

# Workplace policies and practices of care

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- depending on the type of workplace in which they are implemented.
- Both legislation and employers' policies may have unexpected and unwanted outcomes if the range of workplace care cultures and contexts is not properly understood.
- The development of a more complete understanding of the nature of workplace care cultures should aid the effective implementation of policies to improve workers' experiences and employers' ability to attract and retain workers.

## References

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## Workplace policies and practices of care

Workplace policies and practices of care are designed to support workers' caring responsibilities outside of the workplace as well as their general wellbeing. A previous CRFR briefing (McKie et al 2004) detailed the 'carescapes' framework for evaluating an individual worker's caring practices. This briefing looks at how the framework can be extended and used to consider workplace policy, services and structures and how these combine to support care.

### Key Findings

- Terms such as 'work-life balance' and 'wellbeing' are usually used to describe care in the workplace
- Policies range from legally compliant to generous. There is, however, variable knowledge about and use of policies and local practices frequently vary from formal policy
- Notions of caring are often gendered and age-related, typically associated with young mothers with childcare duties
- Perceptions of fairness in the use of policies are critical to working relations. However, gender stereotypes continue to underpin the development and use of many policies
- There is a social moral economy within the workplace whereby some care demands are considered as more 'deserving' than others and as such are treated more sympathetically by managers and colleagues alike
- Many care policies, such as, flexible working, training and development and wellbeing initiatives increase levels of employee commitment, motivation and retention
- Workplace practices are shaped by varying sectoral and occupational characteristics. A given policy may have different effects in different workplaces
- The framework of organisation carescapes offers a mechanism for the identification, analysis and development of 'care' policies

### Background

Changes in the nature and make up of the workplace over the last 30 years have impacted on workers' care responsibilities in the home, community and workplace. The UK economy has changed from a male-dominated manufacturing and industrial economy to one dominated by the service sector. Seventy per cent of workers in the private sector are employed in the service industries. Of these, nearly one-third are female white-collar workers (Sawyer 2005). Currently, more than two-thirds of women with dependent children are in work, and around 30% of women and 20% of men make use of flexible working patterns (ONS 2008).

Employers have had to respond to these changes in order to attract and retain skilled employees and protect their wellbeing. The current economic recession will impact workplaces further.

### The Project

The project design draws on an earlier work (McKie et al 2004) that focuses on an individual's caring practices. It showed that individuals plot routes through a landscape of care in anticipation of caring responsibilities and obligations. These routes can change over time and are typically gendered. The workplace policy and service context was not considered in this earlier piece of work. In this ESRC-funded project we develop the framework

of carescapes to enable policy, services and structures to be considered. We examine:

- the nature of formal workplace 'care policies'
- the implementation of these policies
- individual experiences of care within workplaces and integrating care outside the workplace with work demands
- organisational cultures of care more generally

The project team used interviews, a workplace survey and developed a care map to evaluate policies and practice.

### Workplace survey

The team conducted 10 exploratory interviews to help develop a survey for workplaces. 103 organisations responded to the survey. Seventy were in the private sector, 21 in the public and 12 in the third sectors. Half the workplaces were small to medium sized organisations. This emphasis was intended to reflect the employment patterns of the UK.

### Care map

Care policies and services detailed in the survey responses were mapped into three clusters:

*Equality and diversity* - maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, adoption leave, gender equality, sexual

orientation, race relations, disability and age discrimination, religious observance, nursery access, financial assistance and advice on care for dependents

**Health and wellbeing** - health and safety legislation, bullying and harassment policies, grievance procedures, sickness absence, occupational health, time-off to care for dependents, healthy lifestyle provision, staff counselling

**Responsibilities and rights** - holiday entitlement, working hours, staff appraisal, training and development, apprenticeships, life-long learning, flexible working, trade union membership, redundancy, employer pension schemes and retirement

Statistical analysis of the care 'map' suggested five issues for more detailed investigation:

- age
- defining and identifying wellbeing
- disciplinary procedures
- flexible working
- training and development

**Interviews**

The more detailed issues were explored in interviews with workers from the different organisations to get their experiences of policies and systems.

As far as possible, interviewees reflected the workforce composition by age, gender and hierarchy. Sixty per cent of interviewees were women and 70% were under 50 years of age.

51 employees from nine private sector organisations, 24 employees from four public sector organisations and 12 employees from two third sector organisations were interviewed.

**Findings**

**Policies and practices in organisations**

The analysis of statistical data from the survey identified a pyramid of benefits, shown in the diagram below:



A second and somewhat less widespread set of inward-facing policies are focused on employee retention, for example, generous maternity/paternity leave policies, staff

appraisal policies and good training policies. It should be noted that a single policy can provide a mix of benefits, for example, a staff appraisal process can allow employers to exert control and surveillance but also aid retention. These policies offer care to employees by enhancing staff development and identity with the organisation.

A third and more outward facing set of benefits are designed to differentiate their organisation from another for both current and potential employees. We called this set of benefits 'employer of choice'. Examples included opportunities for training and support to develop job and career options, corporate membership rates for a gym or other external activities.

Finally, a smaller number of organisations had clearly outward looking policies designed to allow employees to achieve some degree of self fulfilment outside of their employment; such policies were frequently linked to corporate social responsibilities. For example, opportunities for volunteering, career breaks and pro bono work on issues or topics not necessarily linked to a specific post.

Our analysis of the interviews in the context of the survey results identified a number of repeated themes:

- The importance of 'care' and caring issues in the workplace - these ranged from friendships, organising child and elder care to dealing with personal crises such as divorce, as well as bullying and harassment
- Tensions over boundaries within and between work/non-work - classic issues of work and family, training and personal development, pets, hobbies and leisure
- Variable knowledge and use of policies - variations in access to and support for use and non use
- The significance of the complex interaction of aspects of identities - including gender and age, and also the relationship between gender, age and sector to caring responsibilities
- The existence of and variability between highly localised workplace cultures - cultures often differed within workplaces between small spatially or organisationally defined groups
- The impact of organisational health and wellbeing on care policies and practices - growth, re-structuring and redundancy, fear and insecurity affect care relationships in the workplace. The impact of the recession on care practices in the workplaces was apparent here.

**A social moral economy of care**

Our analyses suggest there is a social moral economy within the workplace whereby some care demands are considered as more 'deserving' than others and are treated more sympathetically by managers and colleagues alike. Four important features of the moral economy are:

- **Fairness**  
Much of the discourse around care practices pertains to perceptions of fairness. This consideration of fairness

extends beyond treatment of the individual worker by the line manager and includes issues of how employees perceive the way that they are treated and treat colleagues at work and how they see other people being treated by management. Fairness was a frequent theme in discussion of age and gender discrimination and rights as were views about whether individuals were 'good workers' or workers who had given many years to the organisation.

- **Gender stereotypes**  
Much of the emerging policy and practice around accommodating care demands outside work is focused on childcare. We found a clear association of 'family friendly' policies with women's expected social roles, thus women accessing policies relating to childcare are more sympathetically described than men or women requesting flexibility not related to childcare.
- **Workplace pressure and support**  
The degree of intensification of work, stress and perceived pressure and the extent of formal and informal support given to individuals and groups provide the context within which care or lack of care is practiced. These can influence what is seen as fair and what concessions to other workers can be tolerated.
- **Labour process**  
The extent to which the labour process in a particular workplace encourages competition or co-operation between workers at different levels of the hierarchy is important. This links back to the extent of workplace pressure – where workers are stretched to the limit they may have little capacity or willingness to help others

**Differences between workplaces**

The diversity of workplace practices and cultures implies that a given policy may have very different effects in different workplaces depending on their characteristics. This is illustrated in the typology shown in the chart below, which uses the framework of organisation carescapes and draws upon our data:

Discretion	
<b>Just in Case</b> High degree of formality Limited management discretion Predominant in public sector	<b>'Formalised Flexibility'</b> High degree of formality and high degree of management discretion to ensure staff are able to access policies and services. Predominant in professional services
<b>Just in Time</b> Low degree of formality. Policies frequently unwritten or only devised as and when necessary. Predominant in SMEs	<b>'On the Ground' Flexibility</b> Low degree of formality and high levels of reciprocity with employees preferring to rely on each other to negotiate informal patterns of working and caring for themselves. Predominant in low paid services

**Applying the Framework of Organisation Carescapes**

The Carescapes Framework can be applied in workplaces. For example a service sector employer might consider the following questions and data sources:

Focus	Issues & question	Sources and actions
Workplace history	Profit and productivity trends Employment trends Technology and innovation impacts	Accounts Annual reports Workplace and auto-biographies on how working hours have changed
Contemporary context	Staff profile Training and development programme	Staff costs Recruitment and retention Staff satisfaction/ opinion surveys
Assessment	Staffing needs of sections Costs Anticipated customer and staff responses Morale benefits Marketing potential for the workplace	Foresighting costs Monitoring and evaluation system established to include how practices operate

Under each heading there is a series of issues and questions. Addressing these will require various combinations of empirical data, ethical considerations and decision-making.

Take for example the heading of contemporary context. That could be further detailed in organisational and trade union planning by asking:

- What are the important caring relationships which exist in the relevant policy/service provision context?
- How do those involved feel about the caring relationships they are involved in?
- What notions of obligation and reciprocity underpin these relationships?
- Who does most of the caring work?
- Are there inequalities of power in those relationships? How could these inequalities be reduced?
- What is the profile of staff, staff costs and the costs of recruitment?
- How are we doing with regards to legislation and societal trends?
- Overall, do we have a staff complement, with future planning for development to ensure the future with acceptable costs?

**Policy implications**

- At present both political rhetoric and legislative action are shaping care in the workplace. Both rhetoric and legislation are affecting the expectations and assumptions that inform the social moral economy.
- Recent employment legislation has opened up new possibilities for workers to demand flexibility in work hours and greater recognition of care demands outside the workplace. However, these changes have not been seen in the context of other developments which promote care within the workplace, for example, through health and safety legislation or social pressures to stamp out bullying.
- An important contribution of the organisation carescapes framework is to promote such a holistic view of care and to stress that the effect of care policies will vary