in employment. 'Women and Work' programme linked to Alliance for Jobs as means to implement gender mainstreaming.

Greece	<i>Flexible labour market law</i>	This could be used to protect women & other vulnerable groups in the labour market from negative flexibility.	No. The major objective here seems to be to get women into the labour market, regardless of their employment conditions.	Closing gender gap in employment. Supporting family life & the elderly.
Ireland	Social partnership for <i>modernising work organisation</i>	Women are less likely to benefit from teamworking, multi-skilling, training, & knowledge work than men are, & therefore less likely to be able to contribute to economic performance. They are also less likely to be involved in partnership arrangements in the first place.	No. Again, the principle issue is the provision of childcare to support women's participation in the labour market, rather than the conditions of their work once they are actually in the labour market.	Legislative reform, childcare provision & tax benefit reforms. National childcare strategy.
Italy	Terms of <i>social dialogue</i> on labour costs, work organisation & training. Working time.	The social dialogue can be gender-blind. Women are not well-represented in company managements & can be under-represented in union positions where social dialogue takes place. Their needs as employees are therefore often overlooked.	No. The major equal opportunities issue is seen as providing childcare to support labour market participation. Efforts could also be made to ensure that the social dialogue is better able to represent female employees and their concerns regarding training and working time.	Childcare.

Luxembourg	<i>Working time, work organisation. In-house training.</i>	As above, these need to be designed to meet the specific needs of women in the labour market.	Partly. Gender issues in working time are partly addressed through the introduction of parental leave, but much more could be done to ensure that work organisation is woman-friendly.	Parental leave, childcare. Reduction of the gender gap.
Netherlands	Flexibility and Security Act. Collective agreements on education, <i>educational leave, personal training plans</i> , company training plans.	Educational leave and training tends to be given to workers in skilled or senior jobs and this often excludes women in junior or low-level jobs. Education and training plans are particularly beneficial for such women & promote best use of their abilities.	Yes. This plan explicitly addresses equality issues in all pillars. This will be particularly useful in ensuring that women have educational leave and personal training plans which allow them to augment their skills.	Support for equal opportunities in all spheres.
Portugal	Legislation on <i>part-time</i> & temporary work.	This legislation could be used to protect women from the negative aspects of part-time working, such as low pay or poor training provision.	Yes. In addition to trying to integrate EO thinking into all other pillars of the plan, the implementation of a monitoring system is helpful as an evaluation tool, and could be used to assess the conditions of women's employment, especially in part-time and temporary work.	Efforts to integrate EO thinking into other pillars. Implementation of monitoring system.

Spain	Social dialogue arrangements for <i>working time flexibility</i> . <i>Continuous training</i> in SMEs.	Arrangements for working time flexibility need to take into account the specific circumstances of women. Training focus does not include targets for life-long learning or access to the IS, for women compared with for men.	No. The concentration on maternity leave does not indicate that equality thinking permeates the adaptability strategy, despite the potential equality gains to be made.	Maternity leave.
Sweden	<i>Skills upgrading</i> . Exchange of wage increases for <i>reduced working time</i> .	Skills upgrading is very important for women in low-skilled jobs & improves their contribution to economic performance. It is important that it is systematically available to all, as here, in order that women are not excluded by virtue of their jobs or working hours.	Yes. This plan carefully integrates equality issues into other pillars of the NAP. This should have positive implications for women's skills development, and should allow them to work in ways which meet their other life needs.	Childcare. Coherent gender mainstreaming strategy.
United Kingdom	Improving <i>security with flexibility</i> .	This is particularly important for women. The UK labour market is one of the most flexibilised in the EU.	No. Although the introduction of the minimum wage has clearly had a positive impact on women who are low paid, their protection through the welfare system could be addressed.	Minimum wage.

Source: Adapted from European Commission (2000c) *Employment Policies in the EU and in the Member States*, Joint Report 1999, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

In 2000, the situation had changed little. Few of the member states' NAPs for this year dealt with the equality dimensions of workplace training, skill development, and knowledge work, or of ensuring equality of access to these aspects of human capital development in the

context of new flexible forms of working time. The draft Joint Employment Report for 2000 notes that 'most of the initiatives in pillars 1-3 are regarded as gender-neutral' and that, despite the centrality of gender impact assessments to the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming, 'there is no systematic gender impact assessment of policy initiatives done'⁵¹. The report goes on to identify the limited ways in which gender equality thinking has permeated the member states adaptability strategies:

Gender mainstreaming in pillar 3 is mostly focussed on increasing flexibility for the reconciliation of work and family life. France mentions that the new law on the negotiated working time reduction should improve reconciliation, and Italy specifies that new, more flexible labour contracts should, apart from reconciliation purposes, also promote growth in female employment. In Germany, women are expected to benefit particularly from the "Act on Part-time Work in Old Age". Some Member States point out specifically the involvement of social partners in gender relevant initiatives under pillar 3 (Denmark, the UK and Ireland) (European Commission 2000d: 70).

The report concludes that:

... there is still a long way to go to take gender aspects into account in all policy actions (Executive Summary).

It is to be hoped that this message will be taken on board in the NAPs for 2001 and beyond. It is a view that is shared by the social partners, representatives of whom sit on the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. This committee spelt out its concerns in its Opinion on the Employment Guidelines 2001:

... the processes of implementation particularly in relation to gender mainstreaming need to be significantly strengthened ... Gender mainstreaming processes are somewhat haphazard. The assessment of the impact of employment policies on gender equality appears minimal. The gender equality perspective needs to be more visible across the pillars of Employability, Entrepreneurship and Adaptability. It is crucial that there is an investment of human and financial resources in gender mainstreaming processes at European and member state level.⁵²

⁵¹ European Commission (2000d) *Draft Joint Employment Report 2000*, Brussels, European Commission, p.70).

⁵² Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men on the Employment Guidelines 2001, Brussels, June 2000, Eqop 37-2000 en.

5.2. The promotion of equal opportunities is often treated as an extra-organisational issue

Many European enterprises have made considerable progress in implementing equality plans, in which innovations in the organisation of work have been put in place with the express objective of improving gender equality in the workplace.⁵³ However, it remains the case that many others are unaware of the equality challenges facing them, or are unwilling to address them. It is sometimes argued by enterprises reluctant to take on board gender equality objectives, that such goals cannot be pursued at firm level. The justification is that gender inequality is a society-wide phenomenon in which gender socialisation and the subsequent allocation of gender roles in the domestic sphere, rather than organisational practices, are the reasons for women's inequality in the workplace. Thus, it is asserted that the promotion of equal opportunities objectives is a task for extra-organisational institutions – principally the family and the state. This, however, overlooks the ways in which inequality can be perpetuated in workplaces and therefore the potential for addressing gender equality issues within firms when new organisational practices are developed. It also overlooks the crucial role of employers, employees and their unions in promoting equality-driven innovations – such as training régimes that are open to all employees, employee progression routes that recognise women's skills, working time systems that allow women to progress within organisations whilst caring for dependants. The European Commission's report on the National Action Plans for 2000 draws attention to the responsibilities of the social partners in promoting adaptability when it argues that 'given that adaptability takes place in the workplace itself, it is evident that the social partners are the prime movers in this context'.⁵⁴ It could similarly be argued that given the potential for addressing equality issues in workplaces, the social partners will also have a key role to play in this respect.

In successive years of NAPs, gender equality objectives efforts appear to be most concentrated on promoting change in labour markets and institutions rather than in firms. In other words, the notion of mainstreaming gender into workplace level innovations has still

⁵³ E. Olgiati and G. Shapiro (2001) *Promoting Gender Equality at the Workplace*, Report for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

⁵⁴ European Commission (2000d) *Draft Joint Employment Report 2000*, Brussels, European Commission.

not gained widespread currency. In particular, equal opportunities initiatives centre on women's overall representation in the labour market and on childcare provision (Table 2 shows the equal opportunities priorities for 1999; in 2000, very little had changed (EC2000d)). The priority of the earlier multi-annual employment programmes was similarly to get women into the labour market; so training initiatives were focussed primarily at this problem rather than on workplace-based training for increasing women's opportunities for progression or skill utilisation. Women's progression and employee development within organisations was not addressed in equal opportunities planning, despite a clear recognition that in most countries of the EU, the labour market remains highly gender segregated and that glass ceilings in organisations continue to prevent women from progressing into senior positions. This emphasis on women's labour market participation tends to miss the potential for improving women's position *within* organisations by raising their skills, improving company training and employee development practices, and thus, enhancing women's employability. Yet, given the putative skills shortage throughout the European Union, this is now becoming one of the most pressing issues for labour market policy.⁵⁵

Even where companies are encouraged to implement organisational innovations relevant to equal opportunities, these are likely to be regarded as meeting objectives less related to organisational needs and more related to the needs of individual employees, principally women. An example is 'family friendly' working. Across Europe, there are widespread campaigns and codes of practice to encourage businesses to adopt more family friendly policies (EC2000b: 68). However, these types of policies tend to be seen as equality issues rather than as work organisation issues. They are seen as primarily benefiting (mainly female) employees through working time, maternity, paternity and parental leave arrangements. Thus, their main outcome is to promote the more equal sharing of domestic labour and greater opportunities for women to participate in the labour market on the same terms as men. Generally, the costs to employers of such initiatives rather than the benefits are emphasised, and where employers do implement such initiatives, they are seen as doing

⁵⁵ The Swedish Presidency of 2001 has explicitly highlighted the European skills shortage, and sees part of the solution as lying in improvements in the employability of Europe's men and women, both new entrants and existing members of the labour force.

so for altruistic or ethical reasons. As a result, the potential competitive advantages to businesses of family-friendly working⁵⁶ are rarely considered or spelt out.

The competitive and financial advantages to companies in introducing innovations like family friendly working are poorly understood, but they may well be substantial. They are likely to include, for example, the retention of skilled or valued employees, reductions in labour turnover, reductions in recruitment, training and retraining costs, and the ability to match working hours to the consumption requirements of customers. For example, in large service sector companies in the UK (which are the main employers of British women), turnover costs account for between 5 and 10% of wage costs, and labour turnover has been found to be very sensitive to relative wages. Higher wages therefore reduce the propensity of staff to leave and lead to higher levels of employment on average.⁵⁷ The same principle may hold for family-friendly working, for improved training provision, and for improved employee development for women – the costs may be offset by the savings from reduced turnover, recruitment and training expenditure. It is worth examining this issue in detail to establish precisely how organisation can benefit financially as well as ethically from connecting equality initiatives to change programmes.

Policy Message

There is a strong case for a systematic evaluation of the relative costs – both financial and those related to the quality of working life – to firms of implementing a range of equality policies in the context of organisational change. The costs of implementation, for example

⁵⁶ The notion of ‘family-friendly’ working is somewhat problematic, for it assumes that only employees with families can have problems in balancing paid work and private life, including unpaid work. Other formulations attempt to get away from this privileging of families by emphasising ‘work-life balance’ or ‘time sovereignty’ (Industrial Society (2000) *Most Wanted? The Quiet Birth of the Free Worker*, London, The Industrial Society). In French, the concept of ‘social time’ is used (“l’aménagement de temps sociaux”). The main point is that there is an increasing recognition that conventional working hours are inimical to private life, including family life, and that this is a gender issue because these working patterns have historically placed a particular burden on women, who bear the brunt of responsibility for the domestic sphere.

⁵⁷ Brown, D., Dickens, R., Gregg, P., Machin, S. and Manning, A. (2001) *Everything under a fiver: Recruitment and retention in lower paying labour markets*, York, York Publishing Services.

of woman-friendly training schemes and employee development programmes - could be set against those of higher labour turnover, recruitment, training, retraining, low morale and low performance.

5.3. Equality practitioners are not strongly involved in the drawing up of the member states' NAPs

Few countries have involved equality bodies in the preparation of their national action plans. In 1999, only three countries involved equality organisations. This suggests that equal opportunities mainstreaming has not been fully implemented and that equality issues are still not seen as cross-cutting issues which affect all aspects of an employment strategy. The involvement of equal opportunities bodies compares very unfavourably with the level of involvement of local and regional institutions in the development of member states' plans, and with the coverage of regional labour market issues in the plans.

Policy Message

Greater inclusion of equality organisations and mechanisms, including women's NGOs, would probably improve the coverage of equality issues and the implementation of equality objectives.

5.4. Reliable indicators of equality policy implementation are rare

Indicators, targets and deadlines are the key tools necessary for mainstreaming equal opportunities policies, as indeed they are necessary for evaluating all aspects of employment plans. Each annual evaluation of the NAPs has called for improved precision and use of targets and indicators to show what progress has been made in achieving equality objectives. However, many member states have not yet responded to this call, and do not collect or analyse statistical labour market information by gender. Evaluating the 1999 National Action Plans, the Commission complained that

Particular problems exist because of the absence of statistical data. Application of gender impact assessment needs to be further developed. No targets or indicators to monitor success have been specifically mentioned (EC 2000c:67).

Although this situation is slowly improving, so that by the 2000 evaluation, 'more statistics and indicators are available' (EC 2000a:70), their application is still patchy across member states. Moreover, the possibility of using qualitative as well as quantitative measures of achievement does not appear to be considered. The key emphasis has been on developing macro-economic indicators of economic performance.

Policy Message

Qualitative policy indicators might be appropriate for evaluating the progress of organisational changes in achieving equality objectives, for example, assessing the contribution of new training or employee development practices in firms to women's and men's career progression and thus to labour market desegregation. In addition, maximum use needs to be made of the labour market and other statistics collected by Eurostat which are now disaggregated by sex.

It has to be recognised, indeed, that there is a dearth of effective measures for all the pillars of the Employment Strategy, not just the Equal Opportunities pillar. It is very difficult to measure success in organisational change, for example, in terms other than economic ones, though even these measures do not seem to have been implemented in order to evaluate the relationship between new ways of working and improved gender equality.

6. CONCLUDING COMMENTS – TOWARDS A BETTER RECONCILIATION OF THE TWO PILLARS

It is often supposed that women's increased participation in the labour is of itself a positive development. This assumption forms the basis of those employment and equal opportunities policies which are aimed at increasing the proportion of European women who are in paid work. It is undoubtedly true that paid work confers many substantial advantages on women which in themselves promote gender equality, for example, by promoting their economic independence and their social power. However, much contemporary women's paid work is done on terms in which a large percentage of them are effectively trapped in a narrow range of occupations, on low pay, with few prospects for progression or skill

development, and in working conditions which do little to promote the richness of their working lives. Many women are also disadvantaged by having to bear a double load of low paid formal work and unpaid domestic work. There is strong evidence to show that the increased labour market participation of women which most of the EU countries have recently experienced, does not reduce occupational segregation or the gender wage gap. Research shows that this gap remains very high, particularly in the UK.⁵⁸

This indicates that getting women into the labour market is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for achieving gender equality. In addition to efforts to improve their levels of participation, the *nature* of the work that women perform has to be addressed, and the gender segregation within organisations has to be overcome. This requires a substantial re-orientation of work organisation arrangements so that not only are performance objectives met, but also the ability of the whole workforce to meet them is maximised.

Equally, it is not enough to seek to increase women's representation in senior and managerial jobs. This has been the main thrust of equal opportunities policies in many countries – with initiatives to get women into management, into entrepreneurship, into science and technology. However, as long as traditional, implicitly discriminatory, forms of work organisation and working time persist, many women will continue to be consigned to the lower echelons of the labour market. Equal opportunities policy has to be as concerned with improving the circumstances and prospects of these women as it is with increasing the numbers of women in high status areas. Indeed, it should be concerned with the employment conditions of all women, whatever their jobs.

This raises a further difficulty with confining attention only to women's *representation* in senior jobs - it can result in the *organisation* of those jobs being overlooked or taken for granted. Women are entering management positions in European firms, but many leave again because the conditions of work, and particularly the long hours culture of such jobs, are inimical to their private lives. Recent studies of organisations point to a large exodus of women from senior positions in organisations, precisely because they find the working

⁵⁸ Equal Pay Task Force (2001) *Just Pay*, Report to the Equal Opportunities Commission, Manchester, EOC.

conditions hostile to their real lives. For equal opportunities to be sustainable as well as successful, the nature and culture of work organisation and working time has to be addressed such that individual women can progress without incurring a high personal price. In the end, therefore, the successful prosecution of equal opportunities will entail addressing both work organisation and working time issues to make work altogether more 'woman-friendly'.

Summary of Policy Messages

- The impact of teamworking and groupworking on gender equality in the workplace over the longer-term is still unclear, but systematic assessment of its impact on the skills and prospects of women in different settings would be extremely helpful.
- It is important that the social partners ensure that, in facilitating lifelong learning for IT skill development in their enterprises, they take into account the particular needs and requirements of both sexes.
- If knowledgeable work is to be open to both sexes on an equal basis so that they can both equally contribute to innovation and economic performance in Europe's organisations, company training and human resource development policies need to be designed with this explicit objective.
- The role of the social partners in designing 'Equality Driven Total Quality' and in ensuring the participation of female employees in TQM is central to its effectiveness in utilising the full range of organisational resources and talents.
- A simple way in which organisations could begin to develop woman-friendly working time patterns would be to design jobs so that long hours of work are not necessary in order to do them effectively. This might be done through workload reductions, through changes of priority, or through culture change.
- At a policy level, agreements between social partners in the development and implementation of working time innovations are to be encouraged, particularly where

they allow individual women control over their working arrangements at all levels of companies, including senior and managerial levels.

- There is a strong case for a systematic evaluation of the relative costs – both financial and those related to the quality of working life – to firms of implementing a range of equality policies in the context of organisational change. The costs of implementation, for example of woman-friendly training schemes and employee development programmes - could be set against those of higher labour turnover, recruitment, training, retraining, low morale and low performance.
- Greater inclusion of equality organisations and mechanisms, including women's NGOs, would probably improve the coverage of equality issues and the implementation of equality objectives.
- Qualitative policy indicators might be appropriate for evaluating the progress of organisational changes in achieving equality objectives, for example, assessing the contribution of new training or employee development practices in firms to women's and men's career progression and thus to labour market desegregation. In addition, maximum use needs to be made of the labour market and other statistics collected by Eurostat which are now disaggregated by sex.

Workplace Policies. Many organisations have their own equal opportunities policy. In it should be described the steps the organisation will take to abide by equality legislation (such as those listed above) and promote equality in the workplace. These policies are designed to prevent certain employment situations, such as: Male employees being paid more than female colleagues for doing the same job. Equal opportunities for promotion should always be made available to all staff, and no employee should be restricted from promotional opportunities because of their colour of skin, religion, gender or any other discriminatory reason. Equal opportunity employment practices generally involve adhering to federal, state and local laws that prohibit discrimination and harassment in the workplace. However, employers with a broad vision of what it means to provide equal opportunities to potential and current employees create numerous -- not ... Examples of Equal Opportunities Within the Workplace. by Ruth Mayhew. Candidate selection for interviews demonstrates commitment to equal opportunity.